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**Greek Life in American Higher Education: Abolish or Reform?**

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EDUC 97: Thesis

Dr. Joseph Derrick Nelson

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## Acknowledgments

I would like to first thank my thesis advisor, Joseph Derrick Nelson, for offering his unwavering support and mentorship throughout both my thesis as well as time at Swarthmore. Not only is Dr. Nelson my thesis advisor, however he is also my academic advisor, professor (that I have taken classes with in the past), and boss that I report to as managing editor of the *Men and Masculinities* journal. Outside of academics and professional work, I personally view Dr. Nelson as a huge role model, mentor, and close friend. During the three years that I have been at Swarthmore, there have certainly been challenges along the way, and Dr. Nelson has always been there for me offering his generous support in any way, shape, or form.

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and hardships, and taught me many valuable lessons throughout my life. I hope to continue making my parents proud as always.

## Introduction

Given my interest in Greek life in the United States, I, Richard Tian, decided to do my educational studies thesis/annotated bibliography on Greek life in American higher education institutions. The study of Greek life has been a major research interest for me ever since starting college after high school. The concept of these same-sex social organizations interests me particularly because I am an LGBTQ Canadian-born Chinese American, so I do not fit the preconceived stereotype of a fraternity brother. In the past, I have compiled research-backed reports on the role of Greek life on college campuses in American society. At my previous institution (University of Hartford), before I transferred to Swarthmore, I conducted an interview with the University of Hartford's (UHart) director of Greek life and student activities to learn more about the culture of Greek life and its impact at UHart. I found that there exists an imaginary border between Greek and non-Greek life students and that Greek-letter organizations need to break the stigma that is causing this division. Additionally, in its current condition, Greek life across North America is rife with excessive hazing and numerous instances of sexual assault. Through my research and the interview conducted with the Greek life director at UHart, I argued that Greek life organizations across the country should be reformed. However, through additional research, I hope to determine whether Greek-letter organizations should be abolished instead of reformed. My goal is to use this annotated bibliography as an opportunity to make that determination. As a result, I have found various sources that are either pro-reform or pro-abolition. After writing this annotated bibliography, I hope to have a stronger understanding of where I stand in relation to the future of Greek life.

### Annotated Bibliography

Alva, S. A. (1998). Self-Reported Alcohol Use of College Fraternity and Sorority Members.

*Journal of College Student Development*, 39(1), 3.

<http://search.proquest.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/scholarly-journals/self-reported-alcohol-use-college-fraternity/docview/1416092452/se-2?accountid=11311>

In this article, Alva talks about a study (conducted by her) surveying 1,901 undergraduate college students from four campuses of a large comprehensive public university system in California, on self-reported alcohol use. This survey is known as the Core Alcohol and Drug Survey. Of the 1,901 students surveyed, 176 are fraternity members and 187 are sorority members. The purpose of this study “was to examine the role of social norms and expectancies in relation to the differential patterns of alcohol consumption among college students affiliated with fraternities or sororities” (p. 4). The goals of the study were “to (a) compare the prevalence of alcohol use among members of college fraternities and sororities to alcohol use by non-Greek students, while also examining gender differences; (b) compare college students’ self-reported alcohol use to their perceptions of the average students’ alcohol use; and (c) identify possible differences in perceptions of peer alcohol use and in beliefs about the consequences of drinking alcohol that may be predictors of the higher drinking patterns commonly reported by fraternity and sorority members” (p. 4). Last but not least, given the preexisting data and research on Greek-affiliated students and alcohol use, Alva expected and hypothesized fraternity and sorority members to rely heavily on peer norms to estimate their drinking behavior.

Results from the survey show that fraternity and sorority members report significantly higher levels of weekly alcohol consumption than non-Greek students. On

average, non-Greek students reported consuming 1.75 drinks per week, whereas fraternity and sorority members reported consuming 3.91 drinks per week. In addition, in comparisons of both members of Greek organizations and non-Greeks, males reported significantly higher levels of alcohol consumption than did females. For example, fraternity members reported (on average) 5.78 drinks per week, as compared to 2.25 drinks per week for sorority members. For the non-Greek college student population, males reported 2.77 drinks per week (on average), and females reported 1.11 drinks per week. Overall, this study supports prior research findings which show a higher case of self-reported alcohol consumption among Greek-affiliated members than in the general college student population. Through a stepwise discriminant analysis, it is revealed that Greek and non-Greek members can be differentiated on a couple of ascribed benefits of alcohol. One is that Greek members were “more likely to believe that alcohol enhances social activity, makes women sexier, and facilitates bonding” (p. 8). Two is that Greek members were more likely to “have friends who did not disapprove of heavy or binge drinking” (p. 8). While it is not clear whether Alva supports the reformation or abolition of Greek life, it is clear that she believes that Greek life is not okay the current way it is, based on her mentioning of the problematic drinking behaviors of fraternity and sorority members.

Personally, as an individual (age 21 and over) that rarely drinks alcoholic beverages, I am not surprised that fraternity and sorority members generally drink more than those not in these types of organizations, and also overestimate how much their peers drink. This is because I feel that in these types of social organizations, there are often lots of events/parties such as mixers that involve alcohol. As a result, due to this

greater and more convenient access to alcohol, it is no surprise that Greek-affiliated students will drink more than their non-Greek counterparts. The question is whether this increased consumption of alcohol plays a negative effect on anyone or anything. For instance, while alcohol is commonly used as a social lubricant among people, it can also be used in ways that can indirectly harm others. For instance, many males, especially fraternity brothers, tend to use alcohol as a way to have sexual activity with a girl, such as a sorority sister. This is because alcohol tends to lower people's inhibitions and consciousness, which can limit people's ability to consent to certain activities, such as sexual intercourse. As a result, I believe that a problematic aspect of fraternities and sororities is the excessive drinking of alcohol that is associated with membership in these kinds of social organizations.

