

9

GENDER AND BEYOND

SHE SAID, "NO, DON'T." HE RESPONDED, "IT'S OKAY."

We return to the beginning, with lessons amassed through the previous chapters. Recall Luci, who in the opening weeks of freshman year was raped by a senior in his bedroom. She was a virgin at the time. She'd met Scott, the man who raped her, at a bar. He invited her back to his fraternity to have a bit more to drink, and to experience the fun of a college party. Luci enjoyed making out with Scott in his room—until he began to push things too far. He took her pants off, and started to put his penis inside her. Luci exclaimed, "No, don't." He responded, "It's okay." After it was over, and he discovered that she had likely been a virgin (something she denied to him), he recruited a friend, a senior woman, to walk Luci home. As Luci told it, it was pretty clear that he'd preyed on her, and she'd heard that he's done the same with others.

We cannot make sense of what happened to Luci without thinking about gender inequality—socially organized unequal relations between women and men.¹ But there's a great deal that we miss if we view it through a lens of gender as the sole power disparity. Scott's predatory behavior was amplified by his control over the space, by his capacity to mobilize others to gaslight Luci into thinking of it as consensual, by Luci's newness

on campus, and by his access to additional alcohol. This is a dense set of resources that come together for upperclassmen—usually men, but in some instances women. As survivors frequently do, Luci partly blamed herself, but her self-blame is itself a social product. Understanding how social forces produce situations in which assaults are likely to occur does not mean we shouldn't hold assaulters responsible. Our point is not to let Scott say, "Society made me rape her." After all, we heard a lot of stories that started exactly like this one, but ended differently.

Daria met Rob at a party hosted by seniors in their East Campus suite. They each had several cups of whatever weird punch was on offer; looking back, Daria describes herself as pretty drunk. Rob walked her to her dorm and came upstairs with her. Once they were in her room he put his arms around her, kissing her and unbuttoning her shirt. She kissed him back, but wasn't really into it, so she told him that she just wanted to go to sleep and that he should leave. He asked for her number, concerned because she was so drunk. He texted her the next morning to see how she was feeling; they met for coffee, and as the months wore on, they became friends.

Most students do not want to rape each other. Part of the reason is all the teaching institutions have been doing about consent; that is the moment when things can run off the rails. But consent itself is never the whole story. Some assaults happen through verbal coercion in which one person has in effect extracted verbal consent from the other. A more complex, and complete, accounting of power relations points to how we might remake the rails, rather than focusing just on those moments when people run off them. This requires understanding what (other than moral bankruptcy or an imperfect grasp of the rules of consent) shapes the outcome of that moment.² Consider, for example, the difference between Daria being in her own room, asking Rob to leave, and Luci, in Scott's room on the third floor of the fraternity.

Most stories do not feature predatory seniors in fraternity houses. Research on campus sexual assault has largely looked at gendered power by examining heterosexual couples and men's single-sex organizations

like fraternities.³ Power is frequently approached as if located solely at the interpersonal or institutional levels and consisting only of one axis of stratification—gender, read as heterosexual cisgender men's power over heterosexual transgender women. Even the name used for this problem in policy circles—gender-based violence—emphasizes a singular lens. Without question, the preponderance of campus sexual assaults are committed by men and experienced by women, and it is critical to look at men's exertions of power over women, both interpersonally and institutionally. But even in assaults that fit that narrative, individuals are situated along multiple hierarchies—yes, gender, but also race, socioeconomic status, sexual identity, sexual experience, adjustment to college, access to material resources, and peer networks.⁴ Still other forms of power, such as age, control over space, and relative sobriety, are more situational.

Our approach to power and assault must help us understand the elevated vulnerability faced by LGBTQ students and the less numerous instances in which heterosexual men are sexually assaulted by women.⁵ Different types of assault are produced by different kinds of power dynamics. A better accounting of power relations in campus sexual assault must go beyond a singular focus on gender in two ways: it must be more intersectional, and it must acknowledge the social fluidity of power—that there are forms of power where, situationally, the same person could be on either side of the equation.⁶

“HE CAME ALL THIS WAY TO SEE ME.”

Cindy was assaulted for the first time in the fall of her freshman year. Her perfectly straight hair was pulled back into a classic sorority girl ponytail, and she curled her long legs up onto the chair during the interview as the words poured out. She had been sexually assaulted three separate times, so we arranged for a follow-up interview, to give her a chance to unpack and reflect on those stories. The spring of her freshman year she had been rejected from her top-choice sorority, and

was worried that her dream of a particular kind of college experience was slipping from her grasp. Being invited to a party hosted by juniors and seniors was a step toward one of her goals of being a never-say-no kind of person. She and her friends got decked out for the night; Cindy donned a crop top and a spandex skirt, secure in the knowledge that she could look sexy and liberated while still benefiting from the protection of her female peers.

