GENDER SELF CONCEPT AND SEXUAL BEHAVIOR
OF STUDENTS IN GREEK-LETTER ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

Originally designed as "gendered clubs" (DeSantis, 2007, p. 19) that reinforce traditional gender roles, modern-day fraternities and sororities create a world where Greek students are exploring what it means to be a sexual being while still maintaining the traditional expectations of what it means to be a man and a woman. "Hooking up" is a common tool that knits Greek sexual behaviors together, allowing for varied perceived levels of promiscuity. Aided by alcohol, expectations from their environment, and their own sex drive, Greek students engage in high-risk sexual behaviors, leading to emotional consequences, increased risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease (STD), or even sexual assault.

The conclusion of this research is that students are not conscious of and do not reflect on their gender roles and are therefore subject to engaging in traditional gender roles by default. However, the development of their sexual identities and the social implications thereof seem to play a much more significant role in the lives of Greek students. The social interpretation of sexual behavior influences how students engage in sexual behavior and how they view themselves because of their sexual behavior. Based upon these findings, student affairs professionals may have a more full understanding of how to educate and program for Greek students in regards to healthy relationship development and sexual behavior.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This study was designed to explore fraternity men and sorority women’s participation in traditional gender roles and how these roles affect their gender self-concepts and the resulting sexual behavior. For the purposes of this study, gender self-concept is defined as how the men and women students perceive their gender roles and how these result in sexual behaviors (Al-Zyoudi, 2007; Byrne & Shavelson, 1987).

Since the creation of the Greek system, Greek students have been involved on campus by leading student organizations, providing chapter-based codes of conduct and discipline, and establishing a socially supportive environment in an otherwise impersonal college environment (DeSantis, 2007). Today, students involved with Greek organizations form one center of campus social life (Bogle, 2008), and many non-Greek affiliated students attend Greek parties, making Greeks the informal social network on campus.

This campus presence and social power places students in Greek organizations in a position to strongly influence social norms and establish their own set of social rules. Although there are many beneficial and unique qualities associated with being Greek, the very nature of fraternity and sorority membership forms gendered clubs that reinforce traditional gender roles where women are traditionally feminine and men are traditionally
masculine (DeSantis, 2007). These social rules “regarding sexual behavior [may indicate] when sex may be desired, expected, or obligatory” (Anderson, Simpson-Taylor, & Herrmann, 2004, p. 77).

The Problem

In a social setting where women are supposed to be beautiful and submissive and men are supposed to be strong and masculine, sexual energy is one consequence of the enactment of traditional gender roles. Schulz, Bohrnstedt, Borgatta, and Evans (1977) wrote that students involved in fraternity and sorority life were more likely than other students to be sexually permissive. Engaging in sexual behavior becomes an unwritten expectation of fraternity and sorority involvement, certainly not condoned by national headquarters or university standards, but present nonetheless (DeSantis, 2007). This expectation of sexual involvement creates a self-reinforcing feedback loop in a system where fraternity men and sorority women are rewarded for sexually promiscuous behavior through sexual gratification and social affirmation. Such affirmations directly influence students’ gender self-concept.

Gender self-concept indicates a perception that an individual holds about personal “characteristics, qualities, abilities, and actions” (Al-Zyoudi, 2007, p. 132). The gender self-concept ideals held by current Greek students are reflections of both the traditional gender norms established within the organizations and the highly-sexualized, hook up, casual-sexual-encounter culture attributed to the current generation (Bogle, 2008). Hooking up refers to a broad range of sexual behaviors from kissing to oral sex to sexual intercourse (Bogle, 2008; DeSantis, 2007; Sessions Stepp, 2007). It would appear that contemporary sexual behaviors, such as hook ups, resemble the pre-AIDS gay revolution
in which sex was removed from the romantic relationship and “made part of friendships” (Kimmel, 2008b, p. 196). Hooking up has essentially become “the alpha and omega of young adult romance” (Kimmel, 2008b, p. 191).

This study focused on predominantly European-American fraternities and sororities as nationally recognized by the Interfraternity Council (IFC) or National Panhellenic Council (NPC). The study occurred at Indiana State University, a predominantly white institution. In order to reflect the dynamic of the subject university, National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) fraternities and sororities were not used for this study. However, Black Greek organizations do provide an interesting topic for future research.

The pressures to be a sexually active heterosexual member of the Greek system cause stress on the roles for both men and women in the Greek and campus communities. The promiscuous behavior of hooking up leads to difficulty in how women conceptualize and perform their gender role because traditional gender norms require that women maintain a prim and virginal reputation; women must then reconstruct gender role identity to accommodate the norms of casual sexual encounters (DeSantis, 2007; Harris & Struve, 2009). Men, on the other hand, are expected to be “sexually aggressive—to score . . . regardless of how” (Warshaw & Koss, 1988, p. 21) and are berated and teased if they do not engage in sexual acts with women (Kimmel, 2008a).

Further, the gender roles experienced and practiced within the Greek community are indicative of a rape conducive culture (Boswell & Spade, 1966). Men have more social power and therefore the power to determine what is and is not acceptable sexual behavior, leaving women to comply with their desires or face being socially ostracized
(Anderson et al., 2004). Both the objectification and the complicity of women in casual sexual encounters bring Greek students into an environment where sexual interaction, sexual assault, and rape are more likely to occur (Warshaw & Koss, 1988). These environments are maintained through the social norms reinforced by the proximity of the organizations, via Greek social events, meetings, and parties (Schulz et al., 1977; Warshaw & Koss, 1988). Alcohol and any previous sexual contact may also reinforce this environment (Schulz et al., 1977; Warshaw & Koss, 1988).

**Purpose of the Study**

According to Kimmel (2008a), “gender is a performance, a form of drag, by which, through the successful manipulation of props, signs, symbols, behaviors, and emotions, we attempt to convince others of our successful acquisition of masculinity or femininity” (p. 119). It was the purpose of this study to describe the degree to which students’ gender self-concept matches traditional models of gender role and how that is related to their attitudes and behaviors in regards to sexual behavior. The degree to which a student is active or passive in traditional gender roles should explain how the student engages in sexual encounters and how accepted the student is within the community. By coming to understand the nature and thought process behind these sexual behaviors, higher education practitioners can be better prepared to establish education and outreach programs designed to address the specific habits of the population and help reduce high-risk behaviors.

**Research Questions**

1. How do Greek men and women view their gender roles within the Greek community?
2. What do Greek men and women believe are the consequences of these perceived gender roles and sexual behaviors?

3. How do these gender roles influence gender self-concept and, consequently, these students’ sexual attitudes and behavior?

Summary

The promiscuous sexual behaviors associated with traditional gender roles present a medically and psychologically unsafe dynamic for Greek students. If these behaviors continue unchecked and the culture that positively reinforces these behaviors persists, there could be significant implications and consequences for members of the Greek community. Besides the risk of contracting a sexually transmitted infection, the sexual promiscuity and lack of healthy romantic relationships can result in a misunderstanding between students and a long-lasting mistrust and caution in relationships with members of the other sex. In addition, should a sexual assault occur, the manner in which the students manage their feelings about the event could heavily influence their sense of well-being, self-esteem, and ability to trust. Without examining the self-concept behind the sexual behavior patterns, professionals cannot fully know how to conduct effective outreach education and prevention programming.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Fraternity and sorority life has offered students a socially supportive environment within the university community since its creation, providing students a reliable source of support, opportunities for leadership development, and campus involvement during their collegiate years (DeSantis, 2007). However, despite the positive aspects associated with being in a Greek-letter organization, the nature of fraternities and sororities is that of gendered clubs that reinforce traditional gender roles (DeSantis, 2007; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Sex within the Greek community, therefore, refers to both the physical act of intercourse, as well as gender—in particular, gender self-concept.

The term self-concept refers to the identification of self as a separate being or identity from others, typically focusing on three primary areas: perception of self-image, self-esteem, and how one’s behavior reflects self-image and self-esteem (Al-Zyoudi, 2007). Self-concept perceptions often “derive from interactions with significant others, self-attributions, and the overall experiential aspects of the social environment” (Byrne & Shavelson, 1987, p. 366). Therefore, while self-concept is an internalized perception of self, it is influenced by the surrounding environment and the social setting in which the individual is immersed. Gender self-concept, then, can be defined as how one perceives oneself in regards to one’s perceived gender role and sexuality.
Traditional Gender Roles and Greek Life

The traditional dichotomy of gender roles dictates the stereotypes that “males are supposed to be adventurous, assertive, aggressive, independent, and task-oriented, whereas females are seen as more sensitive, gentle, dependent, emotional, and people-oriented” (Crespi, 2003, p. 5). In tribal societies men were in a better position of power by acquiring and controlling valuable resources (e.g. food, tools, weaponry), and women shared little power, did the cooking, prepared clothing, and were primarily responsible for childcare (Marini, 1990). Since then men continue to be “viewed as more status worthy and competent overall and more competent at things that ‘count most’” (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p. 513). Women, by proxy, are better at communal tasks and are expected to be nicer than men (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p. 513). Involvement in a Greek-letter organization does not exempt students from these traditional stereotypes. Indeed, “involvement in fraternities and sororities has been shown to increase the strength of previously held ideas about gender and sex roles” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 340).

Men and women are stereotyped and categorized based on how inherently masculine or feminine they behave (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). According to Crespi (2003), “stereotyping is how we perceive each other, especially individuals outside our group. What we believe to be ‘normal’ is associated with who we are hanging out with” (p. 4). In this sense, “gender usually functions as a background identity, the effects of cultural beliefs about gender in social relational contexts . . . [and] are largely determined by more context-relevant identities and roles” (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p. 516). Therefore, the performance of masculinity or femininity results in the amount of social acceptance one experiences (Kimmel, 2008a; Ridgeway & Correl, 2004). For example,
male and female politicians must perform the expected attitudes and behaviors, or else seem “ineffective and incompetent” (Kimmel, 2008a, p. 111) and face social ostracization. The same concept holds true within fraternities and sororities.

**Masculinity.** Within the fraternity the norms of masculinity require members to appear to establish and maintain certain qualities, including: promiscuous sexual behavior, heterosexual desires, competitive outlook, athletic ability or interest, willingness to drink excessive amounts of alcohol, the ability to show sexual expertise with women, and willingness to bend to the authority of the fraternity “as a sign of loyalty, togetherness, and unity” (Martin & Hummer, 1989, p. 462). Those who oppose this conceptualization of the typical male are often less athletic, drink less, do not view sex as a conquest or right, and are likely removed from the organization or drop out during the pledge process and never become full brothers of the fraternity (Bogle, 2008).

The pledge and initiation processes are used to remove individuals who are not wholly committed to the expectations of the fraternity and developing an unbreakable bond within the fraternal infrastructure (Sanday, 2007). There is little cause for men to truly invest in a significant relationship with women because they are socially removed from the influence of women and receive social acceptance and support almost exclusively from their fraternity brothers (Harris & Struve, 2009; Sanday, 2007). Further, although “men as a group are in power (when compared with women) [they] do not feel powerful” (Kimmel, 2008a, p. 105), creating a desire to gain as much social capital as possible to remain in control. Essentially, this limits male and female interaction to purely sexual behavior or using the prestige of an individual to raise the prestige of the fraternity or gain interest from potential new members by associating with
attractive women (Rhoads, 1995). One fraternity man interviewed by Martin and Hummer (1989) detailed the experience: “We always tell the guys [potential new members] that you get sex all the time, there’s always new girls. . . . After I became Greek, I found out I could be with females at will” (p. 468).

Worthington, Bielstein Savoy, Dillon, and Vernaglia (2002) suggested “one aspect of male gender role socialization is the acceptance of a default heterosexual identity and avoidance of being perceived as gay” (p. 505). Anything that can be interpreted as gay or feminine is immediately labeled a negative. Therefore, men will behave in ways that oppose this effeminate ideal. This can include such outcomes as avoiding emotion, difficulty in developing intimate friendships with men, feeling uncomfortable with male physical contact, and engaging in sexual conquests “as a demonstration of one’s masculinity and sexual encounters that lack attachment and intimacy” (Worthington et al., 2002, pp. 505-506).