Barnes, M. L., Adams-Clark, A., Rosenthal, M. N., Smith, C. P., & Freyd, J. J. (2021). Pledged into Harm: Sorority and Fraternity Members Face Increased Risk of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment. *Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence*, 6(1).  
<https://doi.org/10.23860/dignity.2021.06.01.09>

In their article titled *Pledged Into Harm: Sorority and Fraternity Members Face Increased Risk of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment*, Melissa L. Barnes et al examine the risk of sexual exploitation (both sexual assault and sexual harassment) associated with fraternity and sorority membership in American college campuses. Barnes et al do this through an online survey conducted on college students at a predominantly white university in the Pacific Northwest of the United States. Prior to the study, Barnes et al come up with three hypotheses. The first is that both men and women involved in Greek life will experience some form of sexual assault and harassment. The



second is that membership in a sorority would be associated with an increased risk of sexual assault and sexual harassment for college women. Last but not least, third is that a contextual factor of Greek life, such as alcohol use, would be associated with an increased risk of experiencing sexual assault and harassment for college women.

Ultimately, the results of the study support all three hypotheses. Moreover, Barnes et al assert that “Greek life membership has been associated with perpetration of sexual assault in at least three important ways: 1) sorority membership increases women’s risk for sexual assault, 2) fraternity members compared to male non-members are more likely to perpetrate sexual assault, and 3) Greek life party scenes increase students’ risk of experiencing sexual assault” (p. 5). These are the main takeaways from the available literature that Barnes et al reviewed.

One aspect of this article that I found interesting is how Barnes et al mention a common statistic that approximately one in four college women experience attempted or completed sexual assault during their time in college. I have read about this statistic in various articles throughout my research on Greek life. Moreover, Barnes et al state that the Greek life environment can be to blame for the increased likelihood of sexual violence. In other words, “there are likely aspects of the fraternity environment that encourage sexually coercive behavior, including sexual assault” (p. 3). Because of this, the Greek life environment appears to increase the likelihood of sexually aggressive behavior from fraternity brothers. Generally speaking, attending Greek life parties places students in a dangerous environment where alcohol abuse is rampant, perpetrators are present, and sexual violence is normalized. As a result, “for both men and women

students, membership into Greek life may come with an unanticipated vulnerability to sexual victimization” (p. 21).

Last but not least, a couple more things come to mind. One is the mentioning of the concept of institutional betrayal, which I had never learned about before reading this article. Given that Greek-letter organizations are sanctioned by the higher education institutions in which they reside, there is a theme of institutional betrayal, which basically refers to how “students who experience sexual violence can be further harmed by perceptions that their institution condoned or facilitated their assault in some way” (p. 22). This is a very unique perspective to consider. Second, Barnes et al make a connection to Rashawn Ray’s article on race and fraternities, by mentioning that in general, historically white fraternities tend to experience more privileged standards than predominantly black fraternities, especially at predominantly white institutions. Overall, through reading this article, it is clear that the authors see Greek life as a problematic institution, and that change must occur. However, it is not clear whether the authors are more supportive of the abolishment of Greek life as compared to the reformation of Greek life. Of course, this opinion may also differ between each co-author of the publication.

Friedman, J. (2015, November 20). Greek life on campus. *CQ Researcher*, 25, 985-1008.

<http://library.cqpress.com/>

From 2005 to 2013, more than 60 people died in fraternity-related incidents, most involving alcohol and hazing during the pledging process. Although supporters of Greek life argue that fraternities and sororities provide invaluable leadership training, networking opportunities, and emotional and academic support, the idea of whether or

not to abolish these social organizations still very much exists, with critics questioning whether Greek life still has a place in higher education. Nonetheless, fraternity membership is near a record high. North American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) fraternities have grown from 253,000 members in 2005 to over 372,000 members in 2014, close to the 1990 record of 400,000. On the female side, the 26 sororities in the National Panhellenic Conference counted a record 380,000 members in 2015, the year this article was published. In 2001, a study by the Harvard School of Public Health found that close to 75% of students living in a fraternity or sorority house were binge drinkers compared to 44% of students overall. Moreover, John D. Foubert, a professor of higher education at Oklahoma State University, found in 2007 that fraternity members were three times more likely than nonmember students to commit rape. It is useful to know that throughout my research on Greek life, this has been a common statistic that I have seen various times in different sources.

While some critics of Greek life have suggested abolishing fraternities and sororities, few see abolition as actually feasible. Those that feel that it is not possible to abolish believe that these Greek organizations will go underground if banned from college campuses, making it even harder to monitor and regulate by higher education administrators. In addition, hazing is currently illegal in 44 states. There are about 750,000 students who are members of the nation's 99 historically white fraternities and sororities. Despite Greek-letter organizations being so popular, some people contend that these Greek organizations – particularly fraternities – no longer have value in today's higher education environment. Nonetheless, it is important to also consider whether it is even legal to ban fraternities and sororities from college campuses. Even critics of

fraternities say outright abolition might not work and would be illegal at public state-supported institutions, where students are protected by the American Constitution's guarantee of freedom of association. However, private colleges could in fact outlaw fraternities and sororities. Yet not every critic of Greek life supports abolition. Some in fact do support the reformation of Greek life instead.