She was raped that night by a junior she met at the party. She didn't stay long, but he got her number and his texts kept coming over the course of the evening, as she and her friends moved to a party on East Campus, out to the bars, and back to her dorm. She wasn't really sure if she was interested, but when she asked a friend if she should go hang out with him, her friend's "Why not?" resonated with her "never say never" aspiration and drowned out her reservations. Still, she was still leaning toward just ignoring him. Her phone had died, which seemed to make the decision for her, since she stopped getting his texts. But when she got back to her dorm, there he was, waiting for her in the lobby. She felt that he "came all this way" and so agreed to go back to his dorm with him, although she did not want to fool around with him.

Once there, her discomfort grew. She plugged in her phone, and tried to derail the situation by asking for a tour of his dorm. He dutifully if impatiently walked her around the kitchen, living areas, ending their short stroll back at his room. She texted a friend to see if the party they'd left was still going on, hoping for a pretext to leave. Then he began to undress her. She protested, not wanting to have sex, and clearly telling him so. She pleaded with him that she was a virgin and a freshman. He asked her if she had a boyfriend. She continued to tell him to stop. He held her down and penetrated her. Much bigger than she was, he used his physical power, but—as with Luci's story—the forms of power at work in this interaction extended far beyond the physical. They were in his single room, that recurring privilege of junior and senior housing, where she was more vulnerable than in her suite at the freshman dorms. The power of the group also figures here: having

just been rejected by a sorority, she was that much more primed to go along when her friend told her that yes, she should go hang out with him that night, that she should "enjoy her life." And in the background were the complex demands of "doing gender" correctly as a young woman, which to her meant both being agreeable—she reasoned that she had obligations to him because he walked across campus and was waiting for her (the walk took about five minutes)—and demonstrating an "up for anything," sexually adventurous idealized self.

Without question, some assaults—like Luci's—happen in the context of men's single-sex social organizations, where control over space and control over alcohol are amplified by the prestige of the institution. Recall how Scott asked a female friend of his to walk Luci home—that was for his well-being, not for hers. But other similarities between Luci's assault and Cindy's are instructive: the age differences between them and the men who assaulted them are not that great—just two or three years. Such small differences are socially consequential because of the social resources that students accrue over time. In college, as in high school, age becomes a stand-in for social power, access to desirable space, knowledge of the rules, self-confidence, access to alcohol, and stronger peer networks.

If it is the goal of ethnography to make the familiar strange, then one point here is to lead our readers to think critically about gendered age differences in sexual partnerships. The pairing of first-year women with upperclassmen represents a situation in which class year arguably brings as many power disparities as gender does.

"ENDED UP HAVING THIS MARKER OF PROMISCUITY, HAVING THIS MARKER OF BEING A WHORE."

Liliana shook her head, her curls bouncing, as she recounted a relationship that she described as "maybe the most confusing thing for me to even parse out now"—even with two years' distance. When she first mentioned the relationship, she ascribed their frequent and very acrid

conflict—what she called their "choking collisions"—to the fact that they came "from very different backgrounds," suggesting that having met him on Tinder "should maybe have been the first warning sign." Complex power disparities, including different levels of sexual experience, operated in the background of this story of relationship violence. Liliana told us of ongoing verbal abuse from her boyfriend, who belonged to a "niche at Columbia that I did not fit in with at all, and knew that I didn't . . . they're pretty anti-feminist . . . they called me a 'feminazi,' they called me a bitch. These are my boyfriend's best friends."⁷ Liliana looked back with the shame so characteristic of people who have been in abusive relationships: "I'm so embarrassed of that period. It just doesn't reflect any of the values that I hold . . . I stood up for myself, but not to the extent that I should have, necessarily."⁸ She explains it in part as being a first-year student without a lot of perspective: "I think it was just me as a woman engineer, not knowing many guys at school, and just feeling sort of like, I guess this is what Columbia men are like—I guess this is what dating is like."⁹ When asked why she stayed in the relationship for eight months, she paused—for long enough that we checked to see if she was okay. Then she continued:

Yeah, I'm trying to think. It's a good question. The best answer I can give, which is extremely personal is that—so I wasn't sexually experienced really before I started dating him. . . . He was the third person I had ever had sex with, and he was—I don't know how sexually experienced he was, but far more than I was. I would say quadruple the experience I had, around.

As she continued to recount the story of their relationship, it became clear that it wasn't just the disparity in their experience. Liliana was very precise in her language:

He performed oral sex on me and had a cold sore, HSV-1, and transmitted HSV-1 to me genitally, which is obviously every girl's

nighmare, especially a girl who doesn't have sexual experience. That was beyond traumatizing, because I had had no sexual experience, and I think I felt like my sexual opportunities were over. . . .

