

HEGEMONIC GENDER CONFORMITY, GREEK LIFE, &  
TITLE IX: AN ANALYSIS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

by

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TITLE IX: AN ANALYSIS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

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## ABSTRACT

The U.S. Department of Justice reported that about one in four of all college females are victims of rape or sexual assault on their respective campuses (Fisher et al., 2000). Despite these trends, recent changes to Title IX present additional barriers to survivors of sexual assault on campus. While several studies have pointed to individual behaviors such as alcohol causing increases of assault on college campuses, this research seeks to contribute to a smaller body of work that identifies institutional factors that contribute to the prevalence of sexual assault on campus. Sororities and fraternities play significant roles in perpetuating cycles of gender-based violence on college campuses. The researchers draw on a purposive sample of college sorority women to conduct an IRB-approved study. Researchers will distribute online surveys to investigate institutional factors that reinforce rape culture and dominant gender narratives within sororities and fraternities at a predominately white institution in the southern United States. This study seeks to more critically understand factors such as the construction of space, party culture, and expectations of gender conformity as contributors to rape culture. Particularly, in light of the recent changes to Title IX, this work additionally seeks to identify ways in which new institutional requirements impact survivors' potential to report instances of sexual assault on college campuses. Finally, this research aims to provide an analysis of race and class in predominantly white sororities in relation to rape culture. Implications for practice, education, and research include the development of knowledge of institutional risk factors on college campuses, strategies for rearranging institutional norms in ways that result in more protective factors, and preliminary insight into how new Title IX requirements may impact college students' willingness to report sexual assault on college campuses.

## Introduction

The U.S. Department of Justice reported that about one in four college women are victims of rape or sexual assault on their respective campuses (Fisher et al., 2000). More recent studies report that 20-25% of college women experience sexual assault at some point during their college experience (Mellins et al., 2017). These rates increase for college women when affiliated with Greek life. A study of 779 undergraduate women found that 29% of sorority women had experienced sexual assault in comparison to the scant 7% of non-Greek affiliated women (Minow & Einold, 2009). Despite these trends, recent changes to Title IX policies and procedures present additional barriers to survivors of sexual assault on college campuses. As a result of the May 2020 changes to Title IX policy by United States Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, survivors who file formal Title IX complaints might have to participate in cross-examination and a live trial conducted by party advisors, further impacting the rates of reporting on campus (Office of Civil Rights, Department of Education, 2020).

Researchers have identified several individual characteristics that are deemed to increase the rate of assault experienced by college students, including alcohol use, peer pressure, assumed sexual promiscuity, and victim-blaming (Armstrong et al., 2006). While there can be a link between individual factors and sexual assault, there are larger institutional factors in a place like fraternity characteristics, dominant notions of gender conformity in Greek life, and students' relationship to race and class (Armstrong et al., 2006; Armstrong et al., 2014; Canan et al., 2018; Harris et al., 2019). Additionally, there are institutional barriers to reporting due to the new Title IX policies and procedures. Forcing individuals to participate in cross-examination and a live trial might systematically suppress the voices of survivors (Office of Civil Rights, Department of Education, 2020).

This research seeks to contribute to a smaller body of work that identifies institutional or structural factors that contribute to the prevalence of sexual assault on campus. Through a mixed-method analysis of survey responses from sorority affiliated women at a predominately white institution (PWI) in the southern United States, I aim to gain a better understanding of which institutional and organizational characteristics reinforce rape culture and dominant gender narratives, particularly at the intersection of race, class, and sexuality within Greek life at a predominately white higher education institution. This research also seeks to investigate how the new Title IX regulations will influence rates of reporting among survivors on campus.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Gender Conformity and Hookup Culture**

An adherence to hegemonic gender norms can be a risk factor for sexual assault on campus (Armstrong et al., 2006). Hegemonic masculinity and femininity are socially constructed gender scripts that reinforce inequality and patriarchy in society (Schippers, 2007). Within the dominant gender structure, men are expected to embody and perform the preferred qualities of masculinity (e.g. present as dominant or the sexual subject/pursuer) and women are expected to embody and perform the preferred qualities of femininity (e.g. submissive or the sexual object/pursued). Traits between men and women are socially constructed to be distinctly different, complementary, and hierarchical. When women and men behave outside of these scripts, they often face social consequences resulting in a socially controlled and gendered system. Pariah femininity is when women act outside of expected gender norms and pay consequences for breaking out of hegemonic femininity. This type of femininity can manifest in women being referred to as a slut when acting as the sexual pursuer rather than being sexually pursued (Schippers, 2007).

These constructed gender scripts influence perspectives on hookup culture and sexual activity within the context of universities as well. Sexual freedom and expression on campus is currently characterized by “hookups” over traditional forms of dating. At the collegiate level, “hooking up” can describe a wide range of sexual activity usually outside of a romantic relationship. The term can refer to sexual activities like kissing, sexual touching, oral sex, and penetrative sex (Berntson et al., 2014). Hookups, however, have less to do with the type of sexual encounter, focusing more on the noncommittal aspect of the relationship. Studies have shown that the characteristics of collegiate hookups include: unclear boundaries between those in the sexual relationship, underlying assumptions that more students are hooking up on campus than actually are, the presence of alcohol, unprotected sex, and general dissatisfaction (Klinger, 2016).

An additional study on collegiate hookup culture suggests that there is no huge correlation between how members of different races, classes, religions, and Greek organizations expressed themselves sexually. However, the research shows that gender can impact hook-up culture on campus. Men were more likely to have hookups involving sexual intercourse and relationships that classify as friends with benefits (Berntson et al., 2014). Additionally, hookup culture tends to have more negative consequences for women on college campuses. Studies show that women, while verbally consenting to hookups, tend to experience psychological distress as the sexual act was not fully wanted (Klinger, 2016). Women also experience conflicting messages while navigating hookup culture. College-age women are constantly caught between the pressure to explore their sexuality while also remaining sexually pure (Klinger, 2016). These women are confined by the expectations of hegemonic femininity and the social repercussions of embodying pariah femininities (Schippers, 2007).

Hookup culture also further exposes the differing social and sexual expectations between men and women on college campuses. Gender norms associated with hegemonic femininity place expectations on women to be sexually modest, not wanting to pursue intimate relationships out of concern for their own morality or, at the very least, being perceived as immoral when they do (Berntson et al., 2014). Conversely, men are expected to act as sexually active, longing for physical relationships with little emotional connection (Berntson et al., 2014). These types of strict gender scripts involved in hookup culture reinforce the structures of oppression that perpetuate gender-based violence. Additionally, hegemonic femininity can become a risk factor for experiencing sexual assault on a university campus (Berntson et al., 2014).

Slut narratives on-campus, resultant of women taking on qualities of the sexual pursuer, help monitor these hegemonic gender norms. Being labeled a slut or the threat of being labeled a slut asserts the importance of embodying hegemonic femininity (e.g. submissiveness, compliance, serving as a sexual object) rather than pariah femininities, which are qualities typically accepted and understood as masculine when embodied by men and stigmatized when embodied by women (e.g. being referred to as a bitch when acting assertively or a slut when acting as a sexual pursuer). Pariah femininities pressure women to take the powerless, submissive, and compliant role in dating and sexual relationships as well as reinforcing male dominance and rape culture (Schippers, 2007). Such gender scripts perpetuate oppressive gender structures, creating a hierarchy between men and women. These scripts also monitor gender structures and expressions among women, valuing hyper-feminine behaviors (Armstrong et al, 2014).

Hegemonic gender structures prove to be an integral characteristic of historically white Greek life. Individuals participating in predominately white Greek life organizations have higher

rates of acceptance towards attitudes that are supportive of sexual assault, like token resistance and different rape myths, when compared to their non-Greek counterparts (Canan et al., 2018). Token resistance is defined as sexualized gender norms in which female resistance to sexual activity means they want sexual activity. Rape myth acceptance refers to commonly understood societal rules that promote sexual aggression towards females. When presented with situations on a survey that were crafted to understand student attitudes and understandings of these concepts, Greek affiliated students generally agreed more with rape culture supportive attitudes, reinforcing a dominant gender structure. However, males in fraternities had the highest levels of acceptance when compared to females in sororities (Canan et al., 2018).

