

Caroline K: Hi, everybody. I am Caroline Kitchener, the Associate Editor of The Masthead. Today, I am so excited to have *Atlantic* contributing writer, Caitlin Flanagan, on the phone. Welcome, Caitlin.

Caitlin F: Good morning. Thanks for having me.

Caroline K: I have wanted to have you on a Masthead conference call ever since I read "A Death at Penn State," which was in our November issue of *The Atlantic*. Caitlin takes this extremely disturbing look at how one fraternity's negligence led to the death of student, Tim Piazza. And, I can't really remember the last time that an article gripped me like this piece gripped me.

It was absolutely horrifying, but I read it all in one sitting. It was ... I just really couldn't look away. So, I've got lots of questions for you, Caitlin. And our members have been sending in questions over the last couple of days. I would also encourage everybody who is listening on the call please send me your questions during this call. We really want to focus on what you want to know. So, here's how you do that. For everybody that's listening, there should be a little chat window down at the lower left corner of your screen. Click on that, and then click on the, Everyone tab.

If you type your questions in there, Matt Peterson, our Senior Editor, will pass them over to me. You can also email them, if that's easier, to Matt at mpeterson@theatlantic.com.

Okay. That's all the house-keeping. Caitlin, I want to start by reading a short excerpt from a piece that you published in *The Atlantic* in March of 2014, after you spent a year investigating college Greek life. I think it's quite easy for us to dismiss fraternities, as the sort of hot beds of debauchery. But, in many ways they really do play a crucial role in American culture.

You write, and this is a quote, "An astonishing number of CEOs in Fortune 500 companies, congressman, and male senators, and American presidents, have belonged to fraternities. Many more thousands of American men count their fraternal experience, and the friendships made within it, as among the most valuable in their lives. The organizations raise millions of dollars for worthy causes, contribute millions of hours in community service, and seek to steer young men toward lives of service and honorable action."

You also write that, "The fraternity system has helped build American higher education as we know it." And yet, and this is me again, fraternities seem to perpetuate this extremely disturbing pattern of violence we see again and again ... These hazing rituals, the assault and battery, sexual assault.

You've written two major stories for our magazine on fraternities in the last three years, and I'm just wondering if you can give us an idea of the scale of the silence. Is this is something that's affecting a couple of chapters of a few fraternities here and there, or is this a much more pervasive problem?

Caitlin F: Nobody really knows for sure except for the fraternities themselves. They have a tremendous amount of data on this, especially since the mid-eighties when, number one Americans started suing much more often for damages or personal injuries. Just in general in all sorts of fields, but including things that happened to their children in fraternities. And since they all bound together with a common insurance practice.

So, the fraternities really have the best possible idea of how much is going on. From that data, they won't really share it. They'll share how many claims ... What the percentage of claims are ... You know, how many claims come in for sexual assault ... How many claims come in for slip and fall ... How many claims come in for hazing.

So, you get kind of a sense of what the patterns are. But, they won't give us the numbers. But I have found, since establishing a separate email, and I would definitely encourage listeners if they're interested in communicating with me, it's caitlinflanagan@ca.rr.com, and I made public after this last piece, if you have a hazing story you want to talk about, in confidence or not, you know, just email me here.

And, I'm really struck by how consistent the kind of hazing is, how consistent the actions and activities are, and how really traumatic it has been for many men when they're not just sitting around having a cocktail, when they're just sitting around having a conversation with someone who's had a sympathetic ear to it, that the real trauma for many of these men, was yes it was the hazing. But more than that it was the moment in which they had to haze the others.

That has stood for many as a lifelong moral stain. And, in fact, one of the terrible Penn State cases, not the one that I focus on but one I mentioned briefly, involved a young man named, Marquise Braham, who made it through a hideous hazing, and then when it was time for him to haze the others, the younger members, the pledges, he began to do that, then he called home and said he needed to see a priest about what was happening in his fraternity, and he came home and killed himself.

Caroline K: Oh my God.

Caitlin F: He was at lunch with his mother. He visited the priest in the morning, came home to Long Island from Pennsylvania. He did see his priest in the morning. He went to lunch with his mother, and then he excused himself from the table. And as she sat at the table waiting for him to come back, where she presumed he was in the restroom, he climbed to the roof of the building across the street and jumped and killed himself.