In terms of ways to reform Greek life, Friedman mentions the possibility of lowering the legal drinking age back to 18, what it was prior to the year 1984 when it was raised to 21. This may benefit Greek life as perhaps lowering the legal drinking age to 18 would result in less people needing to attend fraternity functions/parties, thus lowering the instances of sexual assault, for example. With the legal drinking age lowered, college students would be able to go to bars and clubs, instead of having to go to fraternity events held at fraternity houses. Another way to reform Greek life that some college administrators have tried is to make Greek life coed. This has become one of the most contentious issues between higher education administrators and Greek organizations. In the past, Middlebury, Dartmouth, and Trinity have all tried, to force their on-campus Greek organizations to become coed, however, they all failed to do so. Another way to reform Greek life is to ban pledging, the process in which new fraternity/sorority members assimilate into their respective Greek organizations, which often consists of hazing such as forced excessive consumption of alcohol. As of the time of publication of this article, five national fraternities have banned pledging: Sigma Alpha Epsilon, Sigma Phi Epsilon, Zeta Beta Tau, Lambda Chi Alpha, and Alpha Gamma Rho. Last but not least, fraternity houses, like sorority houses already, can become alcohol-free. Edward Whipple, Adjunct Associate Professor of Higher Education and Student Affairs at

Bowling Green State University, as well as Past President and Current Treasurer of the Phi Delta Theta International Fraternity Foundation, argues for fraternity housing to be alcohol-free. Whipple says that in the year 2000, his fraternity (Phi Delta Theta) implemented an alcohol-free housing policy, which has resulted in a 61 percent decrease in the average number of insurance claims, a 94 percent decrease in the average insurance claim, from \$413,000 to \$24,000, and significantly decreased damage to chapter facilities. Whipple ends his argument by saying, “Today’s headlines involving fraternities are dominated by problems rooted in the misuse of alcohol, such as assault, sexual assault, and hazing. With 15 years of history to support its decision, Phi Delta Theta remains committed to a policy that comprehensively addresses these issues to ensure the safety of its members and constituents while offering a values-based leadership experience that is much needed on college campuses today” (p. 15).

Finally, Friedman introduces a Wesleyan University alumnus, Matthew Leibowitz, who founded an organization known as Consent Is So Frat, which seeks to change how Greek students perceive sexual consent. “Its name plays on the usually pejorative connotation of “frat,” suggesting that consent in sexual relationships should be an essential part of the masculine – and sometimes raucous – culture of fraternity houses” (p. 18). Overall, it is hard to tell whether Friedman supports the abolition or transformation of Greek life. In the article, Friedman draws on arguments from both sides and does not provide her own opinion. Through reading this article, I feel that Greek life should be reformed instead of abolished, as several notable experts on Greek life feel the same way. These experts believe that abolishing Greek life is not feasible, and as such, the most realistic thing to do is to reform it as best as possible.

Marcus, E. (2020, August 1). The War on Frats. *The New York Times*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/01/style/abolish-greek-life-college-frat-racism.html>

In this New York Times newspaper article, Marcus writes about how many fraternity and sorority members have disaffiliated from their respective Greek letter organizations during the midst of the pandemic, particularly at Vanderbilt University. This is due to a multitude of reasons. One is the realization that Greek life has deep roots, in that it is exclusionary, racist, and misogynistic, as well as resistant to reform due to the hierarchical nature of national Greek organizations, which control its various local chapters at higher education institutions across the country. Another is because of a handful of racist incidents caught on video and posted on social media, that have accelerated the movement of what is known as “Abolish Greek Life.” The “Abolish Greek Life” movement is not a phenomenon that is only at Vanderbilt. Similar “Abolish Greek Life” movements have occurred at other institutions across the country, such as at Duke, Emory, Northwestern, American University, University of Richmond, and Washington University in St. Louis, to name a few. However, it is arguable that the “Abolish Greek Life” movement has been most successful at Vanderbilt, where a decent number of students have chosen to leave their fraternity or sorority, and the movement at Vanderbilt has been the biggest so far. In fact, on July 7, 2020, “three of the highest ranking fraternity brothers at Vanderbilt – Callen DiGiovanni, who was the student president of the Interfraternity Council; Joshua Allen, who was the student attorney general; and Alex Snape, who was student vice president of housing – wrote a Medium post resigning from their positions” (p. 5). According to Vanderbilt, today, more than

35% of the roughly 7,000 undergraduates at the institution belong to a Greek-letter organization.

It is important to note that the “Abolish Greek Life” movement is targeted at historically white social fraternities and sororities, not all Greek-letter organizations in general. This refers to organizations that are a part of either the Interfraternity Council (IFC) or the National Panhellenic Conference. Last but certainly not least, many of the individuals at Vanderbilt who dropped out of Greek life did so because they felt that reform felt futile. Some even attempted to reform Greek life, however, were ultimately unsuccessful. For instance, one high-ranking individual in the Vanderbilt chapter of the Delta Tau Delta fraternity tried to ban Greek social dues and redistribute campus resources, such as allowing Greek houses to be applied for by any campus organization. However, after he and a couple of other fraternity brothers met with the director of Greek life at Vanderbilt, as well as had a call with a representative from the national organization of Delta Tau Delta, they felt dismissed by both. As a result, these fraternity brothers decided to quit the fraternity. In reaction to this, I am impressed by how even fraternity brothers themselves took steps to try to reform Greek life, and were ultimately unsuccessful, resulting in them deciding to drop their Greek affiliation. What I also found impressive is how the “Abolish Greek Life” movement came to Vanderbilt in the first place, as according to John Hechinger, the author of *True Gentlemen: The Broken Pledge of America's Fraternities*, “Vanderbilt is an unlikely place for an anti-Greek life movement,” as the university has hosted fraternities since the year it was founded, 1873 (p. 3). Overall, it is not made clear in the newspaper article whether Marcus is more supportive of the abolition or reformation of Greek life. However, I would argue that

since Marcus has written an article in regard to the abolition of Greek life, it seems more likely than not that he is more supportive of abolishing historically white Greek-letter organizations instead of reforming them.

Mechanic, M. (2019). Hazed and Confused: Bad Behavior Is Still Rampant in the Greek System, So Why Are Fraternities Only Getting More Popular? [Review of *Hazed and Confused: Bad Behavior Is Still Rampant in the Greek System, So Why Are Fraternities Only Getting More Popular?*]. *Mother Jones*, January/February 2019.

<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/HAZED+AND+CONFUSED%3A+Bad+behavior+is+still+rampant+in+the+Greek...-a0566680740>

In his article, Michael Mechanic opens up about how he was part of the Greek system as an undergraduate student at the University of California-Berkeley in the mid-1980s.