These statistics could be due to normative rates of gender performativity and hegemonic gender structure common within white Greek life organizations. Research indicates that individuals with gender expressions and behaviors straying from the dominant gendered ideals of hegemonic femininity and masculinity, also known as alternative femininities and masculinities, were less likely to be selected for fraternity or sorority membership (Metzger et al., 2006). Alternative femininities and masculinities are when individuals go against traditional gender norms but escape societal pressure due to the counterculture created within a social group. These social groups of individuals with alternative femininities and masculinities do not always experience the repercussions of pariah femininity due to the creation of their own social norms (Schippers, 2007). However, those embodying alternative femininities can face social consequences because they are ultimately not selected to be in the sorority or fraternity. Within the context of Greek life, traits that stray from hegemonic gender scripts could be seen as pariah femininities (Schippers, 2007).

When surveyed, most university-level students picked hyper-feminine women or hyper-masculine men as desirable for Greek organizations. The students themselves varied in Greek and non-Greek identification, proving stereotypical or hegemonic gender expressions are preferred on a widespread basis. However, the study lacked an analysis of intersectionality that proved these choices made by the students were strictly based on gender representation or the intersection of race, sexuality, and/or class as well (Metzger et al., 2006). This study seeks to further investigate the extent to which sexual assault correlates with institutional factors like the expectations of hegemonic femininity and masculinity.

### **Fraternity Characteristics**

Greek life and the subsequent party culture play a huge role in perpetuating cycles of gender-based violence on college campuses. Ethnographic and interview data show that fraternity parties and identification with the party scene increase the rate of sexual assault on campus (Armstrong et al., 2006). Studies also show that white fraternity parties often function as high-risk spaces for sexual assault against women. Since off-campus fraternity parties regulate the location, invite list, attire, and alcohol consumption, women attending these parties are inherently subordinate to the men hosting the parties in terms of power and control (Kozkowski & Wiersma-Mosley, 2017).

Some fraternity parties prove more precarious for women than others. A study conducted on fraternity culture shows that when there are unequal gender ratios, blatant disrespect for women by fraternity members, and little space for casual conversation, there are higher instances of sexual aggression towards females. Lower-risk fraternities have notably equal gender ratios at parties, members that respect the boundaries of female attendees, and coed spaces with more potential for platonic relationships between men and women (Boswell & Spade, 1996). Friendly

relationships, romantic relationships, and familial relationships appear to be protective factors against sexual violence at fraternity parties (Boswell & Spade, 1996). When sorority women attend parties with little space to get to know fraternity members and have limited friendships within the fraternity, they are more likely to become “nameless victims” with an increased risk for sexual assault (Boswell & Spade, 1996; Armstrong et al., 2006; Flood & Pease, 2009). This study seeks to build upon this research by gathering more data about how students involved in Greek life at a predominantly white, southern institution view higher risk or lower risk fraternity characteristics and engage with fraternity culture within the dominant gender structure.

### **Race, Class, and Sexuality in Greek Life**

Given that hegemonic masculinity and femininity are conflated with whiteness, heteronormativity, and high socioeconomic status, the intersection of race, class, and sexuality with gender certainly impacts the experiences of Black, Indigenous, Women of Color (BIWOC), LGBTQ+ women, and women with lower socioeconomic status and the intersections of these as they engage Greek life in the context of PWIs. To date, there has been little research on the experiences of these groups in predominately white Greek organizations at PWIs or rape and hookup culture in predominately BIWOC Greek organizations at PWIs. Additionally, the data that does exist about on-campus sexual assault is rarely analyzed through an intersectional framework.

One study does note that female students that identify as LGBTQ+ do experience sexual assault at higher rates when compared to their heterosexual counterparts. A study of 21 different universities showed that 24% of women who identified as heterosexual experienced sexual assault, 37.8% of women who identified as bisexual experienced sexual assault, and 11.4% of women who identified as lesbian experienced sexual assault (Brubaker et al., 2017). However,

the literature does not directly analyze how race on college campuses impacts rates of sexual assault. Societal statistics of gender-based violence do indicate that BIWOC experience assault at higher rates than white women. Latina women experience sexual assault at a rate of 14.6%, Black women experience sexual assault at a rate of 22%, white women experience sexual assault at a rate of 18.8%, and Native American women experience assault at a rate of 26.9% (Brubaker et al., 2017). Despite these statistics, little research investigates the experiences of BIWOC affiliated with Greek organizations on college campuses in relation to sexual assault or rape culture.

While not directly related to experiences of college women, research does examine the constant hypersexualization of the Black female body and Black femininity in society. Early images of Black women as overly sexual beings originated during slavery with the “Jezebel” stereotype. In the nineteenth century, female slaves were often shown naked to potential buyers, allowing white men to analyze their deemed worth. This type of display hypersexualized the African body, contributing to the sexually deviant stereotypes of today. After the purchase was complete, female slaves were subject to sexual objectification from their masters. By painting Black female slaves as hypersexual in comparison to their white, pure, counterparts, slave masters often tried to justify their acts of sexual assault and rape (Hill-Collins, 2000).

The “Jezebel” stereotype did not stop after the Civil War, rather the power structures of slavery are continuously paralleled within contemporary pornography. Black females in pornography are portrayed as sexual tools whose only purpose is to serve men, almost like a slave’s relation to their master. The violence often included in pornographic images and videos directly correlates to the assault female slaves endured as well (Hill-Collins, 2000). This perception of Black women as overly sexual beings spills into societal perceptions of young

Black girls. Research shows that most adults in society believe that young Black women ages 5-14 need less nurturing, protection, support, and comfort than young white women (Epstein et al., 2017). They also perceive young Black women as more independent and knowing more about adult topics and sex than other young white women (Epstein et al., 2017). While there is a gap in the literature regarding the correlation of race and on-campus sexual assault, the perceptions of Black women as hypersexual beings and the societal statistics that place BIWOC at higher risk for sexual assault imply that the rates of on-campus sexual assault might be high as well (Hill-Collins, 2000; Brubaker et al., 2017).

In the context of Greek life, some research indicates that BIWOC involved in traditionally white Greek life organizations more often subscribe to dominant rape myths and token resistance when compared to their white peers (Canan et al., 2018). Historically, white fraternities, sororities, and campuses perpetuate systems of white privilege in society, making the environment hostile for students of color to thrive as members of these organizations (Harris et al., 2019). Additionally, non-white members of white Greek life organizations are expected to assimilate to dominant white supremacist culture and hegemonic femininity, not challenging the institutions of oppression. Students of color are also expected to perform racialized schemas when it was convenient or beneficial for white members (Hughey, 2010). Being a non-white female in a traditionally white sorority could act as a risk factor for sexual assault due to the pressure to conform to rigid structures of hegemonic femininity. Hyper acceptance of rape culture myths and token resistance could be an overcompensation to fit the molds of dominant white gender narratives. This study intends to analyze the intersection of race, sexuality, and class with gender in both predominantly white, historically Black, and multicultural Greek life.

## **Title IX**

While one in four college females are victims of rape or sexual assault, only about 5% of women report their experiences to their respective Title IX offices (Fisher et al., 2000; Streng & Kamimura, 2015). The obvious lack of reporting stems from institutional barriers on college campuses. Women are often afraid to report their assault because they know their perpetrator, have little knowledge about the reporting process or who to speak to on-campus, fear the Title IX office will breach confidentiality, and feel like the school will not believe them (Streng & Kamimura, 2015). However, the new Title IX policy enacted in May of 2020 by the United States Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos serves as a new potential barrier to reporting on campus. If survivors want to file formal Title IX complaints and pursue criminal prosecution, they might have to participate in cross-examination and a live trial conducted by party advisors. This legislation was enacted to create further protections for those accused of sexual assault on college campuses (Office of Civil Rights, Department of Education, 2020).

Critics of this policy have spoken about how encouraging cross-examination and live trials of those who have experienced sexual assault does not allow for trauma-informed practice. Permitting individuals to interview survivors without any sort of training regarding trauma and sexual violence might further retraumatize victims. Additionally, there has been speculation that this new policy will discourage survivors from coming forward with their stories on campus (Office of Civil Rights, Department of Education, 2020).

