

Recommended Citation

Stroheker, Erica (2023) "Societal Factors Enabling Increased Rates of Sexual Victimization Within Greek-Life," *Perspectives*: Vol. 15, Article 8.

Available at: <https://scholars.unh.edu/perspectives/vol15/iss1/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Journals and Publications at University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Perspectives by an authorized editor of University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. For more information, please contact Scholarly.Communication@unh.edu.

Perspectives

Volume 15 2023

Article 8

2023

Societal Factors Enabling Increased Rates of Sexual Victimization Within Greek-Life

Erica Stroheker

University of New Hampshire, Durham

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.unh.edu/perspectives>

 Part of the [Sociology Commons](#)

Societal Factors Enabling Increased Rates of Sexual Victimization Within Greek-Life

Erica Stroheker

ABSTRACT

Throughout this literature review, I will be discussing sexual victimization rates among students who are affiliated with Greek life. I will attempt to answer whether Greek affiliation correlates with higher sexual victimization rates among female students. I will additionally identify if and how college institutions enable sexual victimization rates. This literature review aims to identify a correlation between sexual victimization and Greek life. Along with using socialist feminism theory to understand sexual victimization, this literature review will also discuss terms such as token resistance, rape myth acceptance, and sexual scripts. In reviewing evidence from past studies and literature reviews, I demonstrate how Greek affiliation is associated with increased sexual victimization rates. This paper concludes that in addition to Greek life being associated with increased risks of sexual victimization, other societal factors may render such association spurious.

INTRODUCTION

It has been shown in numerous studies that sexual victimization rates among women attending a college are high, particularly higher rates among Greek affiliated women. Sexual victimization can be under three categories, unwanted sexual contact, attempted rape, and completed rape. Unwanted sexual contact can be described as unwanted fondling, kissing, or petting, without penetration. Attempted rape and completed rape can be defined as "completed or attempted acts of penile–vaginal penetration, mouth on the respondent's genitals, respondent's mouth on someone else's genitals, penile–anal, digital–vaginal, digital–anal, object–vaginal, and object–anal penetration" (Barnes et al. 2021:4). Throughout multiple articles, authors have revealed one in five women has experienced sexual victimization (Barnes et al. 2021, Jozkowski and Mosley 2017).

This literature review will examine how Greek life enables sexual victimization. Most authors and researchers used a lens of socialist feminism for their arguments. Socialist feminism argues that women experience both gender oppression and economic oppression because of living in a patriarchal society (Jozkowski 2017). Socialist Feminists argue that women are oppressed due to their financial dependence on males. They see women's liberation as necessary for economic, social, and political justice. Economic refers to businesses, organizations, and governments. Therefore, I propose Greek affiliated students will not only report increased risks of sexual victimization but also increased societal factors as to why that is.

Many sociocultural factors contribute to sexual victimization. Such factors may include negative social attitudes toward women, rape myth acceptance, male sexual aggression, and its relationship to social processes (Jozkowski 2017) In addition, the public has become increasingly aware of how women experience sexual victimization more frequently than men. Looking inside

Greek life on a college campus allows us to observe possible answers to why "College women have consistently reported high rates of sexual assault when compared with the overall population" (Canan et al. 2018:1). Looking at Greek life will also allow us to see if the larger population on college campuses reporting to have experienced sexual assault is sorority women. First, we will look at past literature reviews discussing fraternities' power and control, which corresponds with increased rates of sexual victimization among Greek affiliated women.

POWER AND CONTROL

Jozkowski and Mosley argue, "Institutional and sociocultural factors related to gender and class privilege on college campuses are due to patterns of control in university systems that continue to the occurrence and facilitation of sexual assault" (Jozkowski and Mosley 2017:7). Jozkowski and Mosley (2017) explain how men maintain control over a predominate form of socializing, giving males the sense of power and control. Following this pattern of control and power, men in fraternities are more likely to engage in sexually aggressive behaviors. They also uncovered how sexual victimization happens at an increased rate during fraternity parties.

With fraternities having the ability to host parties, as opposed to sororities, it gives men a disproportionate amount of power regarding partying (Jozkowski and Mosley 2017). Sororities are not allowed to host parties or events with other groups. Instead, women involved in Greek life are expected to attend fraternity parties with fraternity men; this gives fraternity men power and control over sorority women. Fraternity men are also "policing" who enter their Party; this allows them to "target" women and uphold patriarchal norms (Jozkowski and Mosley 2017). Fraternities host the main form of socialization on college campuses, thus giving them more power and control. In the following studies, there are sexual victimization rates among Greek life and non-Greek life, which will show us the possible correlation between power and control and sexual victimization.

Regarding this new information, let us explore this within socialist feminism theory. Greek life upholds patriarchy values and norms, one example of this is how fraternities are only allowed to throw parties, forcing the women within sororities to exploit themselves at said parties. Later in the paper discussion on victimization rates within Greek-life will be discussed, we can view sexual victimization as a form of oppression. Power and control are deeply rooted within patriarchal societies, although sororities and fraternities are largely “separate” the social life causes the two to be intertwined.