Mechanic pledged the Beta Xi chapter of Kappa Sigma. While he mentions that the Greek system offers its members a surrogate family in addition to a lifelong support network, Mechanic also states that he has his misgivings in regard to Greek life. One

brother that opened up to American journalist Alexandra Robbins says, “I’m very hesitant to say I was in a fraternity because, to certain people, that will mean I was in a culture that promoted sexual assault. I partied my whole way through college. I had no responsibility, and I’m a privileged Caucasian kid who had everything handed to me.

That stigma is incredibly incorrect” (p. 56). But is it? Mechanic mentions this because he argues that stereotypes exist for a reason. I agree with Mechanic on this, if there was never a history of a certain pattern, then particular stereotypes would not exist. Moreover, out of America’s roughly 5,600 historically white social fraternity chapters, from January 2010 through June 2018, there were about 2,000 cases of abusive drinking, hazing, sexual



assault, racism, violence, vandalism, and fatalities. Moreover, it is important to note that those were just reported incidents that could be found on the internet. According to Robbins, from 2005 to 2017, at least 72 young men died from fraternity-related incidents. What is important to know though, is that despite increasing awareness of these incidents, fraternities have only grown more popular instead of less. In fact, the North American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) which oversees 66 traditional social fraternities, reported a 50% increase in membership over one decade from 2005 to 2015. My question to this is could it be that more people have gone to college from 2005 to 2015, including young men? If that is the case, then it makes sense that fraternity membership has increased during that particular timeframe. Anyways, what I found really interesting is how one of Mechanic's old brothers from his fraternity chapter indicated that he has few regrets about joining Kappa Sigma. However, this old brother would not necessarily encourage their sons to join a fraternity. His old brother says, "I just think there was far too much freedom given to 18-year-old boys to figure out right from wrong. I suppose there still is...the male brain is not even fully developed for another 10 years. You mix that level of immaturity with unlimited access to alcohol, and you're going to have [the] potential for serious problems" (p. 58). Ultimately, through reading this article, I feel that Mechanic is more supportive of the abolition of Greek life than reformation. This is very unique, as given that he used to be a fraternity brother, I would have thought that he would be pro-reform instead of pro-abolition. Nonetheless, I believe that Mechanic is pro-abolition only because of what he has seen and gone through himself as a former fraternity brother.

Ray, R. (2013). Fraternity life at predominantly white universities in the US: the saliency of race. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36(2), 320–336.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2012.676201>

In his journal article *Fraternity Life at Predominantly White Universities in the US: The Saliency of Race*, Rashawn Ray, Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland, College Park, mainly claims that white fraternity men have the privilege of being held less accountable for their interactions with others as compared to black fraternity men. This is because of a variety of reasons. One is that at predominantly white institutions, because the racial makeup of students is majority white, white fraternity men are better able to blend into the student body (when not wearing Greek-lettered clothing to show that they are in a fraternity). In a nine-month ethnographic study of 52 black and white college fraternity men known as “The Fraternity Project,” Ray tries to determine whether there is any difference between how white fraternity brothers interact with others such as fellow men from other fraternities, sorority members, or university administrators, as compared to black fraternity brothers. With the study being conducted at a large predominantly white institution where close to 90% of students identify as white and only 4% of students identify as black, Ray successfully highlights the different experiences that black fraternity brothers go through juxtaposed to the experiences of white fraternity brothers. It should be noted that Ray refers to this predominantly white institution as State University (SU). In terms of the Greek system at SU, about 20 percent of white students belong to a fraternity or sorority, and about 10 percent of black students are Greek-affiliated. With over 2,500 members in the white fraternity system spread across 25 white fraternities and only 50 members in the black fraternity system spread

across only 5 chapters, black Greek life is very small and minoritized at SU. With the age of the participants in the study ranging from 18 to 24, it is interesting to realize that because most white men became fraternity members as freshmen and most black men became fraternity members as sophomores or juniors, the average age of white men sampled is 20 and the average age of black men sampled is 21. What I also found intriguing is that “white men’s average student grade point average is 3.31 compared to 2.92 on a 4.0 scale for black men” (p. 326). Last but not least, “black men are more religious and more likely to be in committed relationships. White men report being upper middle class while black men report being lower middle class” (p. 326). Overall, Ray makes some notable findings through his study, such as how every black fraternity brother was able to name at least three historically white fraternities, whereas no white fraternity brother was able to name more than one black fraternity. In fact, some white fraternity men did not even know that black fraternities existed! Last but not least, “unlike white fraternities, black fraternities face a different level of social interaction with university officials” (p. 332). White fraternities tend to interact less with university officials as they control a large living and social space with their on-campus fraternity houses. Because black fraternities do not have any fraternity housing, they are “dependent on university venues for programming, social events, and parties. This means they have to interact regularly and directly with staff members, administrators, and police officers” (p. 332). Overall, through reading Ray’s article, it is easy to notice the covert forms of racism that unfortunately operate in the twenty-first century. While Ray does not appear to support the abolition of Greek life in any way, shape, or form, it is clear that he believes Greek life needs to be reformed through a racial lens.

Robbins, A. (2019). *Fraternity: an inside look at a year of college boys becoming men*. Dutton.

In her book *Fraternity: An Inside Look at a Year of College Boys Becoming Men*, American Journalist Alexandra Robbins talks about the narratives of two male college students who are both involved in Greek life on college campuses in the United States. One of them is named Jake, who starts off as a freshman at a university known as Town College (TC). Through the book, we learn about the various processes that Jake must go through to become a fraternity member (brother) of Zeta Kappa. The other student is Oliver, who is a sophomore and newly elected chapter president of Phi Epsilon at State University. Over the course of the book, we see the challenges that Oliver faces as a young chapter president, and how he navigates those hardships in a way that positively benefits his fraternity. The fraternity that Jake joins (Zeta Kappa) is very stereotypical, where the brothers promote a sense of hypermasculinity, resulting in pledges being severely hazed (through forced drinking of alcoholic beverages for instance), a greater likelihood of sexual assault committed by its members, as well as a more homophobic and misogynistic environment in its chapter. On the other hand, Oliver's fraternity (Phi Epsilon) is fairly healthy, meaning its brothers do not necessarily promote toxic masculinity, which results in pledges not really being hazed, and sexual assault (committed by brothers) significantly less likely to occur in the chapter. Ultimately, Robbins writes about these two fraternity brothers and their chapters in order to compare and contrast the difference between a stereotypical fraternity that harms society (Jake's fraternity Zeta Kappa), and a fairly ideal fraternity that positively benefits society (Oliver's fraternity Phi Epsilon). Through reading *Fraternity*, it is made clear what allows for a healthy fraternity like Oliver's and a toxic fraternity like Jake's.