She paused.

I sound so overdramatic. It devastated and destroyed me. I considered taking a medical leave from school. I was like, "All right, I'm never getting married, I'm never having kids." It was pretty early on, and I knew that the relationship was total shit by that point, total shit. And I was like, "Oh my god, I've ruined my entire life." I felt like my life was over. . . . I said, "Okay, I guess I'm gonna be alone for the rest of my life unless I stay with this kid, who I don't like, who doesn't treat me well, whose friends hate me, who all my family and friends think is totally bad" . . . I guess the blunt way to say it is I hadn't had any opportunity to be young, and it's over. I told my mom. Obviously got a gynecologist. Did all the things you would do. Went on medication so that I would never transmit it to anyone else. But I was like, "Oh my god, how did this happen to me?" 'Cause I had only had protected sex. I was never taught, in my entire progressive education, never was I ever taught that you use a dental dam when getting oral sex. I hated myself for it. I felt like, "Okay, you blew it, you blew college." And I felt I couldn't have kids.

We rarely interrupted a student to correct erroneous information. We also strove to present ourselves as nonjudgmental, and avoided interjecting in ways that suggested there were things we wanted to hear or things that were true or false. Our goal was create a space for young people to tell their stories. But with Liliana, we couldn't help ourselves. We interrupted her, saying gently, "None of these things are true."¹⁰ And she shook her head again, "Yeah, I know none of them are true. I think I'm just very critical of myself, and I'd always sort of known I was making a mistake. So then, to have that mistake confirmed, through

a message from the universe—I felt, I had made a massive, massive mistake and that my opportunities in college were over." She talked to her mom, who was "so understanding, just so chill." Liliana made clear the full range of social factors at play—not just the disparities in their sexual experience, but her feeling of vulnerability because of her belief that having a viral STI scuttled not just her college social project but her life project. Liliana had a very powerful commitment to a particular sexual project, one that strongly influenced her identity. In describing this project she hedged, simultaneously deploying and critiquing tropes of gendered sexuality:

In a socially loaded way, I had always sort of been like, "It's good that I have waited, it's good that I haven't had casual sex" . . . You know, in a way that's totally socially determined and based on these standards of female virginity and purity and innocence and what-ever . . . I had avoided those things because I felt they were socially not desirable—just to end up with being totally screwed over and having this marker of promiscuity, having this marker of being a whore—I didn't know how to reconcile that with my identity of not having much sexual experience compared to my peers. . . .

Having shared that part of her story, she explained that "that is mostly why I stayed in the relationship with him." Liliana understood her boyfriend's behavior as a reflection of his social background. His working-class upbringing, she reasoned, had been difficult. Verbal abuse was just part of how his family operated. To be sure, there were other students whose cross-class relationships did not devolve into searing verbal abuse. She described the mix of legal, economic, and health-related crises that her boyfriend's family was facing. Without having observed the interpersonal or group dynamics ourselves, it is hard to know how that would have translated into his treating her as if she were "worthless" and his friends calling her "like, feminazi, she's so ugly, she's such a, you know, cunt." But there are some important clues.

Liliana's boyfriend was at the bottom of the campus pecking order. A white "kid," as she called him, from a working-class background, he and his friends were part of a team that wasn't respected. The prestige of athletics at Columbia is highly class-based. Crew—a sport championed at places like Oxford, Harvard, and elite boarding schools—was at the top of the heap, followed closely by other "rich people sports" like tennis, squash, and sailing. His team, by contrast, was subject to widespread social disparagement.¹¹ His body looked like one prepared for physical battle, but Liliana admitted that there was something "attractive" about it. He'd grown up in a context where saying things like "that's retarded" or "that's so gay" were part of everyday parlance. At Columbia, this marked him a bigot and a homophobe. His politics were more conservative than most students; in the campus context, he may have felt that that put him on the margins. In our analysis, he and other men were responding to a feeling of being symbolically dominated by higher status men by challenging the things they felt put them at the bottom of the status hierarchy.¹² This included feminism, but also what they read as a "political correctness" that pretended to insist upon being socially open, but sought to silence and shame men like them for their opinions and experiences.

None of this justifies abusive behavior, but it helps us understand it. Gendered power relations on campus encompass relationships between men and between women, as well as among men and women. Gendered prestige structures advantage some men (and women) over others. As we've argued, groups of men at the bottom of the hierarchy are perceived as socially undesirable, and often described as "rapey." At Columbia, more powerful men present themselves as "modern," suggesting that they're feminists and welcoming of gay people; they use their social power against men at the bottom of the hierarchy, suggesting that they're somehow the opposite.¹³ This social domination helps produce gendered sexual violence in two ways. First, sexual contact with men who are seen as less desirable is more likely to be perceived and labeled as "unwanted." Second, lower-status men challenge their domination in part by trying to undermine the very principles of the hierarchy that dom-

inates them. A generous interpretation is that they may not be sexist or homophobic or racist, but rather that they are resisting their domination by embracing misogynistic, homophobic, or racist violence and language.