**Femininity.** Because fraternity men are perceived to hold the key to social affirmation and acceptance, sorority women feel pressured to obtain the affections of men, placing their level of physical attractiveness and feminine qualities above all others (DeSantis, 2007)—the ultimate goal being getting a boyfriend (Stombler, 1994). Being attractive, feminine, and desired by the other sex is deeply integrated into the self-worth and self-concept of the sorority women. However, while men are expected to be promiscuous and engage in sexual behavior with multiple partners, such behavior has been vilified for women and is considered “unhealthy and immoral” (Kimmel, 2008a, p. 286).
The process of sexual identity development involves “attitudinal and behavioral changes toward (a) oneself, (b) others of the same biological sex, and (c) members of the other sex” (Worthington et al., 2002, p. 505). Women are taught from an early age that being “sexually active or ‘promiscuous’ is to transgress the rules of femininity” (Kimmel, 2008a, p. 287) that are enforced by societal pressures and expectations. Promiscuous women are negatively sanctioned, labeled as sluts, and viewed by society as sexual objects rather than as potential mates for serious relationships (Sanday, 2007). Yet, in order to hold the attention of the fraternity men, a certain amount of sexual activity is expected, else the woman be declared “frigid or icicles” (Sanday, 2007, p. 139). Neither frigid nor slut labels improve a sorority’s social reputation and cause the line between being an acceptable feminine woman and a sexually expressive individual a difficult path to tread.

**Gender Influence**

Because gender is often situational or contextual, men and women will behave differently when at a fraternity party than when in the classroom, workplace, or at a job interview (Kimmel, 2008a). Gender is a “specific set of behaviors that is produced in specific social situations” (Kimmel, 2008a, p. 103). Within the fraternity and sorority environment, women are stereotyped as sex objects in the eyes of the fraternity men, and men are objectified as a means to social acceptance and status to the sorority women (Kimmel, 2008a). Further, to say men are only interested in sex indicates that women would be chaste and virginal if only men could abstain from having sex (Kimmel, 2008a). Not only does this indicate that women are incapable of being sexual beings in
their own right, “it assumes that men are, equally inevitably, violent, rapacious predators” (Kimmel, 2008a, p. 299).

By participating in traditional gender roles, attitudes, and behaviors, the foundation for how both fraternity men and sorority women approach sexual behavior is dichotomous, resulting in social acceptance based upon a performance of perceived masculinity and femininity (Kimmel, 2008a; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). The sexual expectations of men imply that a man must engage in sexual activity in order to be perceived as masculine and compete with and appease his relationships with his brothers (DeSantis, 2007; Martin & Hummer, 1989), whereas women are expected to placate the men with small amounts of physical sexual behavior (i.e., kissing, oral sex, etc.) in order to engage the men in a relationship and prove to their sisters their femininity, desirability as a female, and the positive light she can bring to her sorority’s reputation (Kimmel, 2008a).

**Sexual Behavior and Greek Life**

Although little difference can be noted between the number of sexual activities of Greek and independent students, a study conducted by Scott-Sheldon, Carey, and Carey (2008) indicated that Greek students had a considerably higher number of sexual partners than those not affiliated with Greek. However, affiliation with fraternities and sororities significantly increases the amount of peer pressure on engaging in sexual activity and places an important emphasis on social functions and dating, which creates an environment that harbors sexually promiscuous behavior (Schulz et al., 1977).

Because the expectations of sexual relationships vary significantly between men and women, the manner in which individuals engage in sexual behavior must
accommodate both genders. Hooking up, a deliberately vague term for sexual behavior ranging from kissing to intercourse, satisfies both the masculine and feminine expectations of sexual behavior (Bogle, 2008; Boswell & Spade, 1996). The vagueness of the definition allows men to claim a hook up and hope that his friends think he had sexual intercourse; on the other hand, women can claim a hook up and hope that her friends assume she did not have intercourse, allowing her to simultaneously satisfy the sexual expectations of both men and women (Kimmel, 2008b).

Hooking Up

A typical hook up begins when a fraternity man and sorority woman attend a party, drink excessive amounts of alcohol, and proceed to engage in sexual activities “with the intention of getting as much sexual, physical pleasure” as possible (Boswell & Spade, 1996, p. 139). In a survey conducted by Kimmel (2008b), survey respondents defined a hook up as kissing and non-genital touching (34 percent), manual stimulation of the genitals (19 percent), oral sex (22 percent), and sexual intercourse (23 percent).

Despite its seemingly formless definition, a hook up is a well-constructed social design within the Greek community. Parties, usually at a location of the fraternity’s choosing, are events carefully cultivated to encourage sexual promiscuity (Boswell & Spade, 1996). Alcoholic beverages are typically purchased and mixed by fraternity members, and party themes are designed for revealing and provocative outfits, such as “Anything Goes but Clothes” (Campus Grotto, 2010) or “Golf Pros and Tennis Ho’s” (Boswell & Spade, 1996; College Tips, 2010). Within this environment, the men establish a clear dominance by not only supplying the location for the party, but also the
alcoholic beverages, music, etc. (Boswell & Spade, 1996). In this way, they create the
perfect “sexual marketplace” (Kimmel, 2008a, p. 298) for a hook up.

Alcohol is typically used as a social lubricant to enhance a feeling of confidence and power, increase relaxation and sociability, and wear down any sexual resistance (Kimmel, 2008b). In a study conducted for the National Institutes of Health, Greek students reported engaging in more episodic drinking, had more sexual partners, and had more sex under the influence of alcohol or drugs than their non-Greek peers (Scott-Sheldon et al., 2008). This pattern of “getting drunk and getting her drunk” (Kimmel, 2008b, p. 219) is a very familiar concept and one that is used frequently at Greek social functions, with nearly one-fourth of fraternity members reporting that “more than ten of their friends had used alcohol in this way” (Boeringer, Shehan, & Akers, 1991).

**Relationships**

Because Greek students are heavily involved in activities on campus, are focused on their social lives, and are overcommitted to campus organizations and extracurricular activities, many Greek students view a serious relationship as an “unwanted energy drain” (Kimmel, 2008b, p. 201). In addition, a gender gap presents a difficulty when wanting to start a new relationship. Within the fraternity, men value the relationships with their brothers more highly than they do their relationships with women, even to the point of seeing women as a threat to the brotherhood (Boswell & Spade, 1996; Harris & Struve, 2009). Women, however, are often unsure about the hook up culture and relationships, feeling more pressure to attain the affections of the men to satisfy the expectations of their traditional gender role by obtaining a boyfriend (DeSantis, 2007; Kimmel, 2008a; Rhoads, 1995; Stombler, 1994). Confusion is, therefore, commonplace
for many sorority women—should one “sex it up for the men” (DeSantis, 2007, p. 69) in order to hook up or try to find a relationship partner?

Because within traditional gender roles a woman is discouraged from having multiple sexual partners when she is single, any amount of infidelity is unacceptable and grounds to receive a conduct discussion with her sisters (DeSantis, 2007; Harris & Struve, 2009). However, the opposite is true for fraternity men. When a fraternity man is involved with a girlfriend, it is seen as a challenge to the relationships that he has with his brothers (Boswell & Spade, 1996; DeSantis, 2007). Infidelity is therefore encouraged by fraternity brothers as a way to “straddle the divide between being a boyfriend and being a brother” (DeSantis, 2007, p. 54). One fraternity brother described a girlfriend as “someone you can go to at 2 a.m. after you’ve hung out with the guys. She is the sexual outlet that the guys can’t provide you with” (Boswell & Spade, 1996, p. 140).

**Sexual Assault**

Due to the gender dichotomy and unbalanced level of power within the Greek community, the re-creation of traditional gender roles establishes a rape conducive culture in which one “condones male-bonding rituals and tacitly approves fraternal-dominant, sororal-submissive, flirtatious set of norms” (Lenihan & Rawlins, 1995, p. 450). Sexual assault includes the following acts in varying “degrees of coercion and force” (Koss & Oros, 1980, p. 4): sexual contact, sexual acts, sexual imposition, gross sexual misconduct, attempted rape, and rape. In addition, any sexual act that occurs without freely given, sober consent can be classified as sexual assault (Sessions Stepp, 2007). Of the sexual assaults that occur on campuses, “almost half occurred in a fraternity house and over half occurred either during a fraternity function or [were]
perpetrated by a fraternity member” (Copenhaver & Graurholz, as cited by DeSantis, 2007, p. 97).

However, because the men are dominant in the culture, there is a strong victim-blaming attitude present in both the fraternity and sorority environments. Men and women will use stereotyped allegations, such as “she had too much to drink” or “she never should have gone upstairs” (Ehrhart & Sandler, 1985, p. 3), to justify the assault. Men may blame the assault on intoxication: that she was too drunk, that she deserved the assault, or that he was too drunk to know he was assaulting her (Warshaw & Koss, 1988). Women may keep quiet about the assault in order to avoid any negative social ramifications that would result from reporting (DeSantis, 2007). Such a report would inevitably damage a fraternity’s reputation, driving an incurable rift between the two organizations and shaking their relationships with any other Greek organizations on campus (DeSantis, 2007).

Sexual Identity Development and Social Marking

All of these elements—hooking up, relationships, and sexual assault—are representations of how students identify with their sexual identity. The development of one’s sexual identity is dependent upon multiple factors, including: culture; microsocial context; religious orientation; gender norms and socialization; biology; and systemic homo-negativity, sexual prejudice, and privilege (Worthington et al., 2002). Greek Life, in and of itself, represents a microsocial context that influences the identity development of its members by imposing its own “particular values, needs, or beliefs” (Worthington et al., 2002, p. 503), such as traditional gender expectations, as confirmed by Evans et al. (2010).
Worthington et al. (2002) suggested a theory of heterosexual identity development involving four statuses of development that can be seen in Greek students. The four statuses include: unexplored commitment, active exploration, diffusion, and deepening and commitment. These stages are interchangeable and can be repeated at any time and at any age, with the exception of unexplored commitment. In addition, individuals need not go through each status in their effort to develop their heterosexual identity. Statuses can also be repeated, depending on the individual’s experience (Worthington et al., 2002).

**Heterosexual development statuses.** The first status is unexplored commitment and represents an “unconscious acceptance of a sexual identity largely defined by the expectations of society and important people in one’s life” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 322). This status is usually reflective of “microsocial and macrosocial mandates for acceptable gender roles and sexual behavior” (Worthington et al., 2002, p. 515). This status is usually experienced during prepubescence and is the foundational point for beginning one’s journey in developing a heterosexual identity.

The second status is active exploration, which requires “careful consideration of one’s sexual desires, values, and preferred sexual activities and involves both cognitive and behavioral exploration” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 322). This status is distinguished by three factors: (a) cognitive and behavior exploration, (b) purposeful and goal-directed exploration, and (c) abandonment of traditional heterosexual expectations (Worthington et al., 2002). Such explorations could include beginning a romantic relationship with someone of a different background, social class, race, religion, etc.; experimenting with
different sexual activities; or exploring “atypical modes of sexual expression” (Worthington et al., 2002, p. 517), such as engaging in group sex.

The third status, diffusion, involves refusing to engage in exploration or commitment to their heterosexual identity (Evans et al., 2010; Worthington et al., 2002). While diffusion may include engaging in exploratory sexual behavior, it lacks the goals and directionality that active exploration holds. Diffusion is likely to occur for students when there is “identity confusion in other aspects of their lives” (Worthington et al., 2002, p. 518). The final status, deepening and commitment, occurs when individuals develop a “more thoughtful and complex understanding of their individual and group sexual identities, as well as a heightened awareness of oppression and privilege” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 323). Entering this status may occur through the process of maturational development and consequent deepening of heretofore developmentally inaccessible thoughts, feelings, or behaviors, in which behavioral and/or cognitive exhibition of an explored commitment simply deepens without the process of active exploration.