And, that case Penn State denied. They say he had a long history of mental instability, he didn't. He was just put into that place of moral stain. He saw no other way out than to kill himself. So, what's going on in these extreme events is, you know, I believe that it's an indication of the depth of what's going on in many, many more cases.

So, I think it's widespread. Yeah. And it's happened to many men in the system at any given time.

Caroline K: So, you talked about the consistent patterns, that, you know, as you are going through your email you see pop up again and again, these patterns of violence. What patterns are you talking about? What things do you see again and again?

Caitlin F: Obviously, hazing is really different campus to campus and chapter to chapter. But, if you go to a large public university, with big sort of Division I sports, the typical places of big Greek life scene, you're going to have four or five or six fraternities where pledging is pretty consistent and has hazing during it.

That you are constantly on call for the, you know, eight, twelve weeks, maybe part of a semester of your pledgship, you can be called in the middle of the night to be on these line-ups where you're down in the basement of the fraternity ... And a lot of the things were very familiar with the revelations about American torture in the wars of Iraq and Afghanistan ... And there are stress positions, extreme exercise, extremely cut-off, the first thing they'll do is take away the phones. There is not being allowed to sleep, loud music blared at them.

The other thing that we don't see in the torture text and the thing that always ends up being involved in these cases of death, almost always, is extreme alcohol consumption. And, tolerating alcohol at vast volumes ... The big times that pledging and hazing has really come to the national consciousness, which isn't just in this current era over the last twenty years or so, it having to do with something that's extreme intake of alcohol in a short period of time.

And, you know, when I'm ... I'm older, I'm fifty-five. I am old. When I went to college at the University of Virginia, I mean the fraternity paddles were sold at the bookstore—the campus bookstore.

Caroline K: No. Really?

Caitlin F: Yeah, they were everywhere. Oh yeah. In fact, I remember my boyfriend, who I married, who was in a fraternity ... We loved this one professor, we studied Dante with him, for two semesters. And as our gift, we just went to the campus bookstore, and we bought a fraternity paddle, and then we bought these like transfer letters that you could do stencils. And we just wrote on the fraternity paddle, some lines from The Inferno, as kind of a joke. And he loved the gift, and it was in his office forever.

I mean there was nothing hidden about it. It was just, you know ... You could get your copy of Dante and your fraternity paddle right there.

And as a woman I always thought of this paddling as a joke but there have been some really severe injuries. And in the case that I talked about, the fraternity at Penn State, which was widely considered one of the safest fraternities, they broken a pledge's skin the year before.

And one of the brothers said, you know, 'I'm not gonna go to paddling this time. I get so angry, that I break the skin of the pledges.' And a really tough kid, you know a high

school football player, told me about the paddling at that particular Penn State, and said, "Yeah it really hurt."

And it bruises them, a lot. So, it's not just the humiliation, it is a painful thing. And many accounts that are even more violent and more depraved, as being a pretty common thing that unfolds on college campuses ... Sort of out of sight, and sort of not out of sight, of the administration.

Caroline K: So, I remembered Joe asked a question that telltales really nicely here, about the history. Are these fraternities rituals that we're hearing so much about now, through work like yours, more malicious and mean spirited now than they were in the past? Or are we just hearing more about them, and if it's just that we're hearing more about them, why? Why that change in the media, do you think?

Caitlin F: Well, the history of fraternities to me, is what got me interested in the whole subject. I was interested as an undergraduate. They really got started ... You know, the idea now, that the fraternity industry will tell you, is that they're helpful of [inaudible] of the campus.

And that they do all this community service, and that's true. But, they were not formed in any way to be partners of the campus or administration. They were found because college was so boring, and there were so many rules, and you could never forget ... You know, having sex, you couldn't go on a date. You couldn't smoke cigarettes or a pipe or a cigar. You certainly couldn't have alcohol.

And so, fraternities were born as private clubs that were like usually ... The oldest one is a very beautiful one in Canyon College ... They didn't have windows, they were lodges. And, they right away encouraged kind of these masculine behaviors. But they also had this ongoing anxiety about the fact that people are gonna think that all these men want to live, or you know hang-out away from the community in this private house. Maybe they'll think we're gay, and we've got to prove that we're tough.