Liliana's boyfriend and his peers expressed all kinds of things that were socially undesirable. We didn't just hear about this from her: we heard about them from others, and saw them during our fieldwork. They called women "bitches" and used the word "fag." They railed against feminism and expressed political attitudes viewed by many of their peers as contemptible. Their low social position is both a result of these attitudes and actions and a response to the dominant mores and norms that seek to keep them at the bottom of the campus social hierarchy. Such attitudes put them at risk of committing sexual assault. And as we saw in the previous chapter, this masculine hierarchy also protects more dominant men, whose social desirability as sexual partners makes encounters with them more likely to be viewed as wanted, and thus consensual. This shows another way in which students' focus on status in finding sexual partners is part of the context that produces vulnerability to sexual assault; the heavy emphasis on a potential partner's social desirability can drown out the question of the student's actual interest in that person. Remember Gwen (Chapter 1), in bed with that senior her roommates had encouraged her to date, having doubts about trying to "force something" that she wasn't feeling.

Understanding power, then, means thinking about how people's association with particular groups or institutions places them in positions that are more dominant or more dominated within a prestige structure, and how such positions enable certain kinds of behaviors and attitudes, or at least make them more likely. What Liliana experienced is sometimes referred to as "relationship violence." But that focuses attention only on the relationship between the person acting abusively and the person who is the target of that bad behavior; our interpretation of Liliana's story points to the many other relationships that produced that violence, including those between her ex-boyfriend and his teammates and between the team and the rest of campus.

"HE WAS 'FACEBOOK FAMOUS.'"

Settling into school is thrilling, stressful, and, sadly, dangerous. For students it is a high-stakes moment: an extended process through which they decide which extracurriculars to pursue, and then frequently compete for entry into them. They can reinvent themselves from high school, and set in motion the college project they've planned, which for many includes a particular sexual project. Scholars call these first few months of freshman year the "red zone"—a period of increased vulnerability to sexual assault.¹⁴ The "red zone" may be the period of greatest risk, but that is socially produced, not inevitable. We need to better understand the social processes that produce this temporally elevated vulnerability, in the hopes of imagining how to transform those processes.

Marla, who we interviewed as a junior, experienced multiple sexual assaults in her years on campus—primarily instances in which men had intercourse with her while she was too drunk to consent. As a teenager growing up in Tennessee, Marla was subject to a fairly relentless barrage of (quite possibly well-intentioned) shaming from her mother, whose insistence on baggy and modest clothing left Marla feeling simultaneously unattractive and as if the world were full of sexual danger. During New Student Orientation she began to experience a sexual power she found thrilling: "It was like, yeah, I can kind of, like, see who I want to make out with at a party and/or hookup with at a party and I'll do that. Like, I just . . . make eye contact and then it will happen." As a junior, she could look back and reflect critically on her freshman experiences seeking men's attention as a way to affirm that she was sexy and desirable; in the moment, however, self-doubt about her desirability rendered her acutely vulnerable. On the fourth night of orientation, back in her dorm after a round of parties, she received a text from a fellow freshman. But he was not just any freshman—he was a guy who she and her roommate had discussed, even before they got to campus, as "Facebook famous" for being among the hottest guys in the class.¹⁵

When he texted her "You up?" she agreed to go meet him in a stairwell, thinking that maybe they'd make out. After all, he'd spent the earlier part of the evening trying to chat up another girl; he hadn't put in the time with Marla, so she felt he couldn't expect much more. But he was intending to have sex. They made out, and then he took out a condom and pushed her up against the stairwell wall. Her sexual inexperience and the vulnerability of being drunk, combined with the power he exerted by being such a desirable partner, so clear in his sexual goals and apparently oblivious to the possibility that she might not share them, made the assault almost inevitable. We only have the story from her perspective, so it's hard to know what this man's sexual project was, but it seems safe to say it was not related to expressing feelings of respect for her.