Since this legislation is extremely new, studies have not investigated how this policy will impact rates of reporting nationwide. However, anecdotal evidence from the Title IX coordinator at a predominantly white university in the southern United States suggests that the partisan switches of reporting procedures within the Department of Education do not adhere to trauma-informed practices. Regardless of the requirements of the current policy, the constant changing

of procedures makes engaging with the Title IX office in a transparent manner difficult for survivors (A. Virks, personal communication, February 5th, 2021). This study seeks to understand how survivors on college campuses respond to the idea of sharing details about their assault in a cross-examination format. This study intends to investigate how the new Title IX policies may influence the frequency in which survivors report their experience on campus.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Questions**

This study examines the following questions: (1) What role does gender conformity in Greek life have on risk perceptions and experiences of sexual assault on campus?; (2) What role do fraternity and sorority characteristics have on risk perceptions and experiences of sexual assault?; (3) What role does race, class, and sexuality in Greek life have on risk perceptions and experiences of sexual assault?; (4) What role does Title IX policy have on risk perceptions and experiences of sexual assault?

### **Methods**

The researchers utilized a purposive sampling method directed at college sorority women ages 18 and over at a small, predominantly white university in the southern United States to conduct a quantitative study. Any individual that is an active and initiated member of a sorority at Texas Christian University (TCU) and over the age of 18 was eligible to participate in the anonymous online survey. Participants had to understand and speak fluent English. The researchers contacted executive members from 20 different on-campus sororities to recruit participants for the survey. Additionally, the researchers contacted non-Greek organizations on campus to recruit more sorority women. Anyone who was an active member of a sorority on the

TCU campus could participate in the survey. The researchers aimed to collect as many survey responses as possible.

Participation in this study was completely voluntary. Before beginning the survey, participants read and electronically signed an informed consent document that outlined the purpose of the study and the potential risks. All of the questions on the survey were completely voluntary and the participants could choose to exit the survey at any point without consequences. There were no consequences for non-participation in the research study.

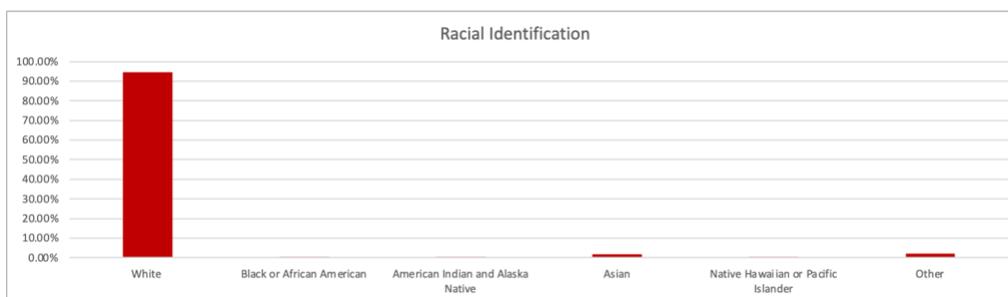
The researchers recruited participants by contacting sorority executive team members that met the requirements for the study via email. The researchers asked sorority executive team members if they could attend virtual chapter meetings to present information about the study. QR codes were provided for sorority members to take the survey during chapter meetings. If the executive team members did not permit the researchers to attend chapter meetings to speak about the survey, the researchers asked if the survey and recruitment speech could be posted on the sorority's Facebook group or in sorority group chats. The survey then detailed the requirements for participation.

The researchers also contacted non-Greek organizations with high concentrations of Greek-affiliated women on campus to recruit as many participants as possible. The recruitment methods for non-Greek organizations were very similar to the recruitment methods for Greek organizations. The researchers contacted executive board members of non-Greek organizations and asked if they would be willing to distribute both the survey and recruitment speech to their members. The recruitment script and informed consent document on the survey outlined the requirements for participation in the study and potential risks.

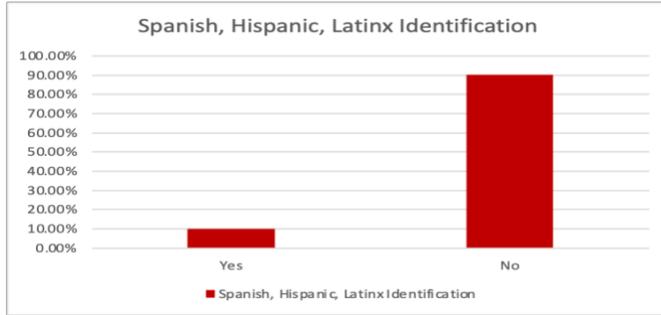
## **Sample**

The survey was posted on the social media pages of 13 sororities, which amounts to a total of about 2,400 potential participants. The survey was open for two months. In total, 184 participants took the survey. The response rate remains unclear as it is impossible to know how many sorority women actually saw or engaged with the online survey. Of the responses (n=183), 65.03% (n=119) of participants reported their age as 18-20, 34.97% (n=64) reported their age as 21-25, and 0.00% reported their age as 25+. In terms of race (n=182), 94.51% (n=172) of participants reported their racial identity as white, 0.55% (n=1) reported as Black or African American, 0.55% (n=1) reported as American Indian and Alaska Native, 1.65% (n=3) reported as Asian, 0.55% (n=1) reported as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 2.20% (n=4) reported as Other (see Graph 1). Of the four responses that indicated other responses as their preferred racial identification, one identified as Asian American, another identified as White American Indian, another identified as Hispanic/Latina from Guatemala/Mayan descent, and another identified as Latinx. The results showed that 183 students reported whether they identified as Spanish, Hispanic, Latinx, or none of these, with 9.84% (n=18) identifying as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latinx and 90.16% (n=165) of participants not identifying as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latinx (See Graph 2).

*Graph 1: Racial Identification by Percent*

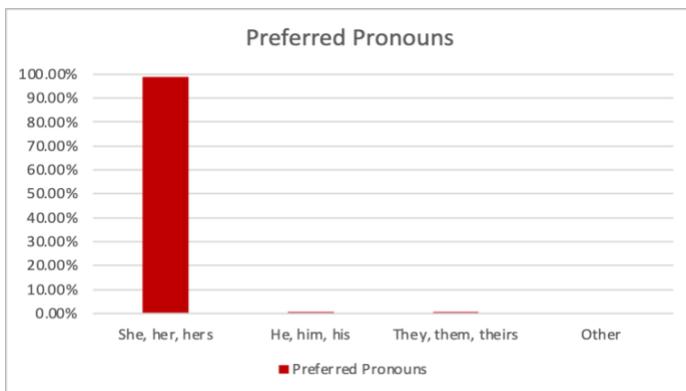


*Graph 2: Spanish, Hispanic, Latinx Identification*

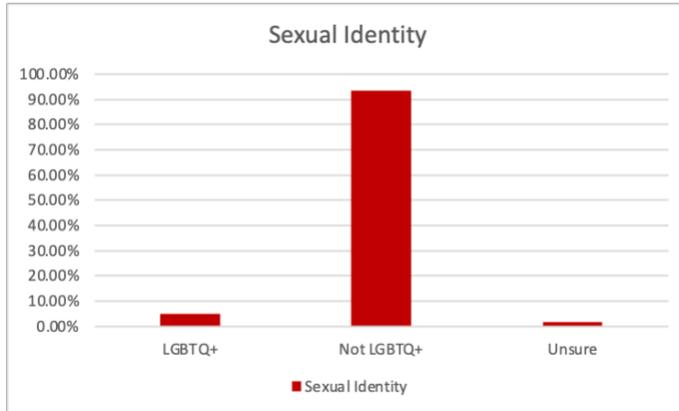


The results showed that 183 students reported their preferred pronouns. Of the responses, 0.55% (n=1) indicated their preferred pronouns were he, him, his, 98.91% (n=181) indicated that their preferred pronouns were she, her, hers, 0.55% (n=1) indicated that their preferred pronouns were they, them, theirs, 0.00% (n=0) indicated other as their preferred pronoun, and 0.00% (n=0) indicated that they were unsure of their preferred pronouns (See Graph 3). The results showed that 183 students reported their sexual identity with 4.92% (n=9) identifying as LGBTQ+, 93.44% (n=171) not identifying as LGBTQ+, and 1.64% (n=3) unsure if they identified as LGBTQ+ (See Graph 4).