After speaking with thousands of fraternity and sorority members, Robbins argues that not all fraternities and sororities are bad, so to speak. Throughout the book as well as in Robbins' various articles that she has written, it is clear that Robbins is not supportive of the abolition of Greek life. Instead, Robbins is much more for the reformation of Greek life. She makes this argument because she believes that college boys need a space to be vulnerable in front of other young men, and fraternities allow for just that. In this book, Robbins also emphasizes how a healthy fraternity can positively benefit its members and surrounding community. She argues that most fraternities and sororities do in fact positively benefit society. However, there are a few fraternities and sororities in Greek life that unfortunately give all of Greek life a bad reputation. These types of fraternities and sororities are often portrayed by the media as representative of the entire Greek system, which simply is not true. Even Jake, the freshman that Robbins interviewed for about a year in her ethnographical study, says that "a fraternity has every potential to be good and healthy as it does to be corrosive and even dangerous to join. It greatly depends on the example chapters set on their campus" (p. 345).

Sanday, P. R. (2007). *Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus*

(Second) [Review of *Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus*]. New York University Press.

In her book *Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus*, Peggy Reeves Sanday, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania, discusses the topic of gang rape in college social fraternities. She mentions a fraternity that she refers to as "XYZ," and particularly the "XYZ express," which is what Sanday refers to as a gang rape incident committed by a "train" of XYZ fraternity brothers at the

University of Pennsylvania in the year 1983. In this incident, Laurel, a student at the University of Pennsylvania, was heavily intoxicated and high on drugs at an on-campus XYZ fraternity party. Without her consent, five or six XYZ fraternity brothers had sex with Laurel, making Laurel a victim of fraternity gang rape. In chapter two known as “The XYZ Express,” Alice and Anna, two female students at the University of Pennsylvania, “describe the sexual culture that made the XYZ express a logical part of party activities” (p. 66). In this chapter, both Alice and Anna share their stories and perspective of what happened before, during, and after the incident. The XYZ fraternity brothers themselves also share their point of view regarding what had occurred, in chapter three titled “Rape or ‘She Asked For It’?”. Overall, Sanday does a good job of casting college social fraternities in a negative light, through her view of gang rape and fraternities through an anthropological lens. Because of this, I would argue that Sanday is more supportive of abolition than reform of Greek life.

Seabrook, R. C., & Ward, L. M. (2018). Bros Will Be Bros? The Effect of Fraternity Membership on Perceived Culpability for Sexual Assault. *Violence against Women*, 25(12), 1471–1490. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801218820196>

In their research article, Seabrook and Ward analyze the connection between fraternity membership and sexual assault perpetration by assessing the role of perceptions in an ambiguous sexual assault scenario. On U.S. college campuses, sexual assault is a major issue. Previous studies conducted estimate that in the United States, between 20-25% of college women are sexually assaulted during their time in college. This may have to do with the fact that “the social environment on college campuses creates and maintains a rape culture, or a culture in which male sexual violence against women is normalized and

women are blamed for experiencing sexual assault (Herman, 1988). Evidence of rape culture can be seen in both the reporting and punishment rates for sexual assault” (p. 1471). For example, between 2012 and 2013, 478 student conduct sanctions were issued for sexual assault across 100 universities. However, only 12% resulted in expulsions and 28% in suspensions. Here, Seabrook and Ward mention this statistic in order to show that many perpetrators of sexual assault are not receiving harsh enough punishments for their actions.

One may wonder what factors permit rape culture to flourish. At the individual level, “fraternity members consistently demonstrate greater acceptance and perpetration of sexual violence against women...for example, Foubert, Newberry, and Tatum (2007) found that fraternity members were three times more likely to commit sexual assault than nonmembers...on an institutional level, male privilege (and especially White male privilege) is reproduced through fraternity control of social spaces...for example, fraternities own houses near campus and use these houses to host parties with alcohol” (p. 1472). In order to examine why fraternity membership contributes to sexual violence, researchers have studied components of fraternity membership that can contribute to sexual assault. For instance, in her ethnography of fraternity culture, Peggy Reeves Sanday makes the argument that fraternity men use sexual assault of women as a way to prove their masculinity in the face of homosocial fraternity bonding rituals. In the current study, Seabrook and Ward seek to examine how external perceptions of fraternity brothers might contribute to rape culture. Specifically, Seabrook and Ward analyzed whether perceptions of guilt for both the sexual assault victim and perpetrator would be affected if the perpetrator happened to be a fraternity brother. If fraternity brothers were

blamed less for sexual assault than nonmembers, this disparity may very well contribute to rape culture through the allowance of fraternity members to “get away with” sexual assault.

In terms of a theoretical rationale for why sexual assault perpetrators tend to be blamed less than their victims, American sociologist of gender Michael Kimmel argues that there are three cultures that can explain why: the cultures of entitlement, silence, and protection. “The culture of entitlement refers to the idea that men who adhere to traditional masculinity deserve the power associated with masculinity. The culture of silence describes the ways in which people who witness risky or deleterious behaviors associated with masculinity are forced to stay silent or else risk being labeled a ‘tattle tail’ or physically assaulted. Finally, the culture of protection refers to the ways in which society at large ‘protects’ men who behave badly” (p. 1474). Out of these three cultures, the culture of protection is most relevant when it comes to defending male sexual assault perpetrators. Instead of blaming the perpetrator, the culture of protection shields perpetrators by shifting the blame to the victims. As a result, victim-blaming is a perfect example of the culture of protection. Unfortunately, the three cultures are not applied equally to all men. Instead, men who are members of a more privileged group generally have a greater sense of entitlement and are given more protection. One type of privileged group is college athletes, forming the “jockocracy” where male athletes feel entitled to and receive special treatment due to their prestigious status. Another type of privileged group is fraternity brothers. Despite fraternity brothers being more likely to perpetrate sexual assault, the culture of protection may shield fraternity brothers from being held accountable for instances of sexual assault.