It is the variability in sexual citizenship, however, that brings the unequal social terrain into sharper relief. When Scott said to Luci "It's okay," he was speaking to her from a land where her desires literally did not exist, where her claims to bodily autonomy were illegible. Similarly, when the junior who raped Cindy asked if she had a boyfriend, the implication was that another man's claim on her body would be reason to stop, but her protests were not. He might have to respect that man's "rights," but Cindy had no rights to speak of. Heterosexual cisgender encounters show many instances of women having been socialized to question their own sexual citizenship. Cindy's reflection that he had "come all this way" across campus to see her was part of the calculus that drove her to walk back across campus with him even though she wasn't that interested. Some people feel entitled to others' bodies, and others do not feel entitled to their own bodies. This suggests the value of strategies and programs to promote sexual citizenship once students are already in college—a little late, we'd argue, but perhaps not too late.

But it is our third key concept, sexual geographies, that most trenchantly reveals the campus-specific social patterning of power that elicits and produces bad behavior. Spaces create and constrain opportunities. Those opportunities are unequally allocated; again and again,

gender and class year come together to impel first-year women into spaces controlled by upperclassmen. Spaces are also a key dimension of institutional power to shape student life. There may be many good reasons for first-year students to have roommates, and at a lot of institutions the only way to arrange that is to put two students in a bedroom.¹⁶ But those shared bedrooms often propel younger women into spaces controlled by older men.

"THAT WAS MY FIRST SEEING OF QUEERNESS."

The experiences of queer and trans students challenge a singular focus on gender and sexual assault in even more fundamental ways.¹⁷ Charlene, a white, genderqueer student, was tall, with a dancer's posture and a warm and engaging smile. Coming from a small town in Minnesota, they didn't have a lot of access to queer community, and so a theater program in St. Paul in the summer after sophomore year of high school was a revelation. They recounted, "I did a musical there, and that was the first time that I encountered gay people—um, more specifically, white gay men who were also doing the show. . . . I was like, oh my god, they're gay, that's cool." They were all older, "so they are automatically cooler; I wanted to be like that, because that was my first seeing of queerness." Charlene described their first sexual experience as "rape." Charlene was drunk and he was sober; the power imbalance also included differences in age and sexual experience. "I had no knowledge of what was going on, and it was also a situation that was very pressurized because of the power dynamic—because of that, I felt like I needed to do it." We see in this experience something particular to LGBTQ young people's lives—the search for connection within a sexual and gender community that is the very first place where they feel seen, where they might have a place, where they belong—and how it intersects with some of the same vulnerabilities in Maria's story—disparities in age, sexual experience, and levels of intoxication.¹⁸ Charlene's vulnerability in that summer theater program is inseparable from

the socially produced, but not inevitable, sense of isolation that many queer and trans youth face.

Once at Columbia, Charlene was very involved with, and most at home around, their network of queer students from other schools in the New York area. Sophomore year, they were spending time with JD, assigned male at birth and transitioning. JD was from a nearby school; they'd study together in JD's dorm room, chill, sometimes watch TV. JD and Charlene sometimes had sex, but JD wanted it a lot more frequently than Charlene did, and would push for physical intimacy in a way that Charlene experienced as hard to say no to. JD would make a physical advance and they'd start to kiss. But if Charlene wanted to stop there, JD would say things like "You don't love me," "You should want to do this with me," or even, "You don't think I'm beautiful." Charlene knew what it felt like to be unsure of one's appeal; especially during the transition, they really wanted to be a source of support. This ended, more than once, in Charlene giving in: closing the computer, lying back, letting JD give them a blow job, and then reciprocating. Totally sober, within a relationship that was important to Charlene, such consent under coercion looks totally different than the kinds of experiences that Luci had. While in some of our examples, people who committed assault clearly "had" power, in the form of resources, strength, status, it's not clear that JD had any of these things. But power does not always need to be possessed in order for it to be practiced. JD was able to exercise power by playing into Charlene's vulnerability to emotional manipulation. Power isn't just about maleness, or whiteness, or heterosexuality. The distinction between having and exercising power isn't just academic; it has important implications for interventions. Just because people don't "have" power doesn't mean they can't use power to achieve their goals. The prevention implication is that even those who do not feel that they have access to much social power should still be taught to be attentive to the ways in which they can use power in interpersonal relationships.¹⁹

It is notable that Charlene's experience happened in JD's room. The

impulse of wanting to affirm a partner's identity out of solidarity seems at least one kind of power relation that is specific to queer students.²⁰ JD may have been manipulating Charlene because they knew about this impulse, their feelings of being "unattractive" may have been keenly felt, or it could have been a bit of both. Programming focused on consent, bystander interventions, or the dangers of alcohol do little to avert this type of scenario.