*Graph 3: Preferred Pronouns*



*Graph 4: Sexual Identity*

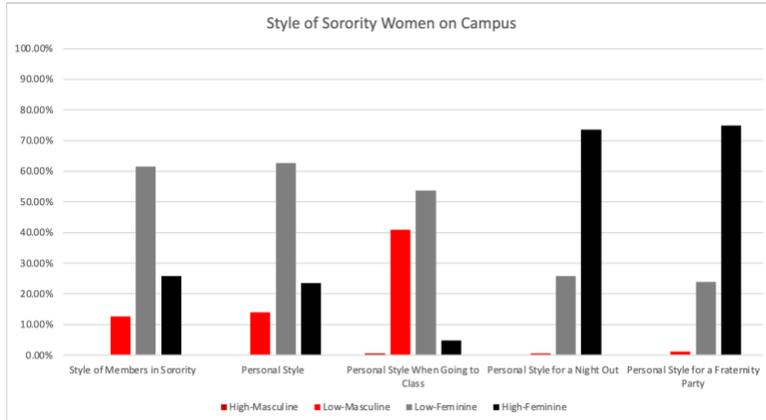


## Results

### Gender Conformity and Hookup Culture

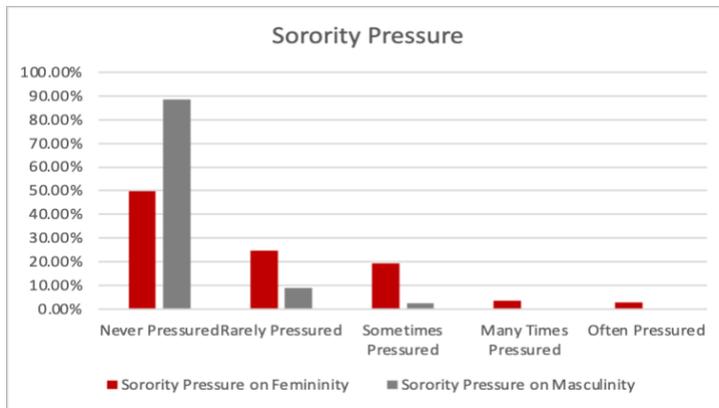
Participants (n=166) indicated the common gendered style of members in their sorority. Responses showed that 0.00% (n=0) identified the common style of members in their sorority as high-masculine, 12.65% (n=21) as low-masculine, 61.45% (n=102) as low-feminine, and 25.90% (n=43) as high-feminine. The results showed that 166 responses indicated their personal style, with 0.00% (n=0) identifying their personal style as high-masculine, 13.86% (n=23) as low-masculine, 62.65% (n=104) as low-feminine, and 23.49% (n=39) as high-feminine.

Participants (n=166) indicated that their personal style when going to class, with 0.60% (n=1) identifying their personal style as high-masculine, 40.96% (n=68) as low-masculine, 53.61% (n=89) as low-feminine, and 4.82% (n=8) as high-feminine. Participants (n=167) indicated their personal style for a night out, with 0.00% (n=0) identifying their personal style for a night out as high-masculine, 0.60% (n=1) as low-masculine, 25.75% (n=43) as low-feminine, and 73.65% (n=123) as high-feminine. The results showed that 167 responses indicated their personal style for a fraternity party with 0.00% (n=0) identifying their personal style for a fraternity party as high-masculine, 1.20% (n=2) as low-masculine, 23.95% (n=40) as low-feminine, and 74.85% (n=125) as high-feminine (See Graph 5).

*Graph 5: Style of Sorority Women on Campus*

The results showed that 167 responses indicated whether or not they felt pressured by their sorority to dress more feminine than they normally would. Of the responses, 49.70% (n=83) indicated they never felt pressured by their sorority to dress more feminine than they normally would, 24.55% (n=41) indicated they rarely felt pressured, 19.16% (n=32) indicated they sometimes felt pressured, 3.59% (n=6) indicated they many times felt pressured, and 2.99% (n=5) indicated they often felt pressured. Of the total responses, 167 indicated whether or not they felt pressured by their sorority to dress more masculine than they normally would with 88.62% (n=148) indicating that they never felt pressured by their sorority to dress more masculine than they normally would, 8.98% (n=15) indicating they rarely felt pressured, 2.40% (n=4) indicating they sometimes felt pressured, 0.00% (n=0) indicating they many times felt pressured, and 0.00% (n=0) indicating they often felt pressured (See Graph 6).

*Graph 6: Sorority Pressure*



The respondents also commented on what activities they chose to participate in or are required to participate in for sorority recruitment. Participants (n=169) reported whether or not they participated in manicures or pedicures before sorority recruitment. Of the responses, 65.09% (n=110) indicated they participated in manicures or pedicures before sorority recruitment, 13.61% (n=23) indicated they did not participate, and 21.30% (n=36) indicated they sometimes participated. Additionally, 16.98% (n=27) indicated they were required to participate in manicures and pedicures whereas 83.02% (n=132) were not required. Participants (n=169) reported whether or not they participated in getting their hair professionally done or spending more time on hair. Of the responses, 44.38% (n=75) indicated they participated in getting their hair professionally done or spending more time on hair before sorority recruitment, 34.91% (n=59) indicated they did not participate, and 20.71% (n=35) indicated they sometimes participated. The results showed that 21.52% (n=34) reported they were required to participate in getting their hair professionally done or spending more time on hair before sorority recruitment and 78.48% (n=124) were not required (See Graph 7).

Participants (n=169) reported whether or not they spent more time on make-up. Of the responses, 76.92% (n=130) indicated they participated in spending more time on make-up before sorority recruitment, 12.43% (n=21) indicated they did not participate, and 10.65% (n=18)

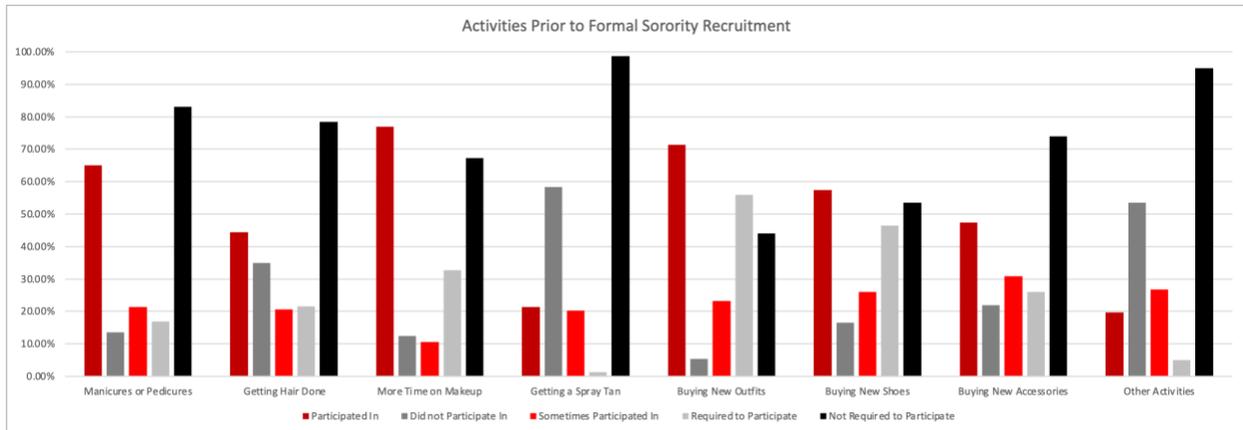
indicated they sometimes participated. The results showed that 32.70% (n=52) indicated they were required to spend more time on makeup and 67.30% (n=107) were not required.

Participants (n=168) reported whether or not they participated in getting a spray tan. Of the responses, 21.43% (n=36) indicated they participated in getting a spray tan, 58.33% (n=98) indicated they did not participate, and 20.24% (n=34) indicated they sometimes participated. The responses showed that 1.27% (n=2) were required to get spray tans and 98.73% (n=155) were not required. Participants (n=168) indicated whether or not they participated in buying new outfits. Of the responses, 71.43% (n=120) indicated they participated in buying new outfits, 5.36% (n=9) indicated they did not participate, 23.21% (n=39) indicated they sometimes participated. The results showed that 55.97% (n=89) indicated they were required to buy new outfits and 44.03% (n=70) were not required (See Graph 7).