(Worthington et al., 2002, p. 519)

Students may or may not enter this stage by the time they graduate from college. However, signs that students may be in the deepening and commitment stage may include their recognition that hook up behavior may not be the best way to establish a long-term, committed relationship but to also recognize that hooking up is a necessary part of developing a heterosexual identity.

Social marking. According to Brekhus (1996), “we may practice sex in private, but we perform our sexual identities and assign sexual identities to others in public” (p.
It is this assignment of identity that provides the social marking by which individuals are judged, an important part of Greek life. Social marking, then, can be defined as “how individuals and institutions who have already internalized the general cultural categories assign sexual identities to others” (Brekhus, 1996, p. 499).

**Elements of sexual identity.** This social marking is based on five key aspects of sexual identity formation and the perceived expectations of those aspects: quantity, timing, degree of consent, orientation, and social value of agents (Brekhus, 1996). The key aspects are evaluated, traditionally, on a “trinary model of markedness” (Brekhus, 1996, p. 501), where an individual can be identified as perverse, generic, or exceptional.

Quantity refers to the number of sexual encounters one has, as well as the number of sexual partners. One is evaluated based on this number in that “‘sluts’ are marked off as a morally inferior category from the ‘normal’ population of sexually active women” (Brekhus, 1996, p. 503). Timing, in regards to sexual behavior, describes how quickly one engages in sexual behavior. For example, “women are marked as ‘sluts’ if they acquiesce to male sexual demands on the first meeting” (Brekhus, 1996, p. 503). Brekhus (1996) said that women will often wait for the man to make the first move so as not to appear sexually promiscuous. The degree of consent refers to the level of consent one obtains before engaging in a sexual activity. Identities such as “exhibitionist” or “rapist” are labeled as “‘perverse’ because they involved insufficient consent” (Brekhus, 1996, p. 505) before beginning the sexual act. This is evidenced by men not getting proper consent before engaging in a hook up with a woman. On the other side of the spectrum are those men and women who refuse to accept consent, do not engage in sexual behavior, and end up being labeled as a prude (Brekhus, 1996).
A fourth aspect of sexual identity is the sexual orientation of the individual. This includes marks in gender preference (e.g. heterosexual/homosexual), as well as other preference markers, such as age, religion, species, etc. (Brekhus, 1996). Labels for these various preference markers include “pedophile,” “interfaith couple,” “zoophiliacs,” respectively (Brekhus, 1996, p. 505). The final aspect refers to the social value of agents. For example, “the relatively lower status of women relative to men has consequences for the assignment of identity” (Brekhus, 1996, p. 506). This determines whether one is labeled a slut or a stud.

The evaluation of these perceived sexual identities forms the foundation for both positive and negative social consequences of sexual behavior.

Sexual identities are the products of shifting moral and social boundaries rather than natural unchanging categories. They are made to appear natural, however, because by accenting only the marked poles of a continuum, we treat marked categories as though they existed completely independent from the larger “generic” population. (Brekhus, 1996, p. 511)

Ergo, how one does or does not engage in sexual behavior involves an element of risk. Students may develop a public reputation among the community, whether positive or negative. The definition of what is natural or appropriate is determined by the students in the Greek community. The research would suggest that the more men engage in sexual behavior, the more accepted they are within the community. Women, however, become more socially ostracized the more they engage in promiscuous sexual behavior.
Summary

The gender expectations and sexual behaviors established within the Greek community are traditions that have persisted since the creation of Greek-letter organizations. Therefore, “changing Greek structures, values and practices is slow and difficult . . . because these shared attitudes reflect a generalized social set that supports male-dominant, female-submissive social roles” (Lenihan & Rawlins, 1994, p. 450). These strictly structured social norms prevent fraternity and sorority members from fully exploring individual potential and limit healthy relationships between men and women in order to fulfill a perceived gender expectation, resulting in hook-up behaviors, weak relationships between men and women, and even sexual assault.

An increased sense of self needs to be better established among fraternity and sorority students, not as members of an organization but as individuals. Students must be taught how to establish healthy relationships, instead of engaging in haphazard relationships thrown together for sexual gratification and social approval. Further, a better understanding of what constitutes sexual assault and rape needs to be filtered through these organizations so that they have the ability to recognize assault should it occur. It is the purpose of this study to examine the degree to which students’ gender self-concept matches the traditional models of gender roles and how that is related to their attitudes about sexual activity so that better education can be established for students.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of heterosexual members of Greek-letter organizations about traditional gender roles and how their gender self-concept affects their conceptualization of sexuality and sexual behavior. For the purpose of this study, gender self-concept was defined as how students perceived their gender role and the sexual behaviors that result from that perception (Al-Zyoudi, 2007; Byrne & Shavelson, 1987). The study used interview-based qualitative methodologies and thematic analysis in answering the research questions.

Phenomenological Qualitative Research

I elected to conduct a qualitative study of gender self-concept and sexual behavior in order to “explore [the] topic in a way that yields rich data impossible to obtain through surveys, document analysis, or observation” (Stage & Manning, 2003, p. 351). Data were examined in a phenomenological manner, a method focusing on “the essence or structure of an experience (phenomenon)” (Merriam, 1998, p. 15). Because phenomenological study focuses on the experience of the individual, “‘bracketing’ taken-for-granted assumptions and usual ways of perceiving” (Lester, 1999, p. 1), it was the best approach for this study as I wanted to examine those behaviors that seem commonplace and ask participants to further examine them. From this, I was able to
determine different meanings behind these behaviors by exposing “taken-for-granted assumptions [and challenging] a comfortable status quo” (Lester, 1999, p. 4).

The phenomena for this study were determined based upon my own understanding of the Greek system and the role sexual behavior played during my experience, coupled with the investigation of recurring themes gathered from individual interviews in order to determine the “general essence” (Merriam, 1998, p.16) of the phenomenon. Phenomenology focuses “on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience” (Patton, 2002, p. 107), allowing for a better understanding of the group’s experience as a whole. The themes or phenomena discovered were evaluated to determine “the essence or structure” (Merriam, 1998, p. 15) of the Greek gender self-concept and sexual behavior experience.

**Participants**

Participants for this study were undergraduate students who were active members of a nationally recognized Interfraternity Council (IFC) fraternity or National Panhellenic Council (NPC) sorority. Both of these are traditionally composed of European American students. In addition, students identified themselves as heterosexual. I recruited five men and seven women from different Greek chapters on a single campus in order to have diversity in Greek affiliation, so as not to present a case study about any one chapter but rather an examination of the larger group.

**Recruiting participants.** Participants were recruited through public announcements made via email. The announcement requested students to participate in one-on-one interviews (see Appendix A). In addition, students were encouraged to recruit their friends to participate in the study, resulting in snowball sampling. Snowball
sampling allows for “participants and informants with whom contact has already been made [to] use their social networks to refer the research to other people who could potentially participate in or contribute to the study” (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005, p. 5).

My friends and colleagues also served as recruitment tools as they forwarded my email to students they thought would be interested in participating. Participants were directed to contact me, and willing participants were selected on the basis of the following criteria: current enrollment in the university, current active membership in a nationally recognized Greek-letter organization, and self identification as a heterosexual. An email was sent to all 22 of the chapter presidents, as well as the two assistant directors of Fraternity and Sorority Life and two graduate assistants for Fraternity and Sorority Life. One student responded to the email and 11 students were referred by students, friends, and colleagues.

**Exclusion criteria.** Exclusion criteria included non-active members of IFC or NPC Greek organizations or identification as a gay or lesbian individual. Although I recognize that individuals who are gay or lesbian are valued and active members of fraternities and sororities, the primary focus of this research was to consider gender self-concept and sexual behavior among heterosexual individuals. Further, while there are many fraternities and sororities that are not affiliated with IFC or NPC, the focus of this study is designed to reflect the experience and demographics of the subject university. Therefore, organizations that are not affiliated with IFC or NPC were not included for this particular study but do provide an interesting topic for future research. Of those who
responded to the request for participants, none of the willing participants met these exclusion criteria and were therefore eligible to participate in the study.

**Participant risks and benefits.** Any risks, discomforts, or inconveniences associated with the study were minor and were not reported by participants. Potential discomforts included: psychological distress about sexual behaviors and experience, such as remorse, concern, or other negative emotions in regards to the participants’ reflection. In order to minimize the risk of the aforementioned discomforts, I was willing to rephrase or abandon questions that made the participant feel uncomfortable. In addition, participants were provided a list of on campus resources to help them deal with any feelings resulting from the interviews or to learn more about coping strategies for negative emotions (see Appendix B). If discomfort became a problem, the participant had the option to discontinue participation. While the participants did not benefit directly from their participation in the study, some students admitted that they had never considered what gender and sexual behavior had meant to them prior to the interview. Many were reflective of the culture but had no intentions of changing their behavior.

**Data Collection Method**

**Individual interviews.** Once a participant identified interest in participating in the study, I ensured that the student met the inclusion/exclusion criteria for the study. Next, I arranged a time and place to meet privately to conduct the interview. Before the interview began the participant and I reviewed the informed consent form and allowed time for the participant to ask questions and sign the informed consent document (see Appendix C). Each participant completed an interview focusing on his or her experience in a Greek organization, the participant’s gender self-concept, and how both of these
elements relate to the participant’s sexual behavior. While the actual time of the
interviews varied per participant, the majority of the interviews lasted approximately 30
minutes. Interviews were digitally recorded to maintain a research record. After the
interview was complete, participants were provided a list of resources to assist with any
emotional issues that may have surfaced because of the interview.

All of the interviews were digitally recorded, and notes were taken during the
interviews. The recording of these interviews were necessary to ensure the accuracy of
data collected. From these recordings, important quotes and thoughts were transcribed
for support in the final analysis of the data. No other individual had access to be able to
hear these interviews in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants. All
interview recording files will be destroyed after three years, as per Institutional Review
Board regulations.

All notes and transcribed quotes from these interviews were written using
pseudonyms and without any identifiers in order to protect the participants’ anonymity.
These documents were also kept in a password-protected file on a password-protected
computer. Only Dr. Will Barratt and I have access to these notes. All documents seen by
Dr. Will Barratt used pseudonyms only; only I have access to the legal names of the
participants. All notes will be destroyed after three years.

All informed consent documents will be kept in a secure and separate location
from the audio files and notes. They have been stored in a locked file cabinet and will be
destroyed after three years.

**Interview questions.** The interview questions developed for this study were
based primarily upon questions used by researchers identified through the literature
review, and additional questions were crafted based on the personal knowledge and consideration of the researcher (see Appendix D). The questions were presented in an order designed to create a sense of comfort and trust with the participant by slowly easing into questions about sexuality and gender self-concept. In addition, questions were arranged for participants to consider their peers’ behaviors before analyzing personal behaviors, so that participants would feel more comfortable and confident about their own experiences in relation to the group at large.

Although the following set of questions was used for the interviews, I used a semi-structured interview method, which allowed for spontaneous questions as the interview and emerging themes allowed. The following questions were utilized during all of the interviews:

One. What does it mean to you to be a man? A woman? What makes you a man? A woman? This question is related to gender self-concept. By understanding what it means to be a man or woman according to the student, I was able to determine what their gender self-concept is.

Two. On that same token, what does it mean to be a brother in your chapter? A sister? Do you think other members of your chapter have the same idea? I further delved into the student’s gender self-concept by examining how their definition compares to the definition of the chapter as a whole.

Three. Why did you decide to join a Greek organization? What made you choose your current chapter? This question helped to ascertain the student’s interests not only socially, but what he or she values in an organization. It also helped to ease the
student into the interview and helped to make him or her feel comfortable by talking about something they already know and have thought about.

**Four.** I’ve heard a lot of different definitions from students about what it means to “hook up.” What does it mean to you? What does a typical hook up look like? This question formed the foundation for the following questions about hook up and sexual behaviors for this student. I needed to understand what he or she thinks is a hook up, rather than going on my own interpretation of what a hook up is.