So, there was some hazing, but it came ... You know, groups of men ... Historically, the military ... That hazing is across the world, around the world, there's some kind of hazing as junior members of clubs or athletics teams are being brought up.

So, there was some, but it was after the Civil War, which was about forty years after fraternities started. It was after that there was this convulsive national sense among American young men, that men that were even in their own family, their older brothers, their cousins ... They'd been tested by war. They'd been injured, they'd had to, or they had to injure others. They'd been, you know, the oldest test of manhood is the test of war.

And here, where these men just in college, just reading books, just, you know fiddling around with papers. And there was an idea that we need to rise to that level of testing. And that's the point that it became more codified as hazing activities, and it became

extreme. But it was really after The Second World War that they became much more militaristically intense and much more sadistic in a sense.

And then they blossomed again with the rise of internet culture, where you have these extreme sort of masochistic stunts being performed. And that entered, you know, the national sort of vocabulary or grammar of things you could do.

And when online means that you can share things so quickly, and a practice in one fraternity can so quickly be sent to another one. And so all those things have rolled up to, I think, it is kind of at it's most intense phases right now. I do think that's true.

Caroline K: So, I'm sure you get this question all the time. It's a very obvious question of, why don't universities just ban fraternities? I mean, we hear these things are going on, why don't they just get rid of them?

Caitlin F: Well, you know, I first wrote about fraternities about eight years ago. I had a column at the Wall Street Journal for a while, the first one I wrote was about ... For God's sake, I didn't know anything about it, and I was widely, you know, about ... A huge, huge number, and I was just really schooled on this whole thing by very angry fraternity men.

First place, if it's a public university, and most American students go to big public universities, those are private clubs that exist off-campus. And you can, in that sense, structure a private club not on campus property, that's no different in that sense than a Sierra Club, or the public library, or the local Italian club. It's been established since the mid-sixties in the Free Speech Movement, students have the right to join private clubs.

So, the university has no power at a public university to stop those students. The more vital reason is that they really enmeshed with one another. The fraternities are offering a lot to the universities. And the most obvious thing, that people don't like to talk about publicly, is that, you know, we in the *Atlantic* community, we write a lot about how it's super, competitive to get into colleges. And how it's harder than ever to get into Yale, as well as it is Amherst, and we can just imagine how every college has just twenty kids dying to get in.

In reality, most colleges need students. It's expensive to go to college. Colleges are kind of wildly over-billed in a couple of periods in the post-war phase. And, they need to attract students. And at some essential level, what colleges are really in the business of, is promoting a product to very young people. They're selling a product to high school seniors, who are seventeen and eighteen years old. And, what college is going to look better to a seventeen, eighteen year old male who is dying to get away from home and have some fun?

The college that has no active Greek life, or the college where, oh there are parties every single weekend, there are clubs you can join, and be at the center of a party life. Where you could never be excluded from the best parties because you're a member of the club that throws the best parties.

And so you take a seventeen year old kid, who is kind of on the bubble even about college itself, and mom and dad are trying to convince him, "No, college is the right thing to do."

He gets to look at an active fraternity row and says, "You know, Mom, maybe you're right about this." So, there are a lot of male students who say, "Yeah, I want to, you know, not only do I want to go to this college, but I may even want to go to college because that looks like a lot of fun."

And I can tell you from having been in the Greek system a million years ago, it is a lot of fun. You know, it is wild and a bit dangerous and a bit outside of the purview of the adult, the so-called adults of the campus who don't want you to do these things.

Caroline K: Right.

Caitlin F: And, it's an incredible exciting feeling that there are these nightclubs, essentially. And some people are admitted into them as guests, and some are not. And that it's wild, it's dangerous, it's male, it's threatening, it's interesting. It is a lot of fun to be had, and it's a tremendous amount of buyer beware danger to be had.

Caroline K: That's very interesting. So, in a way they're a marketing tool for the students. But, what about the parents. We had one member write in about this. Joe. He asked about the parents' role about this. Aren't the parents scandalized by this? Don't they see fraternity row and hear about a really, a violent fraternity culture at a particular school, and say no way my kids not going there? I'm not paying for it.