Participants (n=169) reported whether or not they bought new shoes before sorority recruitment. Of the responses, 57.40% (n=97) participated in buying new shoes, 16.57% (n=28) did not participate, and 26.04% (n=44) sometimes participated. The results showed that 46.54% (n=74) indicated they were required to buy new shoes and 53.46% (n=85) were not required. The participants (n=169) indicated whether or not they participated in buying new accessories. Of the responses, 47.34% (n=80) indicated that they did participate in buying new accessories, 21.89% (n=37) did not participate, and 30.77% (n=52) sometimes participated. The responses showed that 26.11% (n=41) were required to buy new accessories and 73.89% (n=116) were not required. Participants (n=86) reported if they participated in other activities before sorority recruitment. Of the responses, 19.77% (n=17) participated in other activities, 53.49% (n=46) did not participate in other activities, and 26.74% (n=23) sometimes participated in other activities.

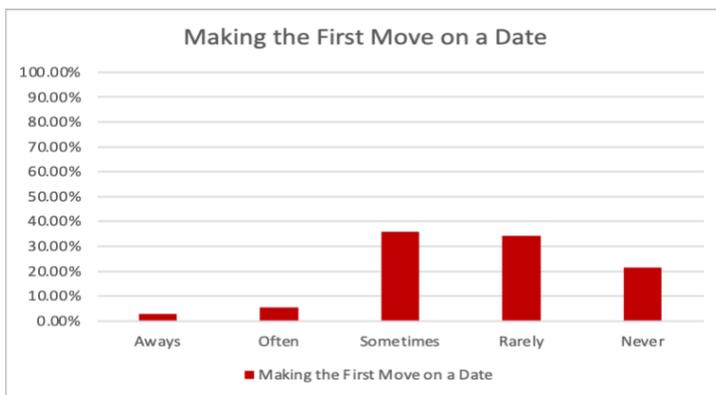
The results showed that 5.05% (n=5) indicated they were required to participate in other activities and 94.95% (n=94) were not required (See Graph 7).

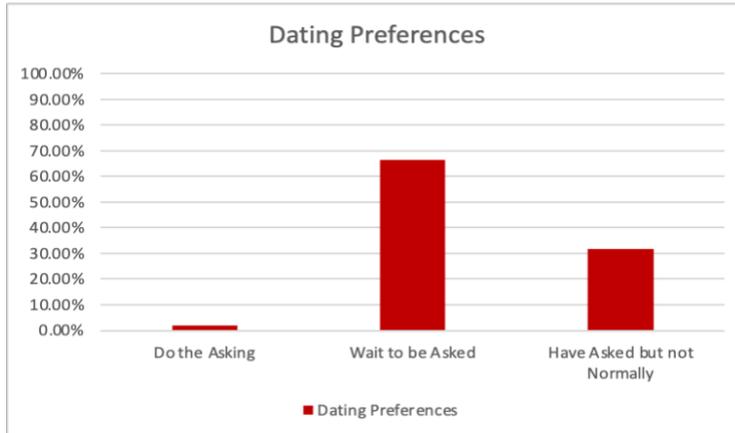
*Graph 7: Activities Prior to Formal Sorority Recruitment*



Survey participants (n=167) noted how often they make the first move on a date, with 2.99% (n=5) almost always making the first move on a date, 5.39% (n=9) often making the first move, 35.93% (n=60) sometimes making the first move, 34.13% (n=57) rarely making the first move, and 21.56% (n=36) never making the first move (See Graph 8). Participants (n=167) indicated whether or not they most often ask someone out on a date or wait for someone to ask them, with 1.80% (n=3) saying they do the asking, 66.47% (n=111) saying they wait to be asked, and 31.74% (n=53) saying they have asked before but not normally (See Graph 9).

*Graph 8: Making the Move on the First Date*

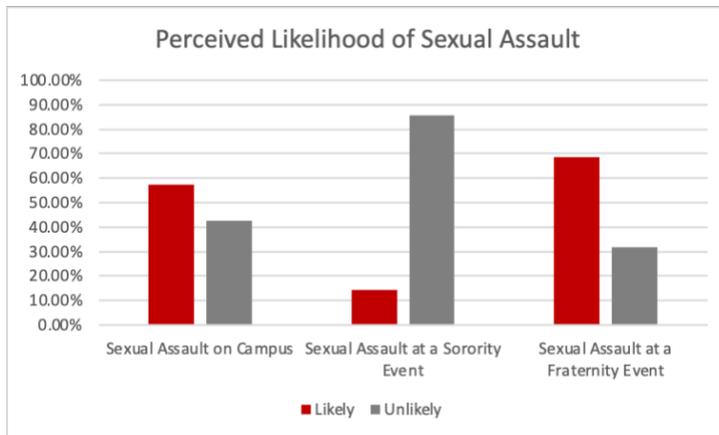


*Graph 9: Dating Preferences*

### Perceptions and Experiences of Sexual Assault on Campus

Of the responses (n=155), 12.26% (n=19) indicated that they felt it was very likely that either themselves or a sorority sister would experience sexual assault while on campus more generally or under non-Greek related circumstances, 45.16% (n=70) felt it was likely, 41.29% (n=64) felt it was not very likely, and 1.29% (n=2) felt it was not likely at all (See Graph 10). Participants indicated the perceived likelihood either a sorority sister or themselves might experience sexual assault while at a fraternity-related event (n=155). Of the responses, 17.42% (n=27) indicated that they felt it was very likely that either themselves or a sorority sister would experience sexual assault at a fraternity-related event, 50.97% (n=79) felt it was likely, 30.97% (n=48) felt it was not very likely, and 0.65% (n=1) felt it was not likely at all (See Graph 10). Participants (n=155) responses indicated their perceived likelihood either a sorority sister or themselves might experience sexual assault while at a sorority-related event with 4.52% (n=7) indicating that they felt it was very likely that either themselves or a sorority sister would experience sexual assault at a sorority-related event, 9.68% (n=15) felt it was likely, 65.81% (n=102) felt it was not very likely, and 20.00% (n=31) felt it was not likely at all (See Graph 10).

*Graph 10: Perceived Likelihood of Sexual Assault*

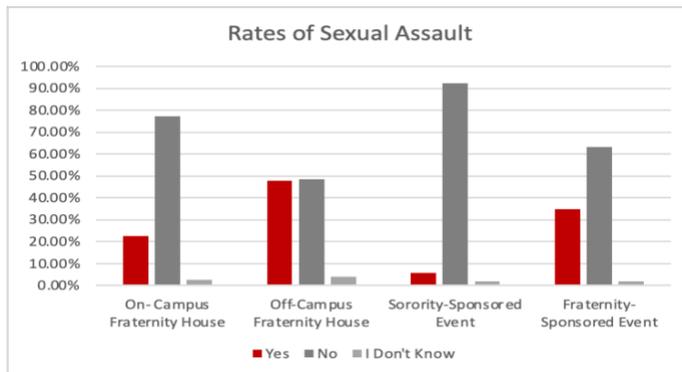


Survey participants also commented on whether or not they or a sorority sister had experienced sexual assault on campus. Participants (n=154) indicated whether or not either themselves or someone they know experienced sexual assault at an on-campus fraternity house. Of the responses, 22.67% (n=34) reported that either themselves or someone they know experienced sexual assault at an on-campus fraternity house whereas 77.33% (n=116) reported that they had not experienced sexual assault nor had anyone they know of, and 2.60% (n=4) reported that they did not know (See Graph 11). Participants (n=155) indicated whether or not either themselves or someone they know experienced sexual assault at an off-campus fraternity house. Of the responses, 47.74% (n=74) reported that either themselves or someone they know experienced sexual assault at an off-campus fraternity house, 48.39% (n=75) reported that they had not experienced sexual assault nor had anyone they know of, and 3.87% (n=6) reported that they did not know (See Graph 11).