**Five.** Other students have told us that they feel like they are sort of expected to hook up. What do you think about that? By giving social permission, I helped make the student feel more at ease about answering honestly. This allowed for a glimpse of gender self-concept by determining whether the student felt a social pressure to engage in sexual behaviors or if they were more independently driven to hook up. Further, it also showed insight into the student’s opinion about his or her sexual behaviors as well as the behaviors of others.

**Six.** Do you like hooking up? Other than the obvious reason, that it feels good, why continue “hooking up?” What’s in it for you? I wanted to further examine motivation behind the sexual behaviors beyond the need for sexual gratification in order to better understand how the student feels he or she must act as a sexual being. This question related to gender self-concept and the resulting sexual behavior.

**Seven.** How do you hook up? What method(s) do you use? Why? In understanding what methods were used to engage in sexual behaviors, the students became more reflective of the actions they are utilizing in order to fulfill their desire to hook up.
Eight. Who do you talk to about your hook ups? Why that person(s)? The person in whom the student confides basic sexual information can be indicative of how they want their sexual encounters to be perceived. If a student tells his or her whole chapter, then he or she is looking for the social affirmation for his or her action. If a student tells no one or only one person, he or she is looking for something more private and personal in his or her experience.

Nine. What’s the difference between a hook up and a relationship? Which do you see most often among your brothers/sisters? By determining the perception of what is most prevalent in the community, I determined what the Greek experience brought and the perceived expectations in regards to sexual behavior and interpersonal relationships.

Data Analysis

Simultaneous data collection and analysis were conducted in order to ensure the accuracy of the data received. According to Merriam (1998), simultaneous data collection allows for “the final product [to be] shaped by the data that are collected and the analysis that accompanies the entire process” (p. 162). After each interview was complete, I listened to the recording multiple times in order to fully understand the experience of the student and his or her interpretations of those events. I completed this task after every interview. In accordance with suggestions by Merriam (1998), I took extensive notes indicating the response to each question and any subsequent questions asked during the interview and made a transcription of quotations that were supportive of and relevant to the emerging themes.
After this intensive listening, the resulting data were analyzed using phenomenological analysis (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). Phenomena or categories were constructed based upon “recurring pattern[s]” (Merriam, 1998, p. 179) present in the data. These categories proved to be a list of themes, as well as supporting examples from participants for each theme, and were developed and adjusted to note “cultural and social regularities” (Merriam, 1998, p. 156). To further ensure the accuracy of the data, Dr. William Barratt, faculty advisor, conducted a separate analysis of themes based upon the notes from each interview. Through both his analysis and mine, we were able to identify strong themes discovered from the data.

Researcher’s Background

While I attended my undergraduate institution I joined a Greek organization that helped form the foundation for leadership, friendship, sisterhood, and understanding the importance of becoming engaged with campus culture. Most of what I experienced was positive and pushed me to become a better student, leader, and individual. However, the culture surrounding sexual behavior was always very intriguing and surprising to me. Hooking up was commonplace among my sisters and among the Greek community. While I never felt a pressure to do so, hooking up only seemed natural and just part of what it meant to be a Greek college student on my campus. On the other hand, though, the sisters who hooked up too often became the subjects of gossip and scorn within the sorority. Meanwhile, the sisters who did not hook up seemed to disappear within the organization. They were never talked about, weren’t popular, and were generally forgotten by the majority of the chapter.
Aside from the hook up culture I sensed in the community, one particular instance is significant in regards to this study. During my second year, one of my sisters was sexually assaulted at a party hosted by a fraternity. Although I cautioned her and tried to pull her away from the situation, she resisted and stayed at the party. After I left, she was assaulted. I will never forget sitting on the red couches in the sorority house the next day listening to her recount the night and worry about sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, and her reputation in the house. She never reported the assault. It was after her experience and my failure to prevent it from happening that I really wanted to explore the nature of sexual behavior in the Greek community and learn how to better provide education and outreach for Greek students.

As the researcher, I am “the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data and, as such, can respond to the situation by maximizing opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful information” (Merriam, 1998, p. 20). However, as human analysis is fallible, I am subject to my personal biases, experiences, and interpretations of the data collected (Merriam, 1998). I am a 23-year old White woman currently affiliated with the alumni chapter of my sorority. Through my own experience in Greek Life as a sorority member, I became aware of the sexualized culture present in fraternity and sorority culture and wondered about its origin. After witnessing fraternity men and sorority women use alcohol as a prelude to sexual behavior, seeing students engaging in promiscuous sexual interactions, and talking with sorority sisters who had been assaulted at parties, the need for research on this subject seemed apparent to me. Therefore, I have an invested interest in the subject, which may affect my interpretation of the interview data.
CHAPTER 4

Participants

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of gender self-concept on sexual behavior of students involved with fraternity and sorority life. To explore this, individual interviews were conducted and analyzed using phenomenological qualitative research methods. The interviews conducted were based upon the following research questions:

1. How do Greek men and women view their gender roles within the Greek community?
2. What do Greek men and women feel are the consequences of these perceived gender roles and sexual behaviors?
3. How do these gender roles influence gender self-concept and, consequently, these students’ sexual attitudes and behavior?

The interviews conducted were approximately 30 minutes in length and consisted of nine pre-determined questions. Additional questions were asked during the process of the interview to seek further clarification of an answer or to seek information about any emerging themes. This chapter is designed to introduce the background of the subject institution and the role that Greek Life plays on campus, as well as introduce the
participants’ stories and experiences. Analysis of data and the resulting themes will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Understanding the Environment

The participants were all current undergraduate attendees of Indiana State University, a mid-sized public institution in the Midwest with a Fall 2010 enrollment of 9,373 undergraduate students. Seventy-five percent of the student population is Caucasian and 19.5 percent are students of color. While over 100 majors are offered, the following represent the top five undergraduate majors within the university: elementary, early, and special education; criminology and criminal justice; nursing; business administration; and physical education.

Nearly 1000 students are involved in Fraternity and Sorority Life, encompassing 13 IFC fraternities, nine NPC sororities, and four NPHC fraternities and sororities. Greek students represent the “largest social atmosphere on campus” (Indiana State University, 2010). They participate in philanthropic and community service activities, leadership development seminars, and university traditions, such as Homecoming and Spring Week.

Participant Introduction and Stories

All of the participants met the inclusion requirements. They have all been given pseudonyms. Their respective chapters have also been given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Table 1 describes the demographics of the participants. Their stories are arranged here in alphabetical order. It is important to note, the majority of participants (11 of the 12) defined hooking up in the same way—a physical act between two
individuals with little to no emotional attachment. Hook up behaviors ranged from simple kissing to sexual intercourse.

Anna’s story. Anna is a third year member of her Greek chapter. Although she never planned on joining a sorority, Anna began college feeling homesick and shy. Her boyfriend had joined a fraternity and was thoroughly enjoying the experience, so she decided to become Greek.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Chapter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Upsilon Sigma Omega</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darren</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Iota Phi Delta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erika</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Gamma Zeta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Alpha Beta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Alpha Beta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leann</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Omega Phi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Alpha Beta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missy</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Omega Phi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Omicron Delta Pi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Omicron Delta Pi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Tau Mu Theta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trevor</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Omicron Delta Pi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
as well. When she met the women of her chapter, Anna said, “I just knew. I just, I felt right at home.”

According to Anna, womanhood revolves around being feminine but also being strong. She feels that women are expected to “handle more things,” like being in charge of the household, having a career, etc. While hooking up is traditionally seen as a one-night stand, Anna pointed out that hooking up could also occur within a relationship. She believed that hook ups are “only negative if you’re not in a relationship.” Outside of a relationship, however, she did not approve of engaging in sexual behavior, other than kissing.

In addition, hooking up proves an interesting dynamic in how men and women view themselves. Anna claimed, “Girls might feel more guilty about it . . . because women tend to think that sex is more of a special thing, more valuable, whereas men just want it for the pleasure or the fun.” Because of this, Anna suspects that women hook up because of low self-esteem. She believes that hooking up makes the women feel wanted by men and temporarily boosts their self-esteem.

**Darren’s story.** Darren is a first year Greek member of his fraternity. He was originally drawn to Greek life because of traditional stereotypes (i.e. partying and alcohol) but found that fraternity life offered much more than he had anticipated. He joined because the members shared similar backgrounds and experiences. “They were all from where I came from,” he said. “Just down-to-earth, country type of people.”

Darren represents his masculinity through his confidence, demeanor, and reliability to complete projects when expected. However, he does not believe in any one representation of masculinity.
[Men] come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. Like, I mean, you have people like Brad Pitt out there that are just, like, the perfect guy. And then you have people like Obama that he goes about his business and takes care of what he has to do. And then there’s the people that work digging ditches. I mean, it’s just, it’s not like there’s really one typical man.

He did not really identify with traditional gender stereotypes, noting that women can have the same types of personality characteristics as men.

Darren is currently involved in a committed relationship, but has been a witness to the hook up culture since he joined the fraternity.

It just seems like people, kind of, get together . . . like high school prom where people kind of, like, get in their little groups and stuff. Just seems like that, you know. They’ll disappear for an hour and then come back.

While Darren does not believe individuals attend parties for the sole purpose of hooking up, he does believe that the party scene offers a good opportunity for the hook up to occur. “They don’t go to parties to hook up. It just so happens that it [hooking up] happens . . . you get a little impaired [with alcohol] and things happen.”

Although Darren is currently involved in a committed relationship and does not engage in hook up behaviors, he offered an interesting view on the role hooking up plays within fraternities and sororities. Hook ups seem to be the way relationships usually start, according to Darren. He supposes that nearly 50 percent of his brothers are in serious relationships. However, if a hook up does not lead to a relationship, he still sees value in the encounter:
If [a hook up] happens and it’s over with, but they still know each other, then it can help network other fraternities and sororities to get together. Maybe help other people meet other sororities to come around or anything like that.

**Erika’s story.** Erika is currently a second year member of a sorority. She originally went through sorority recruitment because her roommate convinced her to give Greek life a try. When Erika met the women of her sorority, she thought they were nice and unique. When she met a woman who was the same major as her, Erika was sold and joined the organization. For Erika, being a woman involves expressing herself in a feminine manner, whether it is the way she portrays her personality, the way she dresses, or her emotions. In being feminine, you “associate yourself with other women.” In essence, however, Erika said, “If you feel like you’re a woman, then you’re a woman.”

In general, Erika feels that her sisters use hooking up for the excitement of a new thing. However, if someone is looking for a relationship, she feels that hooking up is “pointless.” In fact, she believes that women feel less confident after a hook up. She said,

They don’t really feel that they can just hook up. That they have to hook up if they want to [start a relationship] with a guy, rather than maybe, if . . . we take things slow, we don’t hook up this one time and wait a little bit, and then we move on to the hooking up stage a little later.

Men, on the other hand, approach things a little bit differently, she believed.

Men are more confident about it. And it’s more of a thing to brag about, like kind of a way to say, "This is how confident I am. I can get this girl, this many girls,
this girl,” you know? Whereas women are—it shows their low self-esteem, their low confidence, how many guys they hook up with.

**Heather’s story.** Heather is a fourth year member of her sorority. She joined a sorority because she knew people who were involved with Greek life and decided to go through the recruitment process with her friends. When she met the women of her chapter, she said, “I kind of just felt like that’s where I belonged, I guess.” The sisterhood of the chapter has held Heather in the organization. To her, sisterhood is “giving everything you have to [the sorority] and all the girls in it.” While defining sisterhood was no problem for Heather, she struggled to define what being a woman meant to her. She described womanhood as being a friend and sister, successful, responsible, and “just being a good person.” She also made a note to say that she expects such characteristics of both men and women.

Because Heather is involved in a serious relationship, she has never felt pressure to hook up, but she was certain that other people would feel the pressure to do so. “Girls probably feel [pressured] because they’re trying to get a boyfriend, is my opinion. I don’t think that’s why guys do it though. [They do it] because they want to hook up with as many people as they can,” she said. However, because of this, Heather suspects that “lots of people are getting into stuff they don’t want.” She believes the behavior continues because the individuals are lonely and end up replacing an emotional connection with a physical one.