Caitlin F: This always staggers me. This always staggers me, but that's why you report on things, because you find out that your assumptions are wrong, you know. When I was reporting that first piece three years ago, I was invited to a big charity lunch, not really my kind of thing, but someone had invited me to come. And it was a big woman's organization, you know, middle-aged woman. And I was with three different woman at this table, and I said, "Oh, I'm writing about fraternities." And I thought all these moms were going to say, "I'm just terrified my son is going to be in one." And they all said, "Oh the best thing about my son's college experience was his fraternity."

That, they felt that the brotherhood, that there was true friendship. I had someone say that, you know, her son had an injury, not a fraternity related injury, but a sport's injury and had to go to the hospital for a few days, and his fraternity brothers visited him every single day. Every visiting hour there was always a fraternity brother there. And they brought him his favorite food. And that it was a sense of community, and they loved the idea that it was a house that they had, that it was their house.

And then fathers, who, you know, went through the whole experience themselves, sort of said, "Oh, it was my favorite part of college. And yeah, you get through that hazing ... And here's some hints on how to do it ... And here are the things that they're gonna say they're gonna do to you, but it's really just a scare tactic and don't worry about it."

It has to be accepted or confronted that it's a deeply ingrained part of American higher education, historically so. But, I'll tell you this, a lot of people don't ever like to hear the term, white privilege. And I absolutely get it, it's a buzz word, et cetera, but I can hardly imagine a better example of that concept of white privilege than the whole idea of fraternities that the cops are constantly coming.

And, you know, there was the N.W.A song, Fuck the Police. It is when those white boys stand inside their fraternity and insult the cops, because they have absolute impunity to insult the cops. Their fathers are lawyers. Their fathers are professional men. They have been taught that the cops don't have the right to go in there. They're not afraid of the cops because they're middle-classed privileged white kids. And this is why I'm always saying that fraternities are always trying to get more African-American men in their clubs, and they can't understand why.

And I'm saying, "Do you think an African-American college man could take on the amount of lawlessness that you do with the impunity that you do? Do you think that he can really be the face of dealing with the cops, the face of the vandalism, the face of the sex that goes on in the average scavenger hunt of a fraternity. Do you think an average, you know, young African-American male can be sent down to the town, the college town, and told to steal the sign from a revered old drug store, and have that be interpreted by the cops as a prank?"

You know, it's a very, very, very different world that those privileged white young men exist in, in those fraternities. And so, that is being replicated generation after generation.

Caroline K: Yeah. Absolutely. I want to talk ... I want to go back to this idea that fraternities provide this unique sensation of community and brotherhood, or sisterhood if we're looking at Greek life more broadly. I heard, what I still consider to be the best pro-Greek life argument, while I was in college.

My university moved to barre first semester freshman from Greek life. And under the new rules, you could only pledge a fraternity or sorority in your second semester. And there was this very interesting outcry from sexual assault advocates on campus. They were arguing that sororities, in particular, gave women a safe group to go to college parties with. At a time in their college careers, when they knew very few people on campus. And then a group of women, particularly older women, could look out for them and help prevent sexual assault if they were in a sorority.

Is that an argument that you buy?

Caitlin F: Well, I think there's truth to it, and I think also that ... And there'd even been some reporting on this, antidotal report that when you're in a sorority, it certainly doesn't protect you from sexual assault, absolutely, just by being in a sorority.

But there is a sense of accountability. And there is a sense that, oh, we know those girls. There is a sense that they're in that group that we interact with. And then there's a

sense that, they're not kind of these random to us, anonymous to us, not powerful to us, individual girls, women that might come through.

There is a sense that they have the Panhellenic, that they have structures within the university that we need to be a little bit more mindful of. And also, that, you know, if we want to put together in different terms of the campuses, you know a mixer or social between our fraternity and that sorority that's a really hot or top-tier, as they say sorority, we can't have really injured some of their members, sexually raped them or sexually injured or raped whatever them, and expect them to agree to help us climb the popularity ladder.

That does have a protective factor, but it works the other way in that the sorority, the first group you'll see to come up and stand up for the fraternities when a fraternity gets shut down, is often the sororities. And they'll say, "Oh, we know these guys. These are great guys. They shouldn't be shut down. They shouldn't be on probation. We'll vouch for them," which can often be very infuriating, understandably, to individuals, for sorority members that were, in fact, assaulted in those fraternity houses. But there's a real insularity in that system, on that regard. But, I think it kind of emphasizes the fact that there are these male clubs, that are so dangerous, that women are kind of strategically trying to gain the system of how they can visit them, which to me would be absolutely fine if they were not affiliated with the university.