Certainly, queer people also experience intoxicated assaults. Jacqui, a white, genderqueer engineer from a wealthy background, was active in campus social justice work. As the only queer student in their high school, Jacqui was excited to start off orientation week having already connected with another queer student through the class Facebook page. A queer party on their third night on campus seemed like a great place to go with their new friend, and to connect with other similarly identified students on campus. Jacqui hadn't partied much in high school, and was unprepared for how they'd feel after getting high in an upperclassman's room, and doing a couple of shots of vodka back downstairs at the main party. At this point, they felt very out of it: their movements and perceptions were sluggish and lethargic, and they felt "kind of underwater" as they followed a pack, first out to an all-night diner and then back to their new friend's room. Some other queer students were watching TV as Jacqui lay on the bed, drifting in and out of consciousness. The group left Jacqui alone with their new friend. Jacqui tried to leave but couldn't stand unassisted. The new friend guided them back to the bed, then kissed, fondled, and fingered Jacqui. Jacqui did not want this to happen but felt unable to move or to say anything. The new friend tried to get them to reciprocate sex, moving their hand, but Jacqui was way too out of it for that. At this point the new friend said that their mother was coming the next day so Jacqui should leave. Somehow, Jacqui made it to the elevator, and back to their dorm room.

Jacqui experienced this assault as enormously harmful. In high school, they had no fellow queer students to connect with. And yet this first experience with the other queer students on campus went

terribly wrong; they weren't sure there would ever be a place they could feel comfortable. The very promise of queer community produced a deep sense of loneliness and harm. Both the factors that led to this assault and Jacqui's subsequent suffering are only apparent through an understanding of the particularities of queer students' experiences. Frequently stigmatized and isolated in high school, they see college as offering a social landscape where they can finally belong. But the relatively claustrophobic social world they face on campus means that negative experiences within the community, even in a city of possibility like New York, can create a context wherein abuses go unchallenged. To walk away would leave queer students with almost nowhere else to call home.

RACE, SEXUAL GEOGRAPHIES, AND ASSAULT

Race as well as gender structures space. At Columbia, socializing spaces and music choices that reflect the tastes and preferences of high-status white students predominate. This drives some students of color to seek partners off campus, away from classmates who might remember their bystander training and who, because of community norms or solidarity, might intervene to help them.²¹ Recall Charisma, for example, who felt turned off by the mainstream campus social scene that she saw as fratry white guys who drink too much, have bad taste in music, can't really dance, and go for skinny girls with straight hair and thin noses. She was also frustrated by the relatively small numbers of Black and Latino men, who she deemed more suitable partners, on the Columbia campus. She was the woman who ended up in the apartment of a man she barely knew in Brooklyn, thinking that they'd just smoke a little pot, chill, and watch television. But instead, he assaulted her. The racialized nature of campus space is also an element of Lupe's story; the person who had nowhere on campus to listen to bachata, their favorite kind of music. Lupe was the one in a midtown bar when a man approached and bought them a drink. The next thing they knew they were being

mostly carried from a taxi into his apartment, where they were raped. The intensity of the power differential was foregrounded by Lupe's fear for their life; students discussed (and experienced) many awful consequences of assault, but in no instance did a student talk about fearing that another student might murder them.

The hypersexualization of students of color is reflected in how persistently they are subjected to unwanted sexual touching. One man we interviewed speculated that white women's apparent comfort grabbing his penis at a bar reflected both a racialized lack of respect for his autonomy and white fantasies of Black penises. Black women expressed this even more consistently: every single Black woman student with whom we spoke had experienced unwanted sexual touching on campus. That bears repeating: every single one. This becomes part of an unseen burden that Black women bear; in the interviews, they noted it, only to shrug it off as just one more indignity. Building campuses where Black women feel like equal citizens requires complementing prevention focused on consent, alcohol, and healthy relationships with programming grounded in a framework of anti-racism, interpersonal respect, and the right to physical autonomy.

Drunken campus assaults—the challenges of investigation and adjudication, the question of how it can be fair to hold one person responsible when both people were drunk—have dominated the public conversation. What social scientists call “discourse”—the way people talk about campus sexual assault, the incidents that receive media attention, and the examples provided in cautionary words from parents or in prevention programming problems—shapes how people understand the nature of the problem. That, in turn, can influence the investment of resources in prevention programming. Remember that the analysis of SHIFT survey data led by Louisa Gilbert showed that a very substantial proportion of sexual assaults that students experienced did not take place under conditions of intoxication.²² As in our discussion of the historical whiteness of the campus drinking landscape, there's a racial component to this focus on intoxicated assault: the assumption that

white students' experience is universal. Not surprisingly, given that students of color generally drink less, the Khan and Sarvet SHIFT survey data analysis also found that students of color are more likely to experience assaults resulting from verbal coercion in the context of ongoing intimate partnerships, rather than drunken assaults with a partner they met at a party.²³

“THEY WERE JUST SORT OF SKEPTICAL.”