**Laura’s story.** Laura is a second year member of a sorority. She originally joined because she wanted to be involved on campus and make more friends. She felt that, unless you are involved on campus, there is nothing to do. When she met the
women of her sorority, she thought, “they’re really cute,” liked the people she met, and felt very welcomed. The sisterhood of the chapter has since kept her invested.

Until asked, Laura had never really considered what it meant to be a woman. She felt the need to try harder than men (e.g., in the business world) and has often been the subject of sorority girl and cheerleader stereotypes, such as being considered ditzy or dumb. “But sometimes I will even stereotype myself [laughs].”

Involved in a committed relationship, Laura is relieved that she does not have to hook up. “I would feel labeled as slut,” she said. “I wouldn’t feel good about myself.”

Women who hook up a lot are looked down on because of what they do, even though no one actually says anything to their faces. Despite establishing a negative reputation and becoming victims of gossip, Laura suspects that women continue hooking up in order to begin a relationship with a man or to boost their social status. By hooking up with a man who has a lot of social capital (e.g., active in a fraternity, member of an athletic team), the woman feels she has greater social capital.

Another significant aspect of the hook up that Laura has noticed is the importance of using alcohol as a social lubricant. Laura related a story about one of her sisters who routinely will chug alcohol to prepare for someone to come over and hook up. Alcohol also serves as an excuse should the woman regret a sexual encounter the next morning. They want to “feel less bad about it during the act, to get it started; they don’t care what they say or do,” Laura said.

**Leann’s story.** Leann is a first-year member of Greek life. She joined a Greek organization to be a part of something on campus. She wanted the bond of friendship that can be found within a sorority and decided to go through recruitment. After meeting
with the women from her sorority, Leann felt an instant bond with them. She felt the chapter was unique. “You don’t have to be a certain size or have blonde hair,” she said. “You can just be yourself.” Leann believes that being a woman means being soft and feminine, wearing more fitting clothes and looking pretty. She said that women are “not supposed to be masculine or firm.”

When it comes to hooking up, being physically intimate with a partner, Leann believes in two definitions: (a) a random one-night stand or (b) hooking up on a regular basis but not being in a committed relationship. While she does not like the hook up culture and feels that it is degrading, she feels that “it’s easier to hook up than to be in an actual relationship.” Within the last semester, in fact, Leann was involved in a hook up relationship that merely focused on the physical aspect of the relationship, with little to no emotional commitment.

Indeed, this type of relationship she feels is common among her sisters, primarily because hooking up requires less time and effort than a relationship. “People are too busy,” she said. On the other hand, though, Leann admitted, “Sometimes I do think hooking up isn’t the best because, in the long run, people do get hurt, because someone always forms feelings. They say they won’t. But they always do.”

**Madison’s story.** Madison is a second year member of her sorority. She began her college career at another institution and transferred to Indiana State University for her sophomore year of college. She wanted to get “a real college experience.” As soon as Madison had made the decision to transfer to Indiana State University, one of her friends, who was a member of the sorority, immediately recruited Madison.
When asked to think about what it meant to be a woman, Madison listed the following: periods, babies, being taken advantage of easier than men, and being known as the weaker sex—“and we kind of are.” She described herself as being girly, wearing pink and pretty colors, and liking diamonds. Her goal is to become a housewife.

Like many of the other participants, Madison is currently involved in a committed relationship. While Madison does not hook up and declares that she has more self-worth than to do so, she feels a lot of women get social approval if they do hook up. However, if a woman hooks up a lot, she is called a slut behind her back. While Madison claims that it is primarily the women who engage in this sort of gossip, she knows fraternity men who also disapprove of promiscuous behavior. "They don’t want to hang out with you if you’re a slut," Madison explained, "unless they want to get laid."

Missy’s story. A fourth year member of a sorority, Missy joined in order to have a sisterhood. She had had many male friends and really wanted a female connection with women on campus. She selected her chapter because she felt the women were a little bit different. “We’re nerds,” she said. “We’re goofy. We talk about the grossest things. We’re gross. [laughs] And we’re nerds. And we’re not, and I don’t know if everyone else is, but we’re not typical.”

When asked about femininity, Missy’s first reaction was “empowering.” She went on to explain

I think women in general, they need to be more aggressive. Just how the society has been set as far back as you can go; it’s been a very patriarchal society. Our jobs have always been these subservient sort of things, from what I can tell. If you are this empowering, aggressive woman, you’re a bitch. So, you know, you
have that stigma against you to begin with. . . I think you almost have to prove yourself. It’s a tough job.

Although she has been in a committed relationship for several years, Missy has been a witness to the hook up culture and does not appreciate what it offers. “I think you lose respect for yourself,” she said. “And I think that people lose respect for you when you engage in these things.” While she believes that many women will utilize hooking up to establish a relationship with a man, Missy does not believe this is an appropriate or even effective way to develop a committed relationship.

Good or bad, Missy feels that there is a certain amount of pressure not to engage in sexual behavior, but to be experienced in sexual behavior. “I definitely feel that there’s a pressure to be experienced and I think that girls feel that they need to have as many partners as guys do.” But when her sisters do claim to have multiple partners, it is “overshadowing” and the chapter often views the women differently.

**Ryan’s story.** Ryan is a third year member of his fraternity. In joining a Greek organization, Ryan wanted more than just partying and climbing “the social ladder,” as he put it. He found that, in his fraternity, they offered an experience that was different from the typical stereotypes. “I wanted to accomplish something and seemed like they could help me do it,” he said.

For Ryan, masculinity is represented through independence and self-sufficiency, as well as the ability to get work done. “Not that women are more dependent by any means. . . In American culture, men have to be more self-sufficient and kind of do things not necessarily on their own, but handle things by themselves,” he said. In that,
the fraternity offers an opportunity both to prove oneself and provide a source of competition. “There are a lot of egos,” he said. “You gotta stick out in a crowd.”

Although Ryan does not use the term "hook up," he believes that it is an important part of the collegiate experience. “It’s good to have,” he said. “I think that going out and meeting girls, or guys, and having that sort of relationship is extremely beneficial to personal growth.” He appreciates the opportunity to push the boundaries of learning—in this case, learning about one’s own sexuality. By engaging in such behavior, he feels it breaks down the negative stigma surrounding sexual behavior.

If you treat it like it’s bad, then it’s going to be viewed as this sort of. . . . It’s embarrassing to go out and buy condoms, it’s embarrassing to go out and buy the morning after pill if that’s what you actually need, and I think the Victorian era is over and [morals] should act accordingly.

Ryan believes that hook ups, therefore, provide an opportunity for individuals to be open about their sexual awareness and allow for greater opportunities for learning about “population growth, sexually transmitted diseases, etc.”

Scott’s story. Scott is a second year fraternity member. Originally in the Air Force ROTC, Scott was drawn to his chapter by the standards of excellence required of members. He appreciated what the men wanted to achieve and what they believed in. Scott believes that masculinity is seen in one’s leadership abilities. A man is formed from the legacy he creates and the heritage from which he originates. According to Scott, his social and ethical behavior and passion to do what is right are what makes him a man. The standards of his fraternity echo these beliefs.
Hooking up represents one of two things for Scott: a one night stand or even the beginning of a relationship. He views hooking up as a positive social aspect ensuring person-to-person contact in a world with increasing technology and fewer in-person interactions. While there are some positive social aspects to the hook up, Scott noted that it is not always the goal of attending a party.

Most people are like, “Eh, I’m just going to go have a good time tonight.” Other people are like, “I’m gonna go look for somebody.” Others look for somebody to just hang out with for a little bit or just start talking to.

As for Scott, he was one of those individuals who was determined to go looking for somebody. His current relationship began because he hooked up with the woman who would later become his girlfriend.

**Sean’s story.** Sean is a third year fraternity member and the only African-American individual in the study. While he originally thought that fraternities were about getting drunk and “doing stupid things,” Sean learned that there is much more to fraternity membership. He was attracted to his fraternity because of their high academic expectations and the feeling that the members accepted him for who he was. “Being African-American that’s hard, especially going into an all-White fraternity. They’re obviously going to be judgmental, no matter what anyone says. But they didn’t look at that; they just kind of look at me as a person,” Sean said.

For Sean, masculinity means “being able to take care of yourself, being responsible, knowing right from wrong, and know what you should do for others instead of just doing it for yourself.” On the other hand, he feels that women should be a “comforter.” He described his mom as a comforting, supportive woman, and reiterated
that women should be “caring for others and . . . use their energy and their strengths to enhance their own [relationships].”

According to Sean, hooking up describes a wide range of behaviors. “Sometimes you’ll get those people that will like say, ‘Oh, well I hooked up with this girl there, and we did everything’ and they really just kissed. And she was just, like, ‘get away from me,’” he said. However, he did stipulate that the ultimate goal of the hook up may be different. Most women, he suspected, are wanting to get to know a person, while the men are more interested in sexual intercourse.

In my perspective, 9 times out of 10, a guy’s going to pursue a girl because he thinks she’s hot and he wants to try to get with her. . . . Testosterone kicks in and guys don’t think about much past boobs and vaginas. Because of this, he feels it would be easier for a woman to go to a party and find a partner to hook up than it would be for a man.

Trevor’s story. Trevor is a first year fraternity member. Despite the popular culture persona of Greek life, Trevor decided to join a fraternity based upon a friend who was active in his fraternity. Trevor found that he liked what the chapter stood for and could subscribe to the values of the fraternity. While he thought about rushing other fraternities, he enjoyed that his fraternity offered a dry rush. He felt it showed the members’ maturity and their dedication to something other than partying.

To Trevor, men should be subjects of respect. Being a fraternity man, however, includes additional expectations, including: competing with other fraternities, upholding the values of the organization, and doing the right thing. He feels that while other
fraternities may have strong members, the ideal of being a “gentleman” is better upheld by his organization.

Trevor believes that the hook up does not include any amount of physical activity. Rather, it represents the beginning of relationship. “I take it as maybe starting to talk or text or maybe talk on a more regular basis. You know, might lead to a date,” he said. The hook up is “building something that will lead to something more.” By his definition, Trevor likes the hook up culture and finds it useful in his ultimate goal: finding a girlfriend.

However, any amount of physical sexual behavior Trevor categorizes as a one-night stand. While he knows this occurs, he does not believe that such behavior is truly representative of what the fraternity values. “It’s just not a gentleman thing to do. . . . I don’t see it as being the right thing to do.” He suspects that people engage in these one-night stands because of the collegiate environment.

People use the excuse of being in college and doing it now while you’re young. . . . I’ve heard some people talk about the instance afterwards. Maybe talk about a one-night stand at, you know, the next day or something. And they’d be like, “Well, I wish it wouldn’t have happened, but I’m in college. I’m young. I’ll do it now before I get older and get married.”
CHAPTER 5

Themes and Findings

This thesis study was designed to explore the role that gender self-concept plays on the sexual behavior of students in Greek-letter organizations. Individual interviews were conducted and assessed to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Greek men and women view their gender roles within the Greek community?
2. What do Greek men and women feel are the consequences of these perceived gender roles and sexual behaviors?
3. How do these gender roles influence gender self-concept and, consequently, these students’ sexual attitudes and behavior?

The interview data were analyzed to identify major themes in order to determine “the essence or structure of an experience” (Merriam, 1998, p. 15). The themes were identified through simultaneous data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998) and confirmed by a second researcher. Through this analysis, three major themes were found to be common if they were discussed by at least seven of the 12 participants, indicating a theme rather than individual experience. These themes included:

1. Limited conscious considerations of gender role.
2. Sexual activity without emotional connection.
3. Development of sexual identity and the community.

An additional minor theme was identified through the evaluation of the interviews. However, it did not meet the commonality requirement of the other three themes. This minor theme was only discussed by four of the participants. While it did not permeate the research to the extent of the other themes, this minor theme warrants consideration. This final minor theme is the understanding and response to sexual assault within the Greek community.