If these were just a private club, like a nightclub, and if the university said, "We don't have any association. We're not gonna say a good thing or a bad thing about them. We're just gonna say be as careful going in that as you would be going into a nightclub." I wouldn't have a problem with it. But the fact that the university are in a formal, legal, recognized partnership with clubs, that the members are 100% students of the university, and when there is a very high rate of sexual assault of the students of the university, I think that's a grave moral wrong. And I think that's a big feminist issue, that hasn't really been addressed directly.

Caroline K: So, I want to move on to talk about some potential solutions to these problems. We've had a lot of members ask about the different things that parents can do, the different things that the institutions, the universities could do. So, I'm going to start with a question from our member named, Beth. Beth asks what can we do to raise our boys differently, so their sensibilities will not accept the kind of behavior in fraternities that you describe in "Death at Penn State"?

She says, and this is a quote, "I have a boy who is twenty-four, and another who is sixteen, who both have absolutely no interest in fraternities, largely due to the behavior they hear about or have witnessed. It's difficult for me to understand how a young man could stomach the behavior that you describe, and I wonder what could be done before boys enter college."

It's a tough question, but do you have an answer?

Caitlin F: It's a great question, it's not a tough question. I kind of smiled even before she said that she had sons who weren't interested. I was about to say, I don't think that has any problem in how she's raising ... The very fact that she's raising that question, I have no doubt that she is raising exceptional sons, and it turns out that I was right. She's raising exceptional young men who couldn't even stomach it.

You know, the idea that at some sort of ... everybody knows someone like that. Everybody knows someone who's kids are on the right track. Go talk to them, you know. I was amazed at the Los Angeleno, I mean I didn't grow up in Los Angeles, but I raised my kids here. And I spent a lot of money to send them to private schools because I'd say the education I thought would be better.

But I also assumed that, all these parents that care so much about education, I bet that they'll be morally on the same page around drugs, alcohol, treatment of other students, how young men ... I have two sons ... of how young men should treat women. They were not on the same ... There were parents who were so comfortable having parties where kids got extremely drunk.

Where ambulances were repeatedly called to the house. Where drug taking was, certainly pot, lots, and lots of pot was used in the home at the party with the parents knowing it. And, they certainly ... I won't say that they were okay of sexual mistreatment of girls, I won't say that.

But they were certainly creating context in which that would absolutely be something that could happen with that much alcohol on board and that much poor decision making if kids aren't drunk.

And so, even not in the verified world of Los Angeles, and the suburbs around America, there are huge number of parents who are very, very comfortable with kids getting really drunk at parent's recognized events ... Certain amount of drug use, a certain amount of extreme internet content being a part of their lives.

And when those kids go to college, and maybe limited ... And I do think, not to sound like a social conservative, but, I do think that when kids have some kind of religious upbringing as part of their lives, and they're going to church, they're going to temple, they're going and learning some sort of way of understanding other human beings that is connected to some larger morality ... You know, it's interesting ... You know we take our kids to church every Sunday, and at the time I was like, "Why are we doing this?"

But, I didn't think it was the most happening church of all time, but week after week after week they'd draw their pictures, they learn a lesson, they read a little scripture ... You know, we're Christians, so they're reading a little, you know bible scripture. And as we reflect it in the home, you end up raising ... And that's not when I say, "And that's why I have exceptional sons."

But just before I was a writer, I was a school teacher in a boy's school. There were exceptional young men that I saw, and you'd meet the parents and you'd go, "Oh, all these clichés are true. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree."

You meet an exceptional man, he had an exceptional son. It's not that much of a mystery. It just means that the parent has to be willing to say, "I'm gonna be in conflict my child during adolescence because I'm not gonna let him drink into blackout." That's just not on offer.

So, I don't think it's mysterious. I think you find the best in your community and you say, "What are you doing and how can I do that too?"

Caroline K: So, what about once they get to college? We talked about flat relationship between the college and the administrations and the fraternities. We actually have a question from Robert on the best practices of college administrations in dealing with fraternities and preventing some of this from happening. Is there anything that you heard, you know, on different things, different college administrations have tried that have worked?