Heterosexual men's sexual assaults by women are also rendered invisible by prevailing discourses of gender and power.²⁴ These stories, some of which we've already shared, are not numerically nearly as common as those of women assaulted by men, nor do they happen at the extremely high rates at which queer and trans students experience assault. Naming this as assault has the immediate practical value of helping men who feel harmed access the resources that they need to heal. But there is also a symbolic and political value to undermining the equation of masculinity and sexuality agency: describing men as the potential objects of someone else's aggression and not just as the agents gives men social permission not to be sexual aggressors. It also frames sexual assault as something that they have a stake in preventing not just as allies but to protect themselves.

It would be hard to think of a man who embodies hegemonic masculinity more intensely than Rick. He grew up on a farm out west, and joked before the interview began about how useless his cattle-roping skills were in Morningside Heights. Not from a wealthy background, he responded to the ad about SHIFT because he needed the cash. Initially he seemed discomfited by the directness of the questions—leaning back in his chair as if to escape, tapping his hands on his knees and on the table. But he relaxed as the conversation progressed. He waved his hands for emphasis, raised an eyebrow to indicate a joke, and leaned forward, smiling, as he spoke about his ex-girlfriend.

He did not describe what happened that night as an assault. It began,

as many of these stories do, on East Campus (where seniors live), outside a party that had just been shut down. While Rick was standing on the concrete outside the townhouse-style dorms in the wintery chill, Cassidy, who was a friend of a friend, walked over. With their friends they first headed in a group to one bar, and then to another. Cassidy bought Rick drink after drink throughout the night, pressed herself on him physically, and eventually went with him back to his room, where they had sex. He awoke the next morning filled with misgiving and confusion. He asked his friends what had happened. The guys confirmed that from the moment they walked into the first bar, Cassidy seemed to be intent on getting him drunk. They didn't think to intervene—as far as they could tell, he was getting lucky. No need for a wingman; he was headed for sex without even having to pay for his drinks, so what was the problem? But his friend Renee had a different take on the interaction, and she raised the whole issue of gender, saying, "If you were a woman, you would be in hell right now." Ultimately, Rick decided it was not an assault, just a gross story.

But not all men who have these experiences shrug them off. Maddox, who we met in Chapter 2—he was the man who didn't want to tell us the name of the bar he and his friends had found—answered interview questions quickly and efficiently. He leaned forward, letting his hair hang over his eyes, or turned his head, avoiding eye contact. Maddox was assaulted—it was unusual to hear a cis-hetero man describe the experience in these terms—at a party freshman year. It was the cast party from a play he'd been in, and everyone was very drunk. The next day he had to piece together what happened.

I remember being mostly fine and talking to this person, and then I was drinking and drinking, and then I blacked out, and I don't remember anything else that happened except like a few flashes of being in her room. Then I was told what happened [by her roommate, who had also been at the party] and was sort of uncomfortable with it. It was bad . . . I had some really good friends that were

a pretty good support network. I had one friend tell me to call the hotline for whatever, whatever it's called here. And I did that, and that was very helpful. The hotline was more just like having an ear to just talk this through . . . I don't know, it was just sort of therapeutic. My parents, it was more negative. I didn't tell my dad for a while afterwards, and then he was sort of like, didn't take it very seriously, didn't understand. And so we just stopped talking about it. My mom I think struggled to understand, but made more of an effort to just sort of, like, be there to comfort me.

"What did they struggle to understand?" we asked.

Just, like, how that can be, or, like, happen to a man. I think. Both my parents struggled to understand that . . . [they thought] that it had to be very physical and very, like, rape, rape, like violent rape, and so they were just sort of skeptical, like, "Oh, how could this have happened." My mom . . . sort of, like, struggled, but came through that to, like, help me. And then my dad just sort of didn't, and so we don't talk about it.

Maddox was one of the few men we interviewed who described himself as asexual; it's possible that this sexual identity provided him with the critical distance from hegemonic masculine sexuality needed to label what happened to him as an assault. If we read an erection as a barometer of desire (as Maddox's father may have), it is impossible to conceive of a man experiencing penetrative sex as assault—unless he is the one being penetrated. If a man is doing the penetrating, how can he also be assaulted?

HOW TO THINK ABOUT POWER

The stories in this chapter hardly exhaust the multiple forms of power that create the conditions in which sexual assaults occur. In our analysis

of all the stories we heard, the power disparities related to age, levels of comfort in the campus setting, mastery of the rules of the game, and disparities in social status, intoxication, levels of sexual experience, clarity about sexual projects, race, wealth, and control over space. Sometimes only one major power disparity was at play; other times disparities seemed to layer one upon one another. We heard from one participant about what she thought of as a "near miss" of being assaulted by older, wealthy foreign students whose downtown apartment was a kind of palatial man-cave stocked with booze and cocaine, with Uber XLs shuttling women in and out. The woman who told us this story entered that apartment, felt profoundly uneasy, and left almost immediately.