One may wonder why fraternity brothers are in a more privileged position. This has to do with the fact that members of Greek organizations typically come from wealthier (and therefore more privileged) backgrounds. For instance, “nonworking class students are more likely to be enrolled in Greek life than working class students, and White and higher income students are more likely to be in fraternities and sororities than non-White students and those from lower incomes” (p. 1475). In other words, fraternity members often come from privileged backgrounds, maintain that privilege by controlling campus spaces (through their own fraternity houses), and retain that privilege after graduation as an alumnus. The culture of protection suggests that communities tend to support young men (especially privileged young men) who commit sexual assault, in order to pardon their actions.

The study’s purpose was to identify whether young men on a college campus who have privilege through their fraternity affiliation will be held less accountable for sexual assault than young men who are not affiliated with Greek life. Seabrook and Ward come up with four hypotheses: first is that participants will perceive a sexual assault perpetrator as less responsible for sexual assault when he is a member of a fraternity compared with when no information is given about his fraternity status. Second, participants will rate a sexual assault perpetrator more favorably when he is a member of a fraternity compared with when no information is given about his fraternity status. Third, participants will perceive a sexual assault victim as more responsible when her perpetrator is a member of a fraternity compared with when no information is given about the perpetrator’s fraternity status. And fourth, participants will rate a sexual assault victim less favorably when her perpetrator is a member of a fraternity compared with when no information is given about

the perpetrator's fraternity status. The results from the experiment show that "there were no significant differences in perceptions of perpetrator culpability, perpetrator guilt, victim culpability, or victim credibility between women in the control condition and women in the experimental condition...compared with men in the control condition, men in the experimental condition rated the perpetrator as less guilty, and the victim as more culpable and less credible" (pp. 1479-1481).

This study was conducted because of the issue of sexual assault on college campuses, and fraternities being identified as risk factors for sexual assault perpetration. "As hypothesized based on the culture of protection (Kimmel, 2008), male observers rated a perpetrator as less guilty and a victim as more culpable and less credible when the perpetrator was a fraternity member compared with when no information was given about his fraternity status" (p. 1481). Although Seabrook and Ward's hypotheses were supported by male participants, the findings show that there were no differences between the fraternity and control groups for female participants. Overall, the results of Seabrook and Ward's study suggest that "among male participants, fraternity members are blamed less and their victims blamed more for sexual assault than are non-fraternity members" (p. 1485). Seabrook and Ward's results highlight how useful the culture of protection can be to fraternity brothers. As a result, higher education administrators in charge of combating sexual assault on college campuses may need to consider how fraternity brothers are less likely to be held accountable for sexual assault perpetration. In terms of whether the authors are pro-reform or pro-abolition, it is not clear.

Tingley, K., Crumb, L., Hoover-Plonk, Shelly, Hill, W., & Chambers, C. (2018). Sorority and Fraternity Attitudes Towards Initiation and Hazing. *Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors*, 13(2). <https://doi.org/10.25774/pmpp-0598>

In their article, Tingley et al. describe a study they conducted that assessed students' attitudes towards fraternity and sorority intake processes at a regional Mid-Atlantic University (MU) to gain an understanding of overall attitudes and discern whether students distinguish differences between hazing and initiation procedures. In other words, Tingley et al. examine fraternity and sorority members' attitudes towards initiation and hazing at MU, using the Survey of Attitudes About Fraternities and Sororities (SAAFS) instrument designed by Cokley et al. (2001). The purpose of this study was to determine whether students could distinguish the differences between initiation and hazing in order to better affect educational programming for positive change. It is estimated that one fraternity brother has died nationally every year since 1970 due to the dangers associated with hazing rituals. For the purposes of this study, hazing is defined as an "illegal set of procedures which can inflict mental and physical harm (Nuwer, 1999). Binge drinking, deviant sexual behavior, and violence are often associated with hazing processes and draws negative media attention to the respective organizations and campuses (Foster, 2008; Gumprecht, 2006)" (p. 46). Moreover, performing acts of servitude, sleep deprivation, tattooing/branding, and any coerced destruction of personal property can also be considered forms of hazing that could cause physical or psychological harm to those involved. While initiation is not necessarily a negative venture, as initiation processes typically involve social gatherings and the successful completion of activities for

induction, it is the hazing that often takes place during initiation that ultimately makes it a negative process.

“The use of the term ‘pledging’ is diminishing overtime given traditional connections with hazing and the notion of “pledges,” persons bullied as they seek fraternity or sorority membership (Kimbrough, 1997, 2003)” (p. 47). New members of the Interfraternity Council (IFC) and the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) traditionally go through a new member orientation period known as pledging. These negative initiation processes can be the largest cost to individuals associated with fraternity and sorority membership. “In fact, for students, the line between hazing and positive team building may be blurred, which points to a need for additional research in this area” (p. 47). Despite literature that casts hazing as a rite of passage to adulthood ritual, hazing is illegal in 44 U.S. states, as well as banned at higher education institutions and forbidden by national fraternity and sorority organizations. Nonetheless, underground hazing still continues to exist and poses a significant challenge for higher education administrators. However, despite decades of negative publicity, fraternities and sororities have increased in popularity among traditional first-year college students since the early 2000s. This may be because “joining a fraternity or sorority broadens a student’s sense of community and gives emotional safety as well as a sense of belonging as one traverses college experiences...In addition, joining fraternity and sorority communities further encourages that independence through the decision to join a social organization of highly influential peers” (p. 49).