Caitlin F: Well, there was ... In terms of like sexual assault, there was something that was tried and it worked extremely well. It was called ... it wasn't perfect ... but it was called the old fashioned protective system of young women, where young women were really protected by their university. In ways that was an absolute double standard. In ways that were extremely limiting to young women. But in ways that protected them.

Not perfectly, certainly, but there was the idea that there was a curfew. Someone was looking out for you. Someone knew where you were, and somebody was kind of aware that you just left home ... You know, you just left home.

High school juniors and seniors are notorious for thinking they're pretty much free at that point. And they have no idea how many structures are still in place. They don't really realize that mom and dad are kind of sitting up until they get home. You know, that if you're not home by a certain time people are gonna start looking for you. People are going to assume you're out at some hook-up somewhere, you know? And, we decided to drop all that. We decided to drop all that for young men, too, because it did exist in a certain way.

And what's ironic to me, is that with young women, the most feminist young women I know, kind of what they're asking for is certainly not that old sexist protective system, but they're saying, "Can my college somehow protect me from this somehow? Can my college be involved?"

And we really don't know how. We don't know who to allow young women to have the complete freedom that we expect, that I certainly expected when I went to college thirty years ago, because that had already been granted to us. I certainly wasn't gonna choose some religious college that, you know, still have those restrictions in place. I wanted to be an equal of the young men. Of course, I did.

So, we don't know how to protect young women in a certain way from these male sexual aggressive, impulsive, that live so well at fraternity houses, without curtailing them. So, as far as best practices ... Best practices have to do with things that don't exist comfortably on the modern college campus. You know, we're not gonna get involved in individual student's sexual, free made sexual decisions. We're not gonna impose one person's morality on another.

And what we have is this baggie loose idea of, you know, kind of multi-cultural diversity based, decision making that never comes down to the word morality. Because, we don't want our colleges teaching morality, and we're not in concert about morality, and I can certainly imagine that, you know, that I can imagine somebody saying something that they consider an absolute moral truth that I would be outraged if it were taught to my children.

You know, if someone came in and taught some anti-gay thing to my kids, I would say, "What the hell is going on?" Someone employed by the college is teaching abortion to my kids, you know because my morality is very different from others. So, I don't think that there is any kind of best practices around this. To me, and everybody hates this answer, but to me the idea is: To cut the fraternities loose, and to let them live and die by the law, let them live and die by the cops, let them live and die by the lawsuits.

But don't run interference for them. Don't have an office for Greek life that advertises the fraternity. That has big websites promoting them. That gives big lectures to the parents at back to school weekend, parent's weekend about what a great historical, you know, institution these fraternities are. Just say, we're not connected to them. You know, there's lots of things in town your kid may be interested, your kid may want to ski on that ski slope, you know. Take your own chances there, but we're not connected.

To me, that's the only best practice would be the honesty of that.

Caroline K: Yes. Divorcing the college administration from the fraternity.

Caitlin F: Which is what fraternities wanted to be. It was in the mid-sixties when you had, when you had the decline of the protective system, the decline of the idea that the college was not gonna just give you an education but an upbringing. When all of that fell away, colleges were kind of scrambling, well what are we gonna offer students in terms of their personal development. And they thought, "Oh, we'll partner with the fraternities. We'll partner with the sororities. They'll have some kind of a developmental program."

And the fraternities and sororities said, "Sure, they had a lot to gain from their official recognition and promotion." But they didn't change the way they did business in any respect. So, it only legitimized the danger of the fraternity.

And what I always say about fraternity is, if they didn't exist and they were going to be invented now, it could never happen. Like, hmm, could we have a national partnership with an organization that has a terrible history of killing its members, sexually assaulting

its visitors, and promoting alcohol and drug use? Saying, hmm, you know you can't have an official partnership with us. That's not happening, but we're sort of stuck with it.

Caroline K: Right, because we have this extreme. So, we got a couple of questions particularly about sexual assault on college campuses. Judith asks, "Do you think the recent corporate actions regarding Harvey Weinstein, Kevin Spacey, et cetera, will that have any impact on the epidemic of sexual assault on college campuses? Will that have any impact on the culture of fraternities?"