Participants (n=155) indicated whether or not either themselves or someone they know experienced sexual assault at a sorority-sponsored event. Of the responses, 5.81% (n=9) reported that either themselves or someone they know experienced sexual assault at a sorority-sponsored event, 92.26% (n=143) reported that they had not experienced sexual assault nor had anyone they know of, and 1.94% (n=3) reported that they did not know (See Graph 11). Participants (n=155)

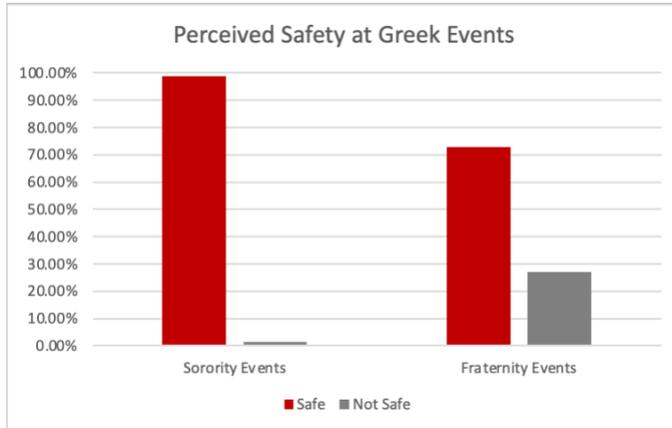
indicated whether or not either themselves or someone they know experienced sexual assault at a fraternity-sponsored event. Of the responses, 34.84% (n=54) reported that either themselves or someone they know experienced sexual assault at a fraternity-sponsored event, 63.23% (n=98) reported that they had not experienced sexual assault nor had anyone they know of, and 1.94% (n=3) reported that they did not know (See Graph 11).

*Graph 11: Rates of Sexual Assault*



For good measure, the survey also inquired through the inverse of the aforementioned questions. Participants (n=154) indicated how safe they generally feel when attending sorority-sponsored events. Of the responses, 60.39% (n=93) indicated that they feel very safe when attending sorority-sponsored events, 38.31% (n=59) indicated they feel pretty safe, 1.30% (n=2) indicated they feel not very safe, and 0.00% (n=0) indicated they feel not very safe at all (See Graph 12). Participants (n=155) indicated how safe they generally feel when attending fraternity-sponsored events with 6.45% (n=10) indicating that they feel very safe events, 66.45% (n=103) feel pretty safe, 22.58% (n=35) feel not very safe, and 4.52% (n=7) feel not very safe at all (See Graph 12).

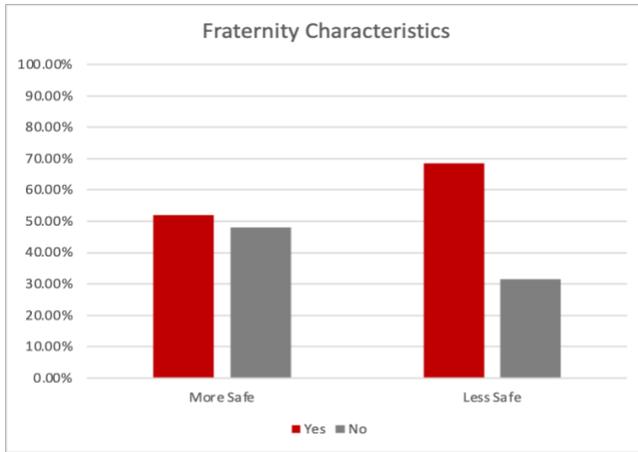
*Graph 12: Perceived Safety at Greek Events*



Participants (n=154) indicated whether or not there were fraternity characteristics that made them feel more safe with 51.95% (n=80) reporting there were fraternity characteristics that made them feel more safe and 48.05% (n=74) reporting there were not (See Graph 13).

Responses (n=152) indicated whether or not there were fraternity characteristics that made them feel less safe with 68.42% (n=104) reporting there were fraternity characteristics that made them feel less safe and 31.58% (n=48) reporting there were not (See Graph 13). Based upon thematic coding, fraternity characteristics that made participants feel less safe are large amounts of drugs or alcohol, not allowing women to mix their own drinks, having a “sketchy” or bad reputation on campus, having just one entrance and exit to the fraternity house, or having entitled or aggressive attitudes. Fraternity characteristics that made participants feel more safe are having a nice or good-guy reputation, knowing men in the organization, having less alcohol or drugs, allowing women to make their own drinks, or providing unopened canned drinks.

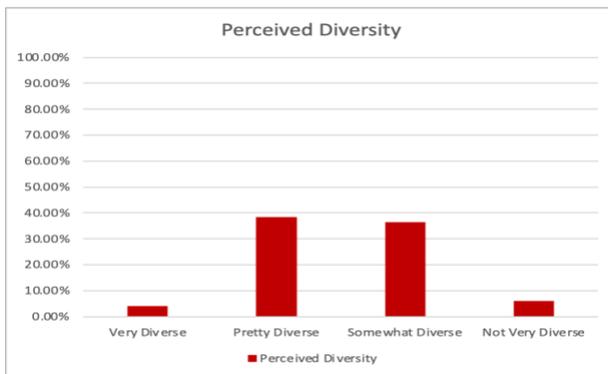
*Graph 13: Fraternity Characteristics*



**Race, Class, and Sexuality in Greek Life**

The sample did not gather many results from BIPOC and LGBTQ+ individuals, making results difficult to analyze. However, the results did show that 167 responses indicated how racially diverse they perceive their sorority to be with 4.19% (n=7) reporting that they perceived their sorority to be very diverse, 14.97% (n=25) perceiving their sorority to be pretty diverse, 38.32% (n=64) perceiving their sorority to be somewhat diverse, 36.53% (n=61) perceiving their sorority to be not very diverse, and 5.99% (n=10) perceiving their sorority to be not diverse at all (See Graph 14).

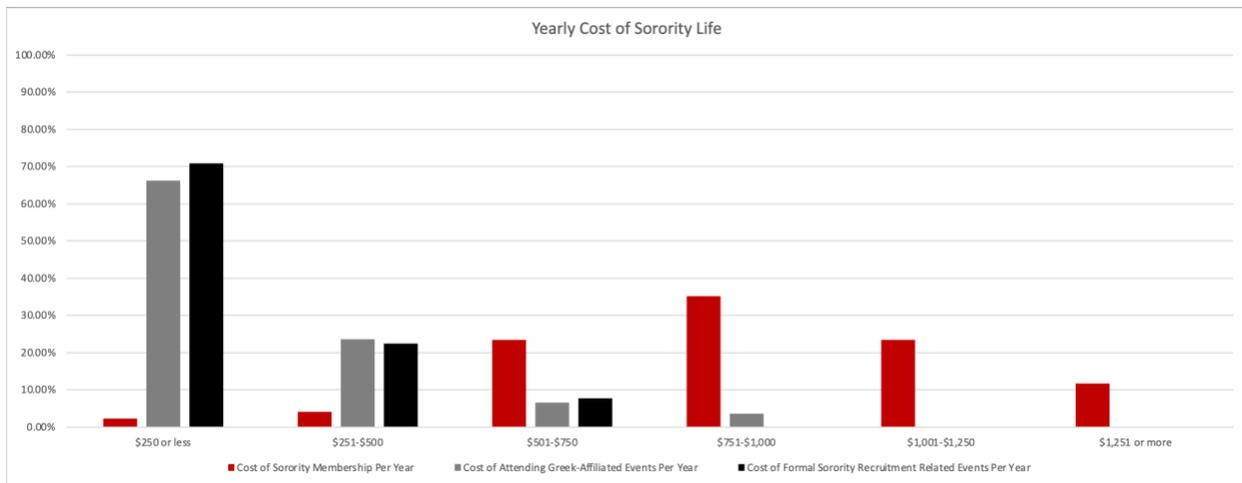
*Graph 14: Perceived Diversity*



The results did yield potential class implications. Participants (n=171) indicated how much they spent on sorority membership per year. Of the responses, 2.34% (n=4) paid \$250 or

less for sorority membership per year, 4.09% (n=7) paid \$251-\$500, 23.39% (n=40) paid \$501-\$750, 35.09% (n=60) paid \$751-\$1,000, 23.39% (n=40) paid \$1,001-\$1,250, and 11.70% (n=20) paid \$1,250 or more (See Graph 15). Participants (n=169) also indicated how much they spent to attend Greek-affiliated events per year. Responses showed that 66.27% (n=112) paid \$250 or less for Greek-affiliated events per year, 23.67% (n=40) paid \$251-\$500, 6.51% (n=11) paid \$501-\$750, 3.55% (n=6) paid \$751-\$1,000, 0.00% (n=0) paid \$1,001-\$1,250, and 0.00% (n=0) paid \$1,250 or more (See Graph 15). Out of the total participants, 168 indicated how much they spent to participate in recruitment-related events per year. Responses showed that 70.83% (n=119) paid \$250 or less for recruitment-related events per year, 22.43% (n=36) paid \$251-\$500, 7.74% (n=13) paid \$501-\$750, 0.00% (n=0) paid \$751-\$1,000, 0.00% (n=0) paid \$1,001-\$1,250, and 0.00% (n=0) paid \$1,250 or more (See Graph 15).