The primary research question for this study was what are the attitudes of MU fraternity and sorority members towards initiation and hazing? A secondary research

question was are there differences in student attitudes towards initiation and hazing based on race or gender? In a previous study conducted in 2001, Cokley et al. found that gender and race were a factor in the way initiation processes were perceived by students in fraternities and sororities. In particular, it was found that African American students had a more positive attitude towards the purpose and impact of initiation and that Latinx Americans thought that initiation should be easier, as compared to their white and African American counterparts. Last but not least, they also found that women generally had more positive attitudes towards initiation than their male counterparts. In 2008, Owen, Burke, and Vickers found that fraternity brothers were more likely to be hazing victims than sorority sisters, which contributes to the more favorable disposition of sorority members towards initiation.

For the survey, a total of 197 students participated, all undergraduate fraternity and sorority members at MU, a large public doctoral extensive institution in the Mid-Atlantic United States. Participants earned a \$50 Best Buy gift card after completing the survey. Despite the low response rate of ~8%, little research confirms response bias due to low online survey participation rates. Since women make up nearly 59% of the sample, this means that there were more sorority sisters that participated in the survey than fraternity brothers. Qualtrics software was used to issue the survey. The results showed that students understood the general purpose of initiation and the dangers of hazing. However, a general understanding may not equate to an understanding of the specific activities involved in new member initiation processes. Moreover, students generally had a strong positive attitude towards pledging, as well as a relatively high tolerance for hazing. What I found interesting was how men showed a slightly higher

moral concern about pledging (the initiation process) than women, and men agreed much more strongly about the difficulty of the pledging (initiation) process than women. I found this interesting because I thought it would be the other way around.

Overall, this was an informative study that provided much-needed insight into the views of fraternity and sorority pledging process by Greek life members themselves. However, moving forward, Tingley et al. suggest “utilizing a focus group consisting of faculty members, fraternities and sororities professionals, students, and researchers to design a questionnaire that is more indicative of the current language used by students in fraternities and sororities” (p. 55). In regard to hazing practices, sorority sisters must feel confident to contest practices that give them any form of discomfort. On a more serious note, they need to feel that not only should they report illegal activity, but that it is the right thing to do. For males, they can learn that while being a fraternity brother has many benefits, one cannot recoup those benefits if not alive. “Men at this age may also need education along the lines of understanding one’s personal physical limits” (p. 55). Finally, colleges and universities must do more to curb hazing. One notable example is the Balanced Man Program (BMP) through the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity at Oregon State University. “In the BMP process, recruits become members immediately who work collaboratively across organization classes to enact membership development opportunities such as workshops on proper etiquette, yoga, and cooking skills. Moody (2006) reported the advantages for the students as well as the university that have come since the implementation of the BMP, including an 11% increase in recruits since 1990, a 50% reduction in alcohol related incidents over a five-year period, and an average grade point average of 3.0, the highest among fraternities on campus (Moody, 2006)” (p. 56).

Overall, higher education administrators and those involved in Greek life must not only promote zero tolerance for hazing, however, must also strictly enforce it. By implementing educational initiatives and enforcing accountability, hazing can be eliminated in the Greek system.

Through reading this article, it appears that the authors are more supportive of the reimagination of Greek life as compared to the abolition of Greek life. This is because on page 47, Tingley et al. say, “While some college student affairs personnel advocate to rid college campuses of sororities and fraternities due to perpetual fatal incidents of hazing, overall the costs and benefits of membership to individuals and institutions is mixed.” Tingley et al then go on to explicitly state the positive aspects of Greek life, ending with, “as such the institutional relationship with these [Greek life] organizations can be considered symbiotic, with fraternity and sorority offices providing a bridge, mediating relations...Unfortunately, the positive aspects of fraternity or sorority membership are often overshadowed by negative facets, the foremost of which is hazing” (pp. 47-48). As a result, I argue that Tingley et al are pro-reform instead of pro-abolition.

Wilkerson, J. J. (2021). *The Title IX guy: several short essays on rape culture, masculinity (the good kind & the bad kind), & other things we should be talking about*. Nanny Goat Press. As its title suggests, in this book Wilkerson introduces 11 short essays in regard to topics such as rape culture, masculinity, and sexual consent. In order to go into a deeper analysis, I will only focus on a couple of the short essays instead of all eleven. These short essays include “The Time I Got Banned for Writing About Fraternity Brothers Holding Each Other Accountable” and “Fruit of the Poisonous Tree: How Toxic Masculinity Produces Sexual Assault.”

In the short essay called “The Time I Got Banned For Writing About Fraternity Brothers Holding Each Other Accountable,” Wilkerson talks about how he used to write for a blog known as the Knetbooks Blog. “The blog features a variety of college centric topics ranging from dealing with the stress of higher education to managing college debt” (p. 1). While Wilkerson’s articles on his affinity for hooded sweatshirts as well as Christmas gift ideas were generally well-received by readers, when Wilkerson made a written plea for fraternity brothers to hold one another accountable for their sexual behavior, his article was banned. To be more specific, it was not the quality of the article that instituted the ban, but rather its topic. Wilkerson’s editor mentioned that an article about collegiate sexual assault might upset some of their readers. Wilkerson says that the editor’s comment is directly tied to the taboo nature of sexual assault conversations. Sexual assault is a challenging topic to discuss because cases of sexual assault usually consist of traumatic and personal details of violent acts that many may consider too sensitive for everyday conversation. Moreover, what I particularly liked about this essay was when Wilkerson talked about his reasoning for wanting to join a fraternity. Wilkerson is a proud fraternity alumnus of a historically white fraternity known as Tau Kappa Epsilon (TKE). On page 5, Wilkerson says, “I knew I wanted to join a fraternity before I even knew what university I would attend. The movie Animal House did the trick on glamorizing fraternity life and by the time I made it to the University of Louisville, I was quickly seeking out Greek Row and joining the most fun loving group on campus at the time, Tau Kappa Epsilon. It would be those days of themed parties, football tailgates, and fraternizing with sororities, that would set the foundation for my eventual excursion into advocacy 15 years later.” In addition, Wilkerson says that when it