**Limited Conscious Considerations of Gender Role**

Gender identity does not seem to be an active conscious and articulated factor in the lives of Greek men and women. When asked what it meant to them to be a man or woman, the majority of participants reported having never considered the matter. “It’s not like there’s really one typical man,” Darren said. He instead reported that the personality traits that made him a man would be the same traits that made him a woman—he identified more with his own personal identity, rather than a gender identity. Heather offered a similar view. “I don’t really know how to answer that,” she said. She began listing personality traits that she valued, such as being involved, successful, responsible, and “just being a good person.” However, she attributed all of these traits to both men and women. Given the lack of conscious consideration of gender, the participants still mentioned qualities that can be associated with traditional gender roles.

**Men.** While not directly identified as strictly male traits, the participants reported qualities associated with traditional gender norms. Scott described masculinity as being seen as a leader and a figure of his ethnic heritage and felt he would be judged based upon the legacy he leaves behind. Similarly, Trevor argued that living up to the values of
the fraternity, upholding respect for everyone, and engaging in competition with other fraternities was representative of what a man should do. Ryan agreed. “There are a lot of egos. You’ve got to stick out in a crowd,” he said.

Further, independence seemed to be a significant factor for masculinity. Ryan said that the ability to be independent was how a man needed to prove himself. “Not that women are more dependent by any means, but in American culture, men have to more self-sufficient and kind of do things, not necessarily on their own, but handle things themselves,” he said. Sean offered a similar view. “Being able to take care of yourself, being responsible, knowing right from wrong, and knowing, kind of, what you should do for others instead of just doing it for yourself [is what makes you a man],” he said.

When it comes to sexual behavior, all the men agreed that their main focus was to begin a relationship with a woman. However, all of the male participants, except one, were currently involved in committed relationships. This may influence the way in which they view the goal of sexual behavior. They all admitted they had brothers or knew of other men who were primarily interested in sexual relationships with women, rather than emotional long-term relationships. While he did not believe his brothers expected him to hook up, Ryan felt a pressure from society, “as part of that sociological manhood, where you hook up with all sorts of girls.”

Women. The traditional expectations of women to be passive, hyper-feminine individuals were reflected in the answers provided by the female participants. Leann said that women are “not supposed to be masculine or firm,” but rather soft. While Madison admitted she had never considered what it meant to be a woman, she identified being taken advantage of more easily than men and being known as the weaker sex as true
portrayals of womanhood. Laura, who was active on the university cheerleading team in addition to her sorority membership, recognized the stereotypes placed upon her.

“People stereotype me as ditzy and dumb,” she said, because of her feminine affiliations.

“Sometimes I will even stereotype myself.”

On the other hand, Missy sought to push against those traditional gender boundaries:

Women in general, they need to be more aggressive; . . . it’s been a very patriarchal society. Our jobs have always been these subservient sort of things, from what I can tell. If you are this empowering, aggressive woman, you’re a bitch. So, you know, you have the stigma against you to begin with. . . . I think you almost have to prove yourself.

Anna agreed. She reported that women should “be feminine but also be strong.” She described how her mother works to balance the lives of the children, the household, her professional career, and her husband. To be a woman, Anna felt that one needs to be able to “handle more things” than a man.

When it came to sexual behavior, the general consensus of the participants was that women should be looking to pursue emotional relationships with potential boyfriends rather than seeking relationships solely based on sexual pleasure. “Women tend to think that sex is more of a special thing, more valuable,” Anna said. “Whereas men, most men, just want it for the pleasure or the fun.” Both Madison and Laura suggested that for a woman to engage in a strictly sexual relationship, she must have low self-esteem or self-worth. Erika agreed:
Men are more confident about [sexual relationships]. And it’s more of a thing to brag about, like kind of way to say, “This is how confident I am. I can get this girl, this many, girls, this girl.” Whereas women are—it shows their low self esteem, their low confidence, how many guys they hook up with.

**Sexual Activity Without Emotional Connection**

While the participants offered a variety of definitions for hooking up ranging from initially meeting a member of the other sex to sexual intercourse, one distinction remained the same: Hooking up was identified as having little to do with emotions. In fact emotional connections were reserved for committed relationships and had little to no affiliation with sexual behavior. Leann argued, “It’s easier to hook up than to be in an actual relationship.” When feelings become involved in a hook up, she said one must make a choice: to begin a relationship or “you end it [the hook up].”

According to Scott, hooking up helped to keep “person to person contact in place” in a world where technological advances are separating human contact. Ryan appreciated the hook up culture as “an absolutely necessary part of growing up” and pushing the boundaries of one’s learning. Ryan said that after engaging in some hook up behaviors, he was able to become more comfortable with his sexuality and became a “much more open, a much more personable human being” because of his experiences. In addition, he feels that hooking up puts sexual behavior in the forefront of conversation, allowing for a good educational tool about sex. On the other hand, Sean argues that forming meaningful relationships is increasingly difficult because of the hook up culture.

But I think, like, nowadays it’s really hard for people to find relationships because of hook ups. And, like, people are scared or nervous or they’ve been hurt
a lot in the past, but I think once you do find the one relationship that you do want to be in it changes your life completely just because you know what that’s like, and you know what it’s like to, like, actually have somebody do stuff for you.

Another drawback of the hook up culture is navigating the balance of hooking up enough to satisfy individual sexual desires without doing it so often as to establish a bad reputation among fraternity brothers and sorority sisters. However, men experience little to no negative ramifications because of their sexual behavior while women do. “Guys can get away with [hooking up a lot] easier than girls,” Anna said. If a man hooks up a lot “he’s a stud,” said Ryan. But women are more subject to negative ramifications, such as being called a slut. When a woman hooks up a lot, she is “seen as promiscuous. When it gets around that this girl’s been with five different guys in the span of a month, it doesn’t really look that good,” said Missy. At the same time, though, Missy feels “there’s a pressure to be experienced, and I think that girls feel that they need to have as many partners as guys do.”

A strong motivator for women seemed to be the desire to begin a relationship. Scott’s current relationship began because of a hook up, and Scott admitted that having a one night stand or hook up could bring one to “the person you’re supposed to be with. It could happen.” However, the majority of the participants admitted that hooking up is not the best way to begin a relationship. The women continue to pursue hook ups, then, because they want to think someone likes them. “For once,” said Madison. Laura agreed. “Girls think that if they hook up, the guy will want to start a relationship.” Missy explained the phenomenon:
Some [women] have [hooked up] for so long that they think that that’s the right way to go about finding a guy. I think that maybe there’s an insecurity issue that maybe if they get these many guys, that that’s a good thing or that makes them feel better. I also think that it’s an issue of no respect for yourself. But, if the hooking up happens too often, “you’re labeled as a slut,” said Madison.

The community tacitly supports hooking up by developing an environment that strongly encourages sexual behavior. The party scene is designed with themed parties where women “try to find the skimpiest [outfits] to say, ‘Look at me!’ . . . And then the guys don’t require them to pay for drinks. Any girl gets in free.” said Missy. According to Missy, these parties seem to be “very sexually charged. Everything, every factor that goes on in those parties between the men and women seems to be all about that hook up.”

It is this environment and the addition of alcohol that primes an environment for sexual behavior. “Alcohol is probably the biggest reason that people do hook up,” Heather said.

Madison and Laura described alcohol as a way to allow the individual to feel less bad about engaging in the hook up, women in particular. It provides an excuse for their behavior. Laura described one of her sisters who will chug or drink alcohol in order to prepare for someone to come over and hook up. Alcohol helps to get the encounter started. However, it also leads to regretting the incident the next day. “The next day, they wish they wouldn’t have done it,” said Heather.

**Development of Sexual Identity and the Community**

With hook ups holding an important role in how students form sexual connections, the participants reported that at least half of the members in their chapters were involved in committed, emotional relationships. In general, the participants noted
that the majority of relationships begin after the first two years of college, allowing students to have time to explore their sexuality when they begin their undergraduate careers and becoming more mature in their relationships as they grow. “There’s always, like, that freshman year experience,” Sean said. “After your freshman year, you mature a lot, just because of things that you go through.” Madison agreed, noting that she sees a lot more of her sisters hooking up during their first few years of college, and she sees more of her upper-division sisters in relationships.

This seems to indicate that sexuality within the Greek community is a developmental process for engaging in relationships that begins with hooking up and ends with the development of meaningful, emotional relationships. When a student begins college, the student is often young and susceptible to peer pressure. “If you don’t know yourself, then you’re going to fall into pressure,” said Scott, explaining why students may feel pressured to engage in hook up behaviors. Trevor also blames the college atmosphere for students who hook up.

People use the excuse of being in college and [hooking up] now while you’re young. . . . I’ve heard some people talk about an instance [of a hook up] afterwards. Maybe talk about a one night stand, at, you know, the next day or something. And they’d be like, “Well, I wish it wouldn’t have happened, but I’m in college. I’m young. I’ll do it now before I get older and get married.”

Ryan appreciated his opportunity to learn and grow through hook up behavior during his early collegiate years. He feels more comfortable with his sexuality as a result. “Looking back on it, I am a much, much more open, a much more personable human being because of that social interaction,” he said.
Aside from the individual experience and growth, the Greek community establishes a social environment in which hooking up is passively supported, even encouraged. Sean admitted to feeling pressure from the environment to hook up.

Depending on the friends that you make, I think that [hooking up] would definitely be something that you’re expected to do. Especially being in something like a fraternity or sorority. That would definitely be something that, like, well everyone else is doing it or, you know like, they’re just gonna make fun of me if I don’t.

However, Sean did note that the pressure he felt was more self-inflicted than directly applied. He had seen his brothers hooking up and wanted to be like them. In the end, Sean noted that he did not feel like “going through the turmoil and everything with it. Just decided to stay on my own path and do what I wanted to do.” In the end, hooking up is something that is simply accepted within the community. “If a brother hooks up a lot,” Scott said, “a lot of brothers definitely see it and don’t look down to it but don’t look up to it either.”

**Understanding and Responding to Sexual Assault**

Alarmingly, when it comes to sexual assault, Greek students show little to no recognition of what it is and how to respond to it. According to Heather, if someone experiences what could legally be defined as sexual assault, the individual will merely “just get over it and move on.” “I’m sure that there’s a least one person that probably could be considered assault. But I don’t think they realize it. And they probably think that they put themselves in that situation, so they probably don’t think that it is.”
Indeed, this situation happened to Madison. She reported that she had been talking to a fraternity man for a couple of weeks. One night at a party, she had been drinking, was tired, and wanted to go to bed. This man brought her to his room. He then proceeded to push her into engaging in sexual intercourse. When she resisted, he continued to coerce her until she finally gave in. “If I hadn’t been drunk, I wouldn’t have done it,” she said. It is important to note that while she reluctantly provided consent, this still meets the legal definition of sexual assault as her consent was coerced and not freely given. In addition, she had been under the influence of alcohol and could not, therefore, provide informed consent. However, despite this legal definition, Madison did not identify this event as assault. She said she regretted the event the morning after, but she ended up dating the man, so it did not matter that she had had sex with him.

Missy believes that the environment allows for assault to occur. For example, she once was out at a bar with her sisters and ended up taking home a woman who was intoxicated. But, Missy said, if she had been at a party, “she would’ve been raped.” She stressed that “each individual girl has to take responsibility for herself, on top of, if you go in a group, you have to take responsibility for everyone else.”

Up until recently, Heather admitted that she did not realize what consent meant. Instead, she subscribed to the following philosophy:

Most people, I feel like if they’re all over a guy and then they put themselves in that situation and then they go home with him, and they don’t remember anything, they—that’s, I feel like they put themselves in that situation. Going home with someone is kind of like, almost consenting.

Sean offered a different point of view on consent and sexual assault.
I think it could be assault. If a girl or a guy says “no,” then they mean “no.”

Even if it’s the fact that like, “Oh come on, just do this with me.” “No.” “Come on, this is all you have to do, just do this with me.” “No.” “Come on, this is the only thing you have to do.” “Ugh, fine, okay.” It’s still, you’re still forcing them against their will because they don’t want to do it. You just talked them so much into doing it that they just want you to leave them alone.