*Graph 15: Yearly Cost of Sorority Life*



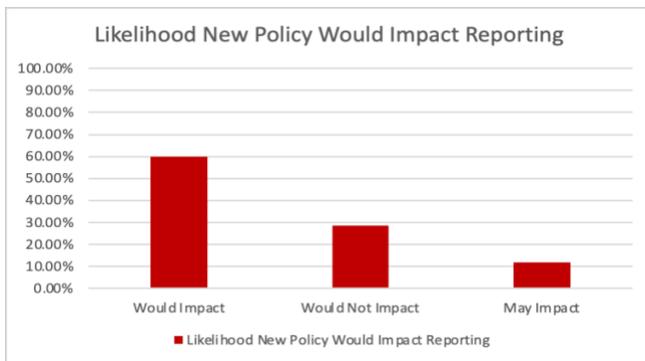
**Title IX**

Participants (n=154) indicated whether or not the new Title IX provisions would impact their decision to report potential sexual assault. The results showed that 59.74% (n=92) indicated the new Title IX provisions would impact their decision to report, 28.57% (n=44) indicated that

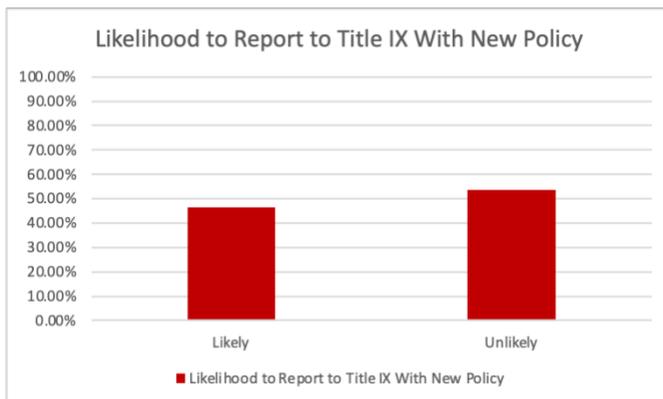
the new Title IX provisions may impact their decision to report, and 11.69% (n=18) reported that the new Title IX provisions would not impact their decision to report (See Graph 16).

Participants (n=155) responses indicated whether or not they would report a personal experience of sexual assault to the Title IX office with the new public hearing requirement. Of the responses, 9.03% (n=14) indicated they would be very likely to report a personal experience with sexual assault even with the public hearing requirement, 37.42% (n=58) indicated that they would be likely to report, 39.35% (n=61) indicated that they would be not very likely to report, 14.19% (n=22) indicated that they would not be likely at all to report (See Graph 17).

*Graph 16: Likelihood New Policy Would Impact Reporting*



*Graph 17: Likelihood to Report to Title IX With New Policy*



**Limitations**

This research study had several limitations. The researcher had set out to create an intersectional, mixed-methods study to analyze structural components of on-campus assault and reporting methods. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the research team decided to focus only on survey data and forgo additional interviews. By switching the method of the study to quantitative only, the results did not allow for survivors to share nuances of their stories via qualitative interviews and thematic coding.

The study also intended to research the experience of BIWOC sorority members in predominantly white and Black Greek organizations on campus. This was a gap identified in the literature review and the research team hoped to include these perspectives to generate a more intersectional perspective of on-campus assault. However, the responses did not represent a large amount of BIWOC, specifically African American, voices. Additionally, very few participants in the study identified as LGBTQ+. This lack of perspective from BIWOC and members of the LGBTQ+ community limited the potential for intersectional analysis of the results.

Given the vulnerability attached to questions regarding sexual assault, the survey asked broader questions that allowed for anonymity. The survey asked if the participant or if someone the participant knows has experienced sexual assault. This prevented the research team from running correlation tests around the relationship between the personal embodiment of femininity and experiencing sexual assault. Members of the research team were not categorized as mandated reporters as this was in the context of research.

Additionally, the data collected from the survey had a slightly skewed sample. The survey was equally distributed to all the sororities on campus to gather a representative sample of member's perceptions on sexual assault. However, since a member of the research team was a part of Greek life on the campus that was being studied, members of that organization

participated in the survey at a higher rate. The responses showed a larger number of members from that particular organization than from other sororities on campus.

## **Discussion**

### **Gender Conformity and Hookup Culture**

Literature has constantly commented on how dominant structures of hegemonic femininity and masculinity dictate constructed gender scripts (Schippers, 2007). Women are expected to have submissive personality traits and dress in stereotypically feminine ways, usually for the gaze of men. Moreover, women are usually expected to behave in sexually passive ways and be pursued as objects rather than do the pursuing in romantic and sexual relationships. Men are encouraged to have more aggressive personality traits and pursue females in romantic and sexual relationships while women are often expected or pressured to not take control within the context of romantic and sexual relationships (Schippers, 2007). These hegemonic gender scripts are recreated and affirmed in sorority and fraternity life. Many college students who participate in Greek life have hyper-masculine and hyperfeminine gender presentations and behaviors (Metzger et al., 2006).

The results of the study reinforce the literature on gender conformity and performance. Historically, there have been institutionalized expectations of sorority women conforming to high levels of femininity. High feminine women select other high feminine women, establishing a cycle of hegemonic feminine expectations. These types of expectations create barriers for women who fail to fit into these molds (e.g. presenting as non-binary and identifying as a member of the LGBTQ+ community) when looking to participate in Greek life (Metzger et al., 2006). Many of the sorority women on campus that responded to the survey did follow gender scripts of hegemonic femininity in some way. A majority of the responses indicated that the

common style of the sororities on campus had low (25.90%) to high (61.45%) feminine characteristics. This differs from the literature in that there is some flexibility between low and high feminine characteristics within sororities on campus (Metzger et al., 2006).

The majority of survey participants self-identified their overall personal style as low or high feminine. However, the gender performance of the respondents had situational variance. Despite the vast majority of survey participants being a member of a sorority that maintained low-high feminine style collectively, many sorority women in the study identified as having high masculine (0.60%) or low masculine (40.96%) style when attending other events on campus like going to class. These results contrast with situations in which they would be engaging men like fraternity parties and nights out where most women indicated their personal style as low and high feminine. This demonstrated situational variance reinforces hegemonic gender norms (Schippers, 2007). Sorority women on campus feel freer to dress in low feminine or masculine manners when attending class or participating in situations that are less gendered than fraternity parties. The women tended to dress more stereotypically feminine in situations where they were more likely to be seen sexually by the male gaze.

Another situation in which sorority women dressed in more stereotypically feminine ways was during sorority recruitment. The literature comments on how the formal sorority recruitment process typically favors women who have high feminine gender presentations (Metzger et al., 2006). Women who participate in activities like spending money on new clothing and accessories, putting on more makeup, and spending additional time on hair are often selected for sorority membership more frequently than women with low feminine, low masculine, or high masculine gender presentations (Metzger et al., 2006). The results affirmed this literature as women on campus were required and/or expected to alter their appearance to be more in

alignment with high feminine gender presentations during formal sorority recruitment. For example, 55.97% of women had to buy new outfits for recruitment and 46.54% were required to buy new shoes. Most women were not required by their sorority to get manicures, pedicures, or spend more time on their hair. However, sororities on campus foster a culture of hegemonic femininity that expects their members to perform in high feminine ways during the formal recruitment process.