In thinking about the multidimensionality of power, we are not arguing against the notion that certain fraternities, or sports teams, or any other single-sex men's organization can produce vulnerability to sexual assault. Rather, we are suggesting that it is simplistic to think about the assaults that happen in those contexts as only reflecting gendered power differences. Not all groups are created equal. Where single-sex organizations like fraternities and men's athletic teams differ from, say, band or the debate team or the newspaper, is that women are absent from leadership, creating the possibility for bonding around shared norms of masculine entitlement to other people's bodies. But coed teams and student activity groups create other dynamics of vulnerability, with students working together intensely, sometimes traveling together, and often celebrating wins, or mourning losses, by drinking heavily. The assaults that take place among students in these activity groups, and that go unreported, speak to the power of the group both to organize opportunities for sexual contact and to downgrade instances of assault. Such instances get relabeled as sketchy, weird, or gross sex, in the interest of preserving group harmony, and because of individuals' wish not to lose access to a valued social activity.

Power can be thought of as something people possess, as something they practice, or as something they enjoy because of structural advan-

tage. The first form of power, as a possession, is something someone "has"; for example, if they're physically imposing, very attractive, or control substantial social or monetary resources. The second form of power is something that someone "does"; for example, if their sexual experience is so considerable that they find it easy to act in sexual situations in ways that help them get what they want. And the third form is a position they occupy that gives them power: being the captain of a team, or on a student organization's leadership board. Power is personal, relational, and institutional.

These forms of power are unquestionably gendered. But other dimensions of social inequality are extremely important; we have highlighted racial and economic inequality, and the particular vulnerabilities of students who are not heterosexual or are outside the gender binary, but this hardly exhausts the forms of inequality relevant to sexual assault (disability, for example, merits a great deal more attention). Acknowledging power as personal, relational, and institutional, while at the same time keeping an eye on the forms of power that reflect broader social inequalities, is essential.

While no society is without power disparities, our argument is not that the inescapable intertwining of power and sex means that consent is truly impossible, and therefore all sex is rape.²⁵ That kind of thinking doesn't reflect most people's experience. Moreover, it diminishes the suffering caused by sexual assault to suggest that somehow it's the same as "normal" or typical sex. It's deterministic, making assault seem inevitable. It enables those who commit assault to abdicate responsibility, and to argue that it's society's fault, not theirs. Uncovering sexual assault's deep social roots suggests that sexual assault prevention is inextricable from broader projects of social justice.

We have said little about the agency and choices of those who don't commit assault, instances in which an advance was made, consent was not given, and this was respected, or where consent was given, but still not acted upon. But these stories are also important. One Latino man

told us of a time he was "hooking up" with a woman. She said "yes" to sex, but he thought she was too drunk to be able to truly consent. And so he stepped back, ending the encounter. His sexual agency was critically important, particularly the agency he exercised in deciding not to have sex that he wanted, out of concern for his partner's state of mind. Another man recounted having sex with his girlfriend, and looking down at her on the bed to see her looking up at the ceiling, expressionless. He stopped. And he had a conversation with her. He implored her to be clearer about her feelings; no matter what they were, he wanted to hear them.

While power differences may be inescapable, schools and the social policies that shape higher education can mitigate asymmetries; this includes policies related to financial aid, student debt, housing, and career services as part of our expansive vision of building a safer environment. But mitigating these asymmetries also includes social sources of vulnerability prior to orientation week: Charlene's "first seeing of queerness" would not have been a first time if her high school had had a gay-straight alliance.²⁶ And more can be done to raise awareness about power asymmetries that are not modifiable—in particular, to sensitize students to the power of age disparities.

Although power generates privilege, privilege possessed need not be privilege exercised. Some of us have the privilege of clearly defined sexual projects for a host of reasons: we're heterosexual and our project is widely accepted; we came from a community that provided us with information about sex and sexuality; we have family and friends who have affirmed our project. Others do not. A critical part of realizing our sexual projects requires recognizing the privileges we have, in relationship to the power we possess, that we practice, and that institutions bestow upon us. Sexual projects, as we use the concept in this book, is descriptive, highlighting the range of what people want out of sex, or through sex. It is agnostic as to what is right or moral or what people owe each other. The normative dimension of sexual projects is some-

thing about which people will disagree, and that is for them to decide. That is also where sexual citizenship comes in; equality is a fundamental element of citizenship. Recognizing everyone's sexual citizenship means checking our privilege, and checking in with each other. Combining attention to sexual projects with the promotion of sexual citizenship and the transformation of sexual geographies suggests a pathway to a world where sexual assault is less common.