While Sean’s interpretation of consent and sexual assault is considerably closer to the legal definition than Heather’s, he admitted that he had “never heard [sexual assault] talked about on campus before” and doubted that any other fraternities had either.

This shows a serious problem within the Greek community in regards to the understanding and identification of sexual assault. Further, since they cannot recognize assault when it occurs, it is likely that they do not know how to respond to it. For example, a woman who was once involved in Heather’s chapter reported a sexual assault. However, Heather seriously doubted whether an assault had actually occurred because the woman had a reputation for being promiscuous and was not highly regarded within the sorority. She even admitted feeling bad for the man accused of assaulting her sister.

I feel for the kid [she accused] because I don’t know if he did it or not. But I do know the way she acted, and the way she’d acted in the past, and the people she’s hooked up with in the past, so I don’t really see that, her being assaulted. To be honest.

**Limitations**

There were several limitations of this study that may have influenced the resulting themes. First, interviewing the male participants may have been confounded because of
my female gender. While I felt that they were comfortable and honest with me, some of their answers may have been subject to revision so as not to offend me. For example, while Ryan was describing the importance of men to be independent, he curbed his response by noting, “not that women are more dependent by any means.” If a male researcher had been interviewing him, he may not have felt the need to clarify his response in this way. Further, three of the five male participants were from the same fraternity chapter. This provides a greater insight into the behavior and thought process of that particular fraternity, rather than the whole of fraternity organizations. Additionally, the majority of the participants appeared to be of a middle class background. Finally, because this study focused on the experience of predominantly White Greek-letter organizations in order to reflect the demographics of the subject university, minority students and organizations were not included.
CHAPTER 6

Discussion

The independent research for this study included individual interviews that were later analyzed utilizing phenomenological analysis (Lester, 1999; Merriam, 1998). Based upon the results of these interviews, analysis, and confirmation by faculty analysis, three major themes were identified:

1. Limited conscious considerations of gender role.
2. Sexual activity without emotional connection.
3. Development of sexual identity and the community.

An additional theme about the understanding and response to sexual assault was discovered. All of these themes will be discussed in this chapter for their relation to the literature and their implications for future practice.

Limited Conscious Considerations of Gender

According to Worthington et al. (2002), gender can serve as a structure to “societal and cultural norms and principles that often serve to structure the roles of men and women along traditional, stereotypical lines” (p. 504). In addition, gender serves as a “process by which men and women internalize societal constructions of gender and act according to these internalized norms in their interpersonal interactions” (Worthington et al., 2002, p. 504). However, it does not seem that the Greek students who participated in
this study identified with their gender role in a way that matches traditional gender role expectations.

According to Kimmel (2008a) and Ridgeway and Correll (2004), how one performs one's gender role results in social acceptance. Therefore, for a man to behave in a promiscuous manner with little emotional attachment and for a woman to resist sexual advances and promote a prim reputation results in greater acceptance among the Greek community (DeSantis, 2007; Kimmel, 2008a; Martin & Hummer, 1989). To behave otherwise would result in social ostracization. However, the participants only minimally agreed with these gender role expectations.

For example, the male participants discussed engaging in hook up behavior that lacked emotional attachment but did not hook up to express their masculinity. They engaged in hook ups because it felt good and many claimed they were looking for a relationship. Further, all of the male participants expressed having intimate emotional relationships with their fraternity brothers. Nearly all of them responded that brotherhood was the most important aspect of their fraternity experience and that being a brother meant that they would be there for each other “no matter what.”

The women responded in similar ways. While they identified strongly with their sorority and the sisterhood it represents, the majority of female participants did not recognize a feeling of inequality or minimalization that traditional gender roles suggest. Only a minority of the female participants recognized that they were subject to a patriarchal society and mentioned a feeling of inequality. Missy was one of those participants.
Women in general, they need to be more aggressive. . . . It’s been a very patriarchal society. Our jobs have always been these subservient sort of things, from what I can tell. If you are this empowering, aggressive woman, you’re a bitch. So, you know, you have the stigma against you to begin with. . . . I think you almost have to prove yourself.

Madison and Laura both admitted to feeling an inequality but did not seek to alter the status quo. Meanwhile, Leann and Erika offered definitions of femininity that supported traditional gender roles and expectations. However, they did not feel that they were required to behave in any certain way, noting that their sororities accepted them for who they are.

In short, gender is not a conscious consideration of Greek students. They do not see gender role as important and, even when acknowledging it, they do not see it in context. When asked, each of the participants provided answers that generally reflected gender norms. This demonstrates a tacit acceptance of gender role, where it is neither consciously accepted nor rejected. Gender role, then, is a non-entity in their lives, which enables students to be oblivious to the impact that such traditional gender role expectations play in their own lives. Their gender self-concept, therefore, seems to be poorly formed and somewhat ambiguous.

Because they do not actively consider their gender role, there is little self-concept or consideration for any consequences. This could create a consequence in that students are not developing a gender self-concept, leaving them in early development stages and subject to traditional gender stereotypes and expectations. They are not challenging those expectations because of their involvement in these gendered organizations and are often
not aware of the importance of gender in their relationships. According to Worthington et al. (2002), “gender role conformity, sexual knowledge, sexual attitudes, sexual values, and some sexual behaviors are each learned within microsocial contexts unique to a given individual” (p. 504). Such a microsocial context includes involvement in a fraternity or sorority, which “has been shown to increase the strength of previously held ideas about gender and sex roles” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 340). With little to no challenge occurring from students exploring their gender identity, there is no challenge or change made to those traditional gender expectations.

**Sexual Activity Without Emotional Connection**

The vague definition of hooking up limits the interaction simply to the physical act of sexual gratification, whether through kissing or sexual intercourse. Sexual behavior, in this way, is seen not as an inherently emotional or spiritual act, but simply as a physical act pursued for fun. The students attempt to compartmentalize sex and emotion by segregating hooking up, which is for sexual gratification, and relationships, which include emotional intimacy. For example, one can hook up and not be in a relationship; however, one can also hook up with one’s boyfriend or girlfriend. The two acts mean different things. Hooking up is isolated from relationships and emotional involvement, unless the participating individuals are in a relationship. This separation appears to be more difficult for woman than men, likely because of social marking.

This view of sexual behavior has a lot to do with the sexual identities of the students and how those identities are then perceived by the community, as suggested by Brekhus (1996). The elements noted for social marking by Brekhus include quantity, timing, degree of consent, orientation, and social value of agents. While not all of these
elements were mentioned by the participants and were not included in the focus of the study, several were represented in the data.

For example, quantity, the number of sexual encounters one has (Brekhus, 1996), plays an important role within the community. Laura and Madison made it clear during their respective interviews that if a woman hooks up too often, she is labeled a slut and subject to negative reactions from the community. If you have a reputation as a slut, Madison explained, the women will talk about you behind your back and the men will not want to hang out with you unless they are trying to hook up for sexual pleasure only.

Timing, how quickly one engages in sexual behavior (Brekhus, 1996), also played a small role. When describing how men and women begin the hook up encounter, Sean said that women will often wait for the man to make the first move “because they don’t want to seem like a whore, or anything.” This situation could also relate to consent. Sean, Ryan, and Darren noted that sometimes women will play “hard to get” in order to preserve their reputation and not seem promiscuous. Further, consent is also a factor when men engage in a hook up with women without proper consent.

The final aspect that was mentioned by the participants was the social value of agents, determining whether one is labeled a “slut” or a “stud.” Ryan noted the inequality. “Isn’t that the difference between being a man and being a woman? If you’re a man and you hook up all the time, you’re a pimp, a stud. But women are sluts. It’s all in how you interpret the social lens,” he said. Anna agreed. “Guys can get away with it easier than girls,” she said. “[People] are more likely to talk bad about the girls than the guys.”
The evaluation of these perceived sexual identities forms the foundation for both positive and negative social consequences of sexual behavior. The norm is established by the community and is met with little question or resistance. However, the participants noted that how one engages in sexual behavior helps to establish a public reputation within the community. Also, many students are beginning to recognize that sexual behavior is not the best way to begin solid and rewarding male/female relationships. Another consequence could be the lack of self-esteem or self-worth associated with promiscuous behavior.

**Development of Sexual Identity and the Community**

Based on the reported experiences of the participants, a distinction between engaging in hook ups versus relationships was dependent upon the individual’s year in school, with younger students engaging in more hook ups and upper-division students being involved in relationships. This is indicative of the development of sexual identities occurring throughout students’ collegiate experience. The heterosexual development theory developed by Worthington et al. (2002) is represented by the experiences of the participants.

Worthington et al. (2002) described heterosexual development using four statuses, which include unexplored commitment, active exploration, diffusion, and deepening and commitment. As the first status is typically experienced during prepubescence, it was not relevant for this study and was not discovered to be a part of the data. However, active exploration, the second status, was present in the experiences of the participants. Missy said that many of her sisters who hook up are trying to “figure out what fits for them.”
Leann admitted to looking for what would work for her, exploring her sexuality, and deciding later whether she wanted to engage in a relationship with a man. Ryan appreciated his experience within this status noting that he felt it was a way to “get closer to understanding what girls are like.” He said he became more socially aware of his surroundings and was not as naïve about sexual interactions. Indeed, he felt that he was a more “open and personable” person because of his exploration.

The third status, diffusion, was also described by the interview participants. Erika believed that men and women engaged in hook up behavior for the excitement of it and the adventure of knowing that one may never see one’s partner again. This shows diffusion in that the students are pursuing sexual relationships for no goal, other than a potential rush of excitement. Finally, while none of the participants had appeared to reach the final status of deepening and commitment, several showed signs that they may be entering into this stage. These signs included their recognition that hook up behavior may not be the best way to establish a long-term, committed relationship, but they also recognized that hooking up is a necessary part of developing a heterosexual identity.

For example, Ryan offered positive insight into why hooking up is beneficial in student growth and pushing the boundaries of individual learning. “It’s good to have,” he said. “I think that going out and meeting girls, or guys, and having that sort of relationship is extremely beneficial to personal growth.” Additionally, Heather and Missy both noted that while they recognize the hook up culture within the community, they do not believe it is the best way to engage in a committed relationship with a member of the other sex. In essence, the views that Ryan, Heather, and Missy offer are indicative of deepening and commitment to their heterosexual identity.
**Sexual Assault**

While gender is not a conscious consideration, the dichotomy of traditional gender roles is still present within the community. This results in a rape-conducive culture that is neither acknowledged nor recognized by the community (Boswell & Spade, 1996; Lenihan & Rawlins, 1995). There are two elements of this rape conducive culture that prove dangerous: (a) ignorance about what sexual assault is and how often it is perpetrated within the community, and (b) a victim blaming attitude that harms victims and perpetuates a culture of sexual assault.

Ignorance about sexual assault seems to be a common theme among the participants. Heather explained that if someone meets what could legally be defined as sexual assault, the individual will merely “just get over it and move on.” Indeed, this happened to Madison when a fraternity man coerced her into having sex after she had been drinking. Madison regretted the event but ended up dating the man who assaulted her, so she was able to explain away the assault. Further, while Sean recognized that coercion did not provide proper consent to sex, he admitted that he had “never heard [sexual assault] talked about on campus before.” He doubted that any other fraternities had experienced such education either.

Victim blame is common when it comes to sexual assault (Ehrhart & Sandler, 1985; Warshaw & Koss, 1988) and the participants’ experience proved to be no exception. Heather suggested that victims feel “they put themselves in that situation, so they probably don't know that it is [sexual assault].” In addition, she claimed that “going home with someone is kind of like, almost consenting.” Indeed, when a woman in her chapter did report a sexual assault, Heather did not believe the assault occurred because
the woman had a promiscuous reputation and was not highly regarded within the sorority. She blamed the woman for the assault, saying, “I don't know if he did it or not. But I don’t know the way she acted, . . . so I don't really see that, her being assaulted.”