Caitlin F: That's an interesting question. That's a really interesting question. You know, this is unprecedented what we're seeing now with the whole Harvey Weinstein thing. And that looking back at past allegations, sometimes from a very long time ago, sometimes without much evidence. And we're thinking, oh we believe this. This makes sense. This is a pattern of behavior. We're on this side of these women.

But what goes on, the great majority of these college sexual assaults ... Boy, they're really different from the college ... There were a lot of college sexual assaults when I went to college, and they were very different.

These ones are so enmeshed with the binge drinking culture, they're so enmeshed with black-outs, they're so enmeshed with kids who have so much alcohol on board they literally don't know where they are or what they are doing. They're literally waking up with sort of flashing moments of memory.

And it's not a Bill Cosby thing. I mean, sometimes they've been, women have been intentionally, you know, drugged by fraternity members. There's plenty of evidence of that. But, much more often it's this binge drinking reality, which is at it's apex, or apogee I should say. In the Greek system, they drink far more than any other kids on campus. And within that world, they're just taking on amounts of alcohol that were the only thing I can compare it to is almost anesthesia.

And, they're young people. So they don't have a great developed frontal lobe that's telling them, maybe I shouldn't do this because the consequences could be bad. They all think that they can handle it, and I think in that way it's very different from what we're seeing with Harvey Weinstein.

But, it's certainly in the culture at this moment that these kind of events against women are really coming more and more to light. And the nation is really galvanized in it's response to them.

The difference with college sexual assault, is that the country rightly rejected the huge Obama Administration policy on how sexual assault should be handled on campus. It was a horrible policy, and it's just been rightly rejected. And so, we don't really know what's gonna happen next in college sexual assault. So, I think she's absolutely right that we have a lot of things that are kind of getting graded together, but I don't know what's going to turn out in terms of that.

Caroline K: Mary Lou would like to know whether the universities are worried about losing alumni contributions if they divorce themselves from the fraternities. I do think it true if you are more likely to contribute to your university if you were in a fraternity. Is that right?

Caitlin F: It is right, and you contribute more dollars. And the simple reason for that is the profile fraternity members have met. These fraternities that become more diverse over the years, but the majority of their members are conservative, straight, living kind of in the suburbs, or cities, their home families ... But, we know those but there's something else that is really true. The great majority are business majors.

And so, they tend to have higher income. That's the reason that they have higher people that say, "Oh, it's all the connections they made."

I'm sure those connections don't hurt, but the reason is that they're business majors. And they go into business, and they have a lot of advantages in business. And they do well and they contribute a lot. And they tend to be young men who like being in organizations, so they tend to be interested in being on the boards of the universities if they've made a lot of money.

And the Penn State board is full of fraternity alumni, who are passionate about fraternity life. And so those things together, money, trusteeships, contributions, are this rich reign of cash for universities who are always, always, always in need of cash. There are cash strapped universities, that just need the cash to keep the doors open. And then there are very, very well endowed universities, who always want more money to have more programs and more research.

So, money really talks in universities. And fraternities provide and meet all sorts of different ways of rich reign of money, and also rich reign of influence. You know, universities have some engineering problem they need to work with, or a legal issue they need help with.

And there are lots and lots of alumni at the university who are fraternity men who are very well placed in fields like that. So, the alumni are a strong powerful force. They have a strict and strong allegiance to their fraternities and to react very swiftly unhappily if their fraternities are hampered or unhindered in any way.

Caroline K: So, to finish this up here, Caitlin, I want to pivot a little bit to a piece on Bill Clinton that actually came up on our website just about an hour ago. It's titled "Bill Clinton: A Reckoning," and it's about how feminists sort of saved Bill Clinton during the 1990s, when he was going through his own sexual harassment scandal.

And you sort of, you asked this question, will the Harvey Weinstein effects make these feminists come out and renew ... And make some kind of renewed objection to Bill Clinton and his actions in the 1990s. What are your thoughts? Tell us a little bit about the piece. I'm sure not many people have gotten to read it yet.

Caitlin F:

Well, the real hypocrisy, the real hypocrisy is among temporary feminists in the right now. A real contradiction, in that on the one hand you will have them saying that we absolutely believe the accusations of these women coming forward about Weinstein and all these other men. And we don't care that they took place, some of them took place a long time ago. They're important, and we stand by the women.

But if you bring up the women who accused Bill Clinton of sexual crimes, they'll say, "Uh, not that again. We're gonna re-legislate that?" They don't want to hear about. And to be very clear, I'm not talking about Monica Lewinsky.