comes to misconduct such as sexual assault, fraternities tend to be reactive instead of proactive. Chapters that have instances of sexual assault can often anticipate university sanctions, unfavorable media coverage, as well as punishments from their national fraternity office. While being reactive ensures that chapters are abiding by Title IX regulations, being proactive may allow for students to avoid these issues, to begin with. Last but certainly not least, Wilkerson argues that “breaking down the taboo wall for fraternity men should start on their first day as a new member” (p. 5). Often referred to as pledges, these new members often have to go through weeks or months of an educational experience, which often focuses on the fraternity’s history, bylaws, customs, rituals, and traditions. This period is known as pledging, and where Wilkerson argues that members should engage in the sexual assault conversation. This way, teaching sexual assault prevention along with other fraternity customs places consent, bystander intervention, and healthy sexual behavior in the chapter’s set of core values and expectations. Most importantly, men, especially fraternity brothers, must risk being “uncool” in order to stand up for what is right, especially when it comes to sexual assault, hazing, and misogynistic or homophobic remarks. As Wilkerson argues, these men must be real men.

In another short essay known as “Fruit of the Poisonous Tree: How Toxic Masculinity Produces Sexual Assault,” Wilkerson introduces the concept of a “Toxic Masculinitree.” “The Toxic Masculinitree bares numerous fruit. Racism, domestic violence, general violence, homophobia, transphobia, and sexual assault all hang as products of the negative attitudes adopted to protect the male ego” (p. 43). In other words, because the tree itself is tainted, those who consume the fruits from the tree are also tainted. If the byproducts of the tree are the fruit, what is allowing the tree to grow

on the vine is the sunlight, which Wilkerson refers to as dominion/control. What I found interesting in this short essay is Wilkerson's very straightforward definition of sexual assault. According to Wilkerson, "sexual assault is the control over a person using sexual activity" (p. 44). Not only that, however, Wilkerson also introduces a simple equation in regard to sexual assault. Sexual activity plus consent equals a positive sexual encounter, whereas sexual activity minus consent equals sexual assault. "And it is the second equation where dominion meets its nasty cousin: entitlement. If the dominion is the sunlight that allows the Toxic Masculinitree to grow, then entitlement is the soil, rich in nutrients, that strengthens the roots. It is that initial thought that as men, we are somehow owed something to due to our penis" (p. 44). One example of dominion and entitlement at work is the incel community, also known as involuntary celibates. Incels are an online community of young men who are unable to attract women sexually, resulting in views that are generally hostile towards women and men who are sexually active. The Southern Poverty Law Center describes the incel community as a part of the online male supremacist ecosystem. Because of this, it is listed alongside other hate groups dining on the fruit of the poisonous tree such as the Ku Klux Klan, Neo Nazis, and Neo Confederates. Instead of taking personal responsibility for their situation, Incels feel entitled to women, leading them to blame women for not succumbing to their physical desires. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that incels view women as objects and express anger for their lack of sexual control and domination over them. Going back to the idea of the Toxic Masculinitree, these trees are planted by elder authority figures and maintained by senior members throughout the years, who are role models for younger folks. In order to eradicate toxic masculinity, it is necessary to cut down the

Toxic Masculinitree. However, it can be quite difficult to do this individually. As a result, “Toxic Masculinitree excavation is more practical as a team project. And various men are doing just that: teaming up to strike it down...Once a Toxic Masculinitree has been uprooted, the soil will be ripe for a new tree to be planted; a tree that bears the fruit of compassion, respect, accountability, and consent. And this will be the fruit that nurtures and grows those who eat it” (pp. 49-50).

Worthen, M. G. F. (2014). Blaming the Jocks and the Greeks?: Exploring Collegiate Athletes’ and Fraternity/Sorority Members’ Attitudes Toward LGBT Individuals. *Journal of College Student Development*, 55(2), 168–195. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2014.0020>

In this article, Meredith Worthen, professor of sociology at the University of Oklahoma, examines athletes’ and fraternity/sorority members’ attitudes towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals. While prior research has proven there to be significant relationships between both athletic and Greek system membership and negative attitudes towards gays and lesbians, such work seems to vilify membership in athletics and the Greek system as causal mechanisms of homophobia. Moreover, results from various studies show that being a male athlete or fraternity brother is related to unsupportive attitudes toward LGBT individuals. This may be because both the Greek system and athletics can generally be considered institutions that reinforce stereotypical conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity. In other words, they can be thought of as organizations that reify traditional masculine and feminine gender roles. Why is this the case? Well, one rationale could be that sports teams, particularly for males, as well as fraternities, often give off a homoerotic vibe. Given that males in these groups often spend lots of time together in close contact, there can be the suspicion that these males

are homosexual themselves. As a result, in order to not give off that implication, men in these groups may feel the need to prove that they are in fact heterosexual. They do this by demonstrating their manhood for other men's approval, as well as showing contempt towards homosexuality through being homophobic. It can be argued that both male athletes and fraternity brothers construct their masculinities through a homophobic lens. To positively bolster athletes' and Greek life members' perceptions/views of LGBT individuals, Worthen encourages developing specific ally groups, such as Greek LGBT and athlete LGBT ally programs, to best address the ways that LGBT prejudices can be confronted in Greek and athletic cultures. Last but not least, Worthen also says that "it could be especially helpful to encourage both male athletes and fraternity members to learn about campus LGBT programs and the educational opportunities they offer" (p. 191). In terms of Greek life's future, it is not clear whether Worthen believes Greek life should be abolished or reimaged. However, through Worthen's mentioning of fraternity brothers learning more about campus LGBT programs/organizations, as well as ally groups, it seems that Worthen is not directly in favor of the abolishment of Greek-letter organizations. Instead, Worthen seems to be more supportive of the reformation of the Greek life system.