**Interpretations**

The results of this study indicate a need for greater education of students in Greek-letter organizations about gender self-concept and the role that gender plays in their lives, as well as the effects of sexual behavior with no emotional connection. The limited consideration of gender leaves students subject to traditional gender roles and restricts the development of their gender self-concept. Further, because sexual behavior is approached from a place with little to no emotion, students must be educated about the risks inherent in this type of behavior (e.g., sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancy, poor male/female relationships, etc.). This behavior may even have some influence on whether a sexual assault is committed. If there is no emotional connection involved, one may not realize that one is committing assault or being assaulted. This numbness promotes a dangerous environment for students and needs to be addressed by higher education educators.

**Implications**

**Future practice.** In order to help students develop healthier relationship habits, student affairs practitioners should increase programming to educate students about communication and healthy interpersonal relationships. In addition, professionals may want to address sexual assault education by incorporating such programs as GAMMA (Greek Advocating for the Mature Management of Alcohol; Bacchus Network, 2011) or Green Dot bystander intervention programs (California Coalition Against Sexual Assault,
NPC has developed sponsored programs to promote academic excellence, alcohol-free housing, recreation and prescription drug use (Sorority Action for Education, SAFE), and NPC Focus, which address drug education, self-esteem, and positive confrontation (NPC, 2011). Several of these programs have been noted at national conferences and have been adopted by many sorority chapters across the country. IFC has also developed programs designed to address leadership, community service and outreach, and fraternity/sorority assessment (North American Inter Fraternity Conference, 2011).

In looking at these offerings, it is evident that the national councils are not doing enough to address the needs demonstrated by this study. While individual chapters often address issues such as alcohol, there should be greater efforts to mandate such important education from the national organizations for sexual health, sexual assault, and gender self-concept and awareness. Further, universities should provide better opportunities for education as well by providing educational programs either through a violence prevention office, student health promotion, or student counseling center.

**Future research.** This study intended to examine the role that gender self-concept plays on sexual behavior in Greek students. The results indicated that the participants were not conscious of the role that gender self-concept played in their lives and behavior. An interesting opportunity for future research may involve searching the role that sexual identity development theory and heterosexual identity development play in the lives of Greek students. Additionally, a limitation of this study was the exclusion of NPHC or minority focused organizations. Research into how racial identity affects sexual behavior would prove an interesting study.
Because sexual assault is vastly misunderstood among the community, another area for future study would be to examine the prevalence of sexual assault within these communities and the responses to sexual assault. While this study touched a little on these elements, a more in-depth study would be greatly beneficial in understanding how sexual assault is understood and approached by Greek students. Further, a case study examining an intense sexual assault prevention program would provide important insight into the effects of such a program and how to address sexual assault issues with Greek students.

Conclusion

The research conducted for this thesis indicates that because they do not consider their gender roles, Greek students are subject to engaging in traditional gender roles as a “default” setting. Because of this, their attitudes and behaviors are representative, perhaps unconsciously, of a society encumbered by traditional gender norms. However, the inclusion of hooking up into traditional gender roles creates an interesting dynamic. It brings more to the forefront the sexual aspect of identity, rather than that of gender.

Moreover, the development of their sexual identities and the social implications thereof seem to play a more significant role in the experience of Greek students than their gender self-concept. This may be indicative of a shift in importance of identity development. While research indicates gender identity development may have played a more significant role in the past, the experiences of the students in this study seemed to indicate that sexual identity development is a more pressing consideration in the lives of current students. Further research is needed to determine the role that sexual identity
development and heterosexual identity development play in the identities and sexual behaviors of Greek students.

This research provides minor insight into the relationship that gender has on sexual behavior of Greek students as well as the influence of social interpretations of sexual behavior on the students’ experience. Because of this, student affairs professionals may have a more full understanding of how to educate and program for Greek students in regards to healthy relationship development and sexual behavior.


APPENDIX A: Call for Participants

Hello! I need your help in collecting information from fraternity and sorority students about gender self concept and how this affects their relationships, in particular their sexual relationships. My plan is to conduct individual interviews with students to discuss their experience of sexual behaviors and the interpretations and meaning of those behaviors for each person. I would like to speak during your weekly chapter meeting, preferably during the week of April 3, and give a short description of my research and ask for volunteers to participate in my research. If you would agree to let me speak to your chapter, I would greatly appreciate it. This research is being conducted for my Master’s thesis in Student Affairs and Higher Education at Indiana State University under the direction of Will Barratt (will.barratt@indstate.edu).

Please email me at jarthur2@indstate.edu to let me know if and when it would be convenient for me to address your chapter.

Thank you so much for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Julianne
APPENDIX B: Student Resources

Indiana State University
Student Counseling Center
3rd Floor, Student Services Building
567 North 5th Street
Terre Haute, IN 47809
Phone: (812) 237-3939
www.indstate.edu/cns

Indiana State University
Psychology Clinic
Root Hall B-202
Phone: (812) 237-2445
www.indstate.edu/psych/

Indiana State University
Student Health Promotion
3rd Floor, Student Services Building
567 North 5th Street
Terre Haute, IN 47809
Phone: (812) 237-3939
www.indstate.edu/shp

Planned Parenthood
Terre Haute
30 South 3rd Street
Terre Haute, IN 47807
Phone: (812) 238-2636
www.ppin.org

Vigo County Health Department
Health Educator
Ryan Oliar
Vigo County Annex Building
147 Oak Street
Terre Haute, IN 47807
Phone: (812) 231-6227
www.vigocounty.org/health/healthed.asp
APPENDIX C: Informed Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Gender Self-Concept and Sexual Behavior of Students in Greek Organizations

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Julianne Arthur, from the Department of Education at Indiana State University. Ms. Arthur is conducting this study as part of her graduate student thesis. Dr. William Barratt is her faculty sponsor for this project.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a member of a Greek-letter organization. Participants for this research must identify as heterosexual individuals and be active members of National Panhellenic Council (NPC) sororities or Interfraternity Council (IFC) fraternities.

• PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to see how individuals feel about the role he/she plays as a man or woman within the Greek community in regards to sexual behaviors. We hope to use what we learn from the study to establish better education efforts for Greek students about sexuality.

• PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

1. You will be asked to participate in a single 60-minute one-on-one interview with the researcher. The interview will take place in a private location in order to ensure confidentiality. A time will be arranged for you to meet with the researcher at your convenience.
2. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions about your experience in your Greek-letter organization, the role that you feel you play within your organization and the Greek community, and how these experiences affect your sexual behaviors.
3. Your interview will be digitally recorded. The recorder will be operated by and placed beside the researcher.
4. After the interview is complete, you will be provided a list of on campus resources should you wish to take advantage of them. Additionally, the researcher will provide you with
contact information should you wish to contact her again with more information or with concerns.

5. The researcher will transcribe your interview tapes after the interview.

• POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

We expect that any risks, discomforts, or inconveniences will be minor and not likely to happen. Potential discomforts may include: psychological distress about sexual behaviors and experience, such as remorse, concern, or other negative emotions. In order to minimize the risk of these discomforts, the researcher will be willing to rephrase or abandon questions you feel uncomfortable answering. In addition, you will be provided a list of on campus resources to help you deal with these feelings or to learn more about coping strategies for negative emotions. If discomfort becomes a problem, you may discontinue your participation.

• POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

It is not likely that you will benefit directly from your participation in this study. However, the research should be helpful for educators in understanding the thought process and concept behind sexual behaviors for students involved in Greek-letter organizations. This understanding, in return, could result in better and more effective outreach education and programming for the Greek population.

• PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

You will not receive any payment or other compensation for participation in this study. There is also no cost to you for participation.

• CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of pseudonym to let Ms. Arthur or Dr. Barratt know who you are. We will not use your name in any of the information we get from this study or in any of the subsequent research reports. Once the study is complete, we will destroy the list linking your real name to your pseudonym.

Information that can be used to identify you individually will not be released to anyone outside the study. Ms. Arthur will use the information collected in her master’s thesis and other publications. We also may use any information that we get from this study in any way we think is best for publication or education. Any information used in this manner will not identify you individually.

The audiotapes of the interviews will not be heard by anyone outside the study. The tapes will be destroyed after the completion of Ms. Arthur’s thesis project. The transcriptions created from the
audiotapes will be written with your assigned pseudonym and not identify you individually. The transcriptions will be destroyed after three years.

• **SELECTION OF A PSEUDONYM**

To protect your confidentiality, you will be given the option to select a pseudonym. You may choose which pseudonym we use. If you have no preference, a pseudonym will be provided for you by Ms. Arthur.

• **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Any data or information you provide prior to your withdrawal will not be used in the study. All written and recorded notes from your participation will be immediately destroyed.

• **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please feel free to contact:

Julianne Arthur  
Principal Researcher  
Department of Education  
567 S. 5th Street,  
Student Services Building  
Indiana State University  
Terre Haute, Indiana 47809  
(614) 581-0845  
jarthur2@indstate.edu

Dr. William Barratt  
Associate Professor  
Department of Education  
1206 School of Education  
Indiana State University  
Terre Haute, Indiana 47809  
(812) 237-2869  
will.barratt@indstate.edu

• **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or e-mail the IRB at irb@indstate.edu. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with ISU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.
I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

__________________________________________________________________________  ________________

Signature                                                             Date
APPENDIX D: Interview Questions

1. What does it mean to you to be a man? A woman? What makes you a man? A woman?

   *Gender Self-Concept:* By understanding what it means to be a man or woman according to the student, we can see what their gender self-concept is.

2. On that same token, what does it mean to be a brother in your chapter? A sister? Do you think other members of your chapter have the same idea?

   *Gender Self-Concept:* We further delve into the student’s self-concept by examining how their definition compares to the definition of the chapter as a whole.

3. Why did you decide to join a Greek organization? What made you choose your current chapter?

   *Greek Experience:* I believe this question will help to ascertain the student’s interests not only socially, but what he/she values in an organization. It will also help to ease the student into the interview and help to make him/her feel comfortable by talking about something they already know and have thought about.

4. I’ve heard a lot of different definitions from students about what it means to “hook up.” What does it mean to you? What does a typical hook up look like?
Sexual Behavior: This question will form the foundation for the following questions about hook up behaviors for this student. I need to understand what he/she thinks is a hook up, rather than going on my own interpretation of what a hook up is.

5. Other students have told us that they feel like they are sort of expected to hook up. What do you think about that?

Gender Self-Concept/Sexual Behavior: By giving social permission, I can help make the student feel more at ease about answering honestly. This allows for a glimpse of self-concept by determining whether the student feels a social pressure to engage in sexual behaviors or if they are more independently driven to hook up. Further, it also will allow insight into the student’s opinion about both his/her behaviors, as well as the behaviors of others.

6. Do you like hooking up? Other than the obvious reason, that it feels good, why do you continue “hooking up?” What’s in it for you?

Gender Self-Concept/Sexual Behavior: I want to further examine motivation behind the sexual behaviors beyond the need for sexual gratification in order to better understand how the student feels he/she must act as a sexual being.

7. How do you hook up? What method(s) do you use? Why?

Sexual Behavior: In understanding what methods are used to engage in sexual behaviors, the student will become more reflective of the actions they are utilizing in order to fulfill their desire to hook up. In this reflection, they may recognize
behaviors they had not realized before (such as potential predatory behaviors, like using alcohol to ensure a hook up, etc).

8. Who do you talk to about your hook ups? Why that person(s)?

*Greek Experience/Gender Self-Concept:* The person in whom the student confides basic sexual information can be indicative of how they want their sexual encounters to be perceived. If a student tells his/her whole chapter, then he/she is looking for the social affirmation for his/her action. If a student tells no one or only one person, he/she is looking for something more private and personal in his/her experience.

9. What’s the difference between a hook up and a relationship? Which do you see most often among your brothers/sisters?

*Greek Experience/Sexual Behavior:* By determining the perception of what is most prevalent in the community, we can determine what the Greek experience may be and the perceived expectations are in regards to relationships.