Traditional romantic and sexual relationships and gender scripts are also intensely correlated, with men often doing the pursuing and women being pursued (Berntson et al., 2014). Sorority women in the study confirm these stereotypically feminine gender scripts in dating relationships. A majority of female respondents indicated that they never or rarely initiate or make the first move on a date. This resonates with commonly identified submissive traits women are expected to maintain in society, waiting for men to ask them on dates and progress romantic relationships (Schippers, 2007).

### **Fraternity Characteristics**

The results resoundingly showed that there are institutional structures of rape culture and patriarchy that sustain cycles of abuse against college women on campus. More than half of the responses indicated that there was a high likelihood of themselves or a sorority sister experiencing abuse on campus. This perceived likelihood of assault only increases when the context is changed to fraternity-sponsored events. The results showed that 68.39% of sorority women feel it was likely either themselves or a sister would experience sexual assault at a fraternity-related event. This percentage drastically reduces to 14.20% when the respondents were asked whether or not they perceive themselves or a sorority sister to be likely to experience assault at a sorority event.

Institutional structures regarding rape culture were further confirmed when analyzing statistics on actual sexual assault. The results showed that 34.84% of participants had either experienced sexual assault at a fraternity event themselves or knew someone who had. This rate drops to 5.81% when participants reported rates of sexual assault at sorority-sponsored events. Rates of reported sexual assault also drastically varied between on-campus and off-campus fraternity houses. The results showed that 47.74% of sorority women had experienced sexual assault themselves or knew someone who had at an off-campus fraternity house. This rate reduces to 22.67% when considering rates of assault at on-campus fraternity houses. The difference between rates of assault at on-campus and off-campus fraternity houses resonates with the literature on fraternity characteristics that make women more or less safe (Boswell & Spade, 1996). On-campus fraternity houses have more than one entrance and exit, are regulated by the university, and cannot host parties with alcohol. Off-campus fraternity houses are often more likely to host parties that perpetuate cycles of abuse, providing an excess of alcohol and limiting entrances and exits for attendees.

Clearly, there are more systemic problems connected to sexual assault on campus rather than individual experiences. Structural power dynamics increase sorority women's perceived risk of assault on campus. Fraternities as organizations reinforce these expectations, creating scenarios that make women uncomfortable and at risk. For example, women indicated through qualitative responses on the survey that excessive intoxication, disrespect of women through unwanted physical touch, and aggressive personalities made fraternities seemingly more dangerous. The literature references various situations, like unequal gender ratios, not knowing men in the fraternity, and little space for casual conversation, contributing to systems of power and control that make women more at risk for assault (Boswell & Spade, 1996).

Women who responded to the survey noted that they felt safer at sorority-sponsored events and less safe at fraternity-sponsored events. Additionally, more than half of the participants indicated there were fraternity characteristics that make them feel more comfortable. Qualitative responses regarding fraternity characteristics fell directly in the line with the literature regarding what fraternity spaces are safer for women. For example, several women referenced knowing men in fraternities on a platonic level, having less aggressive personality traits, and stronger leadership that discussed topics like consent with fraternity members made them feel safer.

### **Race, Class, and Sexuality in Greek Life**

Unfortunately, our results did not gather a substantial amount of information from BIWOC or LGBTQ+ folx participating in sororities on campus. Only one individual self-identified as African-American, one individual as American Indian or Alaskan Native, three as Asian, one as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 18 as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latinx. Additionally, 98.91% of participants indicated their pronouns were she, her, hers while only 0.55% indicated that they were they, them, theirs. Only 4.92% of respondents identified as LGBTQ+ and 1.64% were unsure. These numbers indicated that most of the responses came from a sample of white, cis-gender, heteronormative women, reinforcing normative gender scripts of hegemonic femininity within these sororities.

The survey did not garner any responses from members of historically Black sororities on campus despite various forms of outreach. Additionally, results indicated very few responses from BIWOC individuals in predominantly white Greek life. BIWOC individuals often experience hostile environments and forced assimilation when participating in white Greek life (Harris et al., 2019). This form of institutional white supremacy could explain the low numbers

of BIWOC members in traditionally white Greek life (Harris et al., 2019). The scarcity of data on BIWOC in this study further reinforces the lack of investigation into these particular experiences within this collection of literature.

Despite being the intention of the study to further explore the experiences of BIWOC both within predominantly white sororities and predominantly Black or Latina sororities, this study proved limited in being able to gather that data. However, one interesting finding on race was what seemed to be cognitive dissonance of respondents on how diverse they perceived their sorority. Despite the vast majority of sororities and survey respondents being predominantly white, these findings showed that many members believe their sorority to be more diverse than it is with 4.19% perceiving their sorority to be very diverse, 14.97% perceiving their sorority to be pretty diverse, and 38.32% perceiving their sorority to be somewhat diverse. Only 5.99% of respondents perceived their sorority to be not diverse at all. These percentages are in direct contradiction with the sexuality and race demographics of the survey as 172 of respondents were white, 181 used she, her, hers pronouns, and 171 did not identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community.

Aside from systemic white supremacy in Greek life, another barrier from participating in traditionally white Greek organizations is the cost. Most women paid between \$500.00 and \$1,250.00 per year for sorority membership alone. This total does not even include the cost of attending Greek-affiliated events or participating in formal sorority recruitment. Many women in the study paid over \$2,000 a year for membership and events related to Greek life. These costs act as a barrier for individuals of low socioeconomic classes for participating in sororities on campus, maintaining structures of heteronormative white supremacy.

## **Title IX**

Little research has been done on the changes to the Title IX policy enacted in May of 2020 by the United States Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos. Some literature has criticized the requirement of the new policy to host cross-examination and live trials during Title IX investigations, claiming that these practices will serve as barriers to survivors reporting their experiences (Office of Civil Rights, Department of Education, 2020). The participants of this study proved that the criticism of Betsy DeVos' policy had merit. Almost 90.00% of respondents claimed that this policy would definitely or probably impact their decision to report sexual assault to Title IX. Over half of the participants indicated that they would be not very or extremely unlikely to report under the new policy. Moving forward, more inclusive policies that uplift the experiences of survivors should stray away from required cross-examination and live trials and move towards a trauma-informed, survivor-centered approach to these processes.

### **Implications**

Structures of oppression like hegemonic gender scripts infiltrate college campuses and reinforce cycles of sexual assault. The nature of hegemonic femininity and masculinity in white Greek life and characteristics of fraternities increase the perceived and actual likelihood of women experiencing assault. Additionally, the new Title IX policy enacted in May of 2020 creates a culture of silencing the pervasive nature of rape culture among college women. This research indicates that institutional structures of oppression need to be changed to support survivors after abuse and prevent abuse in the first place.

Moving forward, more inclusive Title IX policies that uplift the experiences of survivors should not require cross-examination and live trials. These extremely rigid and legal forms of investigation put survivors at risk of retraumatization and should be shaped with more trauma-informed practices in mind. The results of this study will be used to help shape survivor-oriented

practices on campus as the researcher intends to present the information to the campus' confidential advocate and Title IX coordinator. More research should be done to further analyze the perspectives of women on campus and shape evidence-based and trauma-informed practices.

Additionally, schools should implement programs within fraternities that discuss the nature of consent, patriarchy, and gender norms. This type of structural change will target hegemonic gender scripts and rape culture at a structural level and divert the responsibility of change from the survivors or those at risk to those who typically do the perpetrating. Universities should be committed to developing best practices and guidelines on fraternity-led events (e.g. number of exits, location) as well as the construction of fraternity houses. Facilitating discussions about topics like consent on campus with both sorority and fraternity members could also shift the romantic and sexual culture on campus. Women might be more encouraged to take roles of power and agency when pursuing heteronormative relationships and embodying more diverse forms of gender across the masculine-feminine scale. College campuses need to take action against systems of oppression to protect women on campus and alter stereotypical scripts that reinforce gender-based violence and inequality. These action steps should be first and foremost on the agendas of institutions of higher education as the rates of sexual assault on campus prove to be both a public health issue and social justice issue.

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