I'm talking about the women who did exactly what women are doing now against all these different men, who came forward and said, very credibly, very consistently, and in some respects with more evidence and more [inaudible] accounts than a lot of women we take seriously on these other men who say, Bill Clinton violently raped me. Bill Clinton brought me to a hotel room and very crudely sexually harassed me. Bill Clinton took me into a private office and rubbed his erection against me when I had come for professional and personal advice.

These accounts fit the exact pattern of the accounts that we're hearing now on these other men, which I absolutely believed, and I absolutely believed when they came up against Bill Clinton to say these things. And because, it was very expedient for the sort of feminist movement to excuse Bill Clinton, because he had done absolutely so many good and just and important things for women during his time. He'd also been a big supporter of abortion, which is obviously a polarizing issue, but most feminists will say they're pro-choice.

So, they covered for him, and they said these women are liars. And the worst it could be that he'd need sex addiction therapy. You know, Gloria Steinem said that when he raped somebody, according to a standard that we all believe of these other women. And I think it's the original sin of the contemporary Democratic Party and contemporary feminism.

And I think we need a reckoning. I think if the parties are really gonna rise again, we need a reckoning. We need an acknowledgement. Just as Obama gave that incredible speech about rape, when the Jeremiah Wright tapes were made available. And he said, he has a messy history on this. Every family a messy history. I loved my grandmother more than life itself, and she loved me more than life itself, but she would cross me to the other side of the street when [inaudible] young black men.

We all have a messy past, and he came and he spoke into that reality that was messy and complicated, and everybody nodded and said they knew exactly what he was talking about. And I think somebody powerful ... If the Democrats want to really be on the right side of history, 'cause they were on the wrong side of history, and they still are, someone needs to stand up from within that movement and say, "We made a mistake and we apologize."

Caroline K: Absolutely. So, do you think we're gonna have that reckoning? Do you think the Gloria Steinem's of the world are going to come out and say, "We were wrong."

Caitlin F: I have no idea, but I'll tell you what, they've lost ... You know, I never in my life have voted for a Republican president, and I thought maybe this will be the time when I heard Hilary was winning. And then it was Donald Trump and, oh Christ, I gotta go vote for Hilary Clinton.

But a lot of people think that there's such a thing as Hilary, of a Clinton derangement syndrome, and that is irrational. That real anger at that couple. It's partly ... There are some people who have a rational thing and think like they killed Vincent Foster, and all this stuff. That's irrational.

But some of us are furious, some of us life-long Democrats, myself included, are furious at the way they treated these women who came forward and said, "He sexually harassed and even raped me." And a lot of us kind of are sick of that, and feel like this is a time in our country ... We are not in a time where we're just in the forgetting mode. We're in a time where monuments are coming down. When old sex crimes are being redressed. When victims are being listened to.

And it's very hypocritical for us in the Democratic party to say that we're not willing to do the same and have a reckoning for the fact that Bill Clinton was covered for by machine, feminism in a way that was very disgraceful, was a grave moral wrong, and needs to be atoned for.

Caroline K: Well, I guess we'll see, and it doesn't seem like this movement is quieting down anytime soon.

Caitlin F: No, it's not. And as they say in the piece, if every one of us women in the country talked about what's it like in the course of an ordinary female life, to come up against the force of malevolent male sexual aggression, we'd never stop talking. It's almost just a horrible, irreducible reality of being a woman. And the feminist movement should be the one that is always on the side of women. And not on the side of party politics. So, that's what the piece is about.

Caroline K: Well, I look forward to reading it. I haven't gotten a chance to yet.

Caitlin F: Thank you.

Caroline K: Thank you, Caitlin.

Caitlin F: What a great conversation, and thanks for all the questions from the readers and listeners. I appreciate it.

Caroline K: Yeah. It was great. We had some great member comments and questions today.

Caitlin F: We did, for sure.

Caroline K: So, we will leave it there. Next week, right before Thanksgiving, we're gonna have a conference call with Culture Editor, Lenika Cruz. We're going to be talking about Stranger Things, that Netflix show that has become something of a cultural phenomenon. So, looking forward to that, and everybody have a great week. We'll talk to you next Monday. Thanks, Caitlin.