RAPE CULTURE, TOKEN RESISTANCE, GENDER ROLES

Rape culture is embedded in college campuses, not only in sexual victimization attitudes but also in the institution itself. For example, Armstrong et al. (2006) note that when schools sanction parties at fraternities, which have been identified as particularly high-risk venues for sexual assault, this supports a culture prone to rape. The risky nature of these venues is created due to the increased focus on traditional gender roles that result from the gender-segregated spaces of sororities and fraternities (Canan et al. 2018). Such school-sanctioned events exemplify how rape culture is produced within college institutions and how traditional gender roles support this idea.

There are pre-set sexual ideas on how sexual behavior should occur and how these ideas are rooted in traditional gender roles (Canan et al. 2018). Canan et al. (2018) also provide an example of this, "the idea that men should initiate sex and women should respond to men's initiation, not initiate themselves, stems from a traditional gender ideal that women's roles in sexuality are more passive than men's roles(2)". Not only do they use this example, but also an example of how women say "no" to a sexual act, even when they want to perform said sexual act; because women are trying to fulfill a role of sexual passivity (Canan et al. 2018). This is what researchers call token resistance, which can be defined as refusing a sexual act when wanting to

do the sexual act. A very important part of this is stated by said researchers, "Therefore, this sexual script that guides who should initiate sexual behavior is both built upon traditional gender role ideals and potentially problematic because it supports the idea that women's refusals may be "token" because women want to seem sexually passive" (Canan et al. 2018:2). In according to gender roles, it is important to note men also experience sexual assault.

Male sexual victimization can also be explained in traditional sexual scripts. Canan, Jozkowski, and Crawford provide an example of how some men won't want to engage in sexual acts but feel as if they violated their traditional sexual roles. Since traditional sexual roles hold up the expectation that men will be more sexually aggressive than women, men can feel social pressure to engage in sexual acts they do not wish to partake in (Canan et al. 2018). Researchers conclude this is problematic in gender-segregated spaces such as fraternities and sororities. This is because "Greek-affiliated students are more likely to endorse traditional gender roles than independent students" (Canan et al. 2018:3). Thus, explaining the importance of researching sexual victimization within college campuses, with a focus on Greek life.

SURVEY STUDIES: GREEK ASSOCIATION

Minow and Einolf examine the relationships between sorority members, sorority participation, and sexual victimization. They seek to answer whether sorority membership is associated with increased rates of sexual victimization. Researchers sent out a survey to eight randomly selected sororities and gave each sorority 60 surveys; The remaining surveys (520) were handed out randomly on campus to women. In total 779 surveys were completed (Minow and Einolf 2009). Minow and Einolf (2009) had three total hypotheses, their results concluded sorority members were more likely to experience sexual victimization. For attempted rape, 14% of sorority members experienced this over 6% of nonaffiliated females. Following this pattern, 33% of

sorority members experience completed rape, compared to 8% of nonmembers. Although, there was no significant evidence for unwanted sexual contact, 35% experienced for sorority members and 33% for nonmembers, it is important to point out that over one third of all women who took the survey experienced unwanted sexual contact (Minow and Einolf 2009). Einolf and Minow (2009) concluded alcohol consumption, sorority membership and attendance at coed Greek social events while alcohol increased women's risk for sexual victimization in college (Minow and Einolf, 2009). Similarly, Barnes et al. (2021) found an association between alcohol use and an increased risk of sexual victimization.

Barnes et al. (2021) conducted a study to examine the risk of sexual assault and sexual harassment associated with Greek life on college campuses. Similarly, they chose to send a survey. Said survey was sent out to 1,000 randomly selected enrolled students, with 883 respondents. It is important to note the amount of s They stated, "The sample in this study is relatively representative of the selected university, although women students were overrepresented in this sample" knowing that their sample was overrepresented of women, they still proceeded to analyze their findings (Barnes et al. 2021:6). They hypothesized that Greek affiliated students experience higher rates of sexual assault and sexual harassment than non-Greek members. Similarly to Minow and Einolf (2009), Barnes et al. (2021) also hypothesized a "that alcohol-related problems and environmental factors within Greek life are associated with increased risk of sexual violence and harassment"(8). Their findings supported their hypothesis, women and men affiliated with Greek life experienced significantly increased levels of sexual assault. In addition, sorority women were two times more likely to report nonconsensual sexual contact and unwanted sexual attention and three times more likely to report attempted/completed rape than nonmembers (Barnes et al. 2021:21). Their results regarding alcohol-related problems suggest that sexual victimization rates of Greek life are not

solely due to their drinking habits. Following these two patterns, we will look at a different study conducted to measure token resistance, rape myth acceptance, and sexual victimization experiences between all Greek life and non-Greek life.

In this survey study, researchers examine three research questions: They seek to Examine variables that predict beliefs of token resistance with particular attention to gender and Greek-life variables, examine variables that predict endorsement of rape myth acceptance with particular attention to gender and Greek-life variables, and Examine frequency of rape and sexual assault experiences in sorority women, non-sorority women, fraternity men, and nonfraternity men (Canan et al. 2018). Researchers received 981 completed responses after removing participants who did not meet certain requirements. Researchers concluded, "Gender and Greek-life status were both linked to the endorsement of rape myth acceptance and token resistance" furthermore, "...male students with Greek membership show even higher rates of endorsement of rape myth acceptance and token resistance than female students with Greek membership" (Canan et al. 2018:8).

From this, we will now look at their sexual victimization results. Canan et al. (2018) examined sexual abuse throughout their lifetime, observing increased sexual victimization rates among men compared to women (Canan et al. 2018:8). The researcher's explanations for these results were that Rape myth acceptance could exacerbate these high rates among men (Canan et al. 2018). Belief in rape myths may make perpetrators less likely to label male victims as victims, especially if the perpetrator is female." (Canan et al. 2018:8) Another way this finding differs from the rest was that the researchers asked the following: "I experienced sexual behavior other than penile-vaginal intercourse that I did not consent or agree to because I realized refusing was useless"; Their results were rather shocking, "...was endorsed highly by both men (40.8%) and women (39.0%). Given that typical rates of sexual assault are much lower than these percentages

for both women and men, these findings were quite surprising." (Canan et al. 2018:8). These findings are different from other surveys and provide a new way to measure this subject.

Looking at Greek life victimization rates, their results were the opposite of past surveys. They conclude, "we found no difference in the rates of sexual assault and rape experienced by Greeks and non-Greeks for either males or females." (Canan et al. 2018:9). Later, they explain how this is not supported in past literature, and it may be due to the fact of different definitions or attendance to fraternity parties; they simply do not know the real reason to why their results differ, but research attempted to explain possible factors.

CONCLUSION

Most of the survey studies have shown increased rates of sexual victimization within Greek life. There was evidence of sorority women experiencing increased rates of attempted rape and completed rape but similar results with unwanted sexual contact. There are institutional factors that support rape culture. The college itself allows fraternities to host parties (the main form of socialization in college), where increased sexual victimization rates occur. Following this, sexual roles and gender roles ascribed to the gender also affect these rates for both males and females. These gender roles, such as men feeling the need to fulfill their role and engage in sexual behaviors while women feeling the need to be passive, are exacerbated by those affiliated with the Greek system. Greek-affiliated students feel more pressure to conform to these gender roles than nonaffiliated students. This causes a supportive rape culture and is an important factor concerning sexual victimization rates. Along with the increase in victimization rates, we examined the power and control factor to explain the possibility of increased sexual victimization rates within fraternities. From this, we can conclude how societal factors surrounding Greek life may correlate with increased rates of sexual victimization.

REFERENCES

- Armstrong E. A., Hamilton L., Sweeney B. (2006). Sexual assault on campus: A multilevel, integrative approach to party rape. *Social Problems*, 53, 483-499
- Armstrong, E. A., & Hamilton, L. (2013). *Paying for the party: How college maintains inequality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Barnes, Melissa L.; Adams-Clark, Alexis; Rosenthal, Marina N.; Smith, Carly P.; and Freyd, Jennifer J. (2021) "*Pledged into Harm: Sorority and Fraternity Members Face Increased Risk of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment*," *Dignity: A Journal of Analysis of Exploitation and Violence*: Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 9.
- Canan, S. N., Jozkowski, K. N., & Crawford, B. L. (2018). *Sexual Assault Supportive Attitudes: Rape Myth Acceptance and Token Resistance in Greek and Non-Greek College Students from Two University Samples in the United States*. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 33(22), 3502–3530.
- Franklin, C. A., Bouffard, L. A., & Pratt, T. C. (2012). *Sexual Assault on the College Campus: Fraternity Affiliation, Male Peer Support, and Low Self-Control*. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 39(11), 1457–1480.
- Jozkowski, K.N. and Wiersma-Mosley, J.D. (2017), "*The Greek System: How Gender Inequality and Class Privilege Perpetuate Rape Culture*". *Fam Relat*, 66: 89-103. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12229>
- Koss, M. P., Abbey, A., Campbell, R., Cook, S., Norris, J., Testa, M., Ullman, S., West, C., & White, J. (2007). Revising the SES: A collaborative process to improve assessment of se

Mellins CA, Walsh K, Sarvet AL, Wall M, Gilbert L, Santelli JS, et al. (2017) *Sexual assault incidents among college undergraduates: Prevalence and factors associated with risk.*

PLoS ONE 12(11): e0186471.

Minow, J. C., & Einolf, C. J. (2009). *Sorority Participation and Sexual Assault Risk. Violence Against Women*, 15(7), 835–851.

Teah-Marie Bynion, Malachi Willis, Kristen N. Jozkowski & Jacquelyn D. Wiersma-Mosley (2022) *Women's disclosure of college sexual assault: Greek-life status does not influence disclosure*, *Journal of American College Health*, 70:5, 1543-1551, DOI:

10.1080/07448481.2020.1810052