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## Power, Privilege, and Fraternity Men's Perceptions of Sex and Sexual Violence: A Phenomenological Study

Justine Diener O'Leary

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, justine.diener@huskers.unl.edu

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POWER, PRIVILEGE, AND FRATERNITY MEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF SEX AND  
SEXUAL VIOLENCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Justine Diener O'Leary

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

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Major: Psychological Studies in Education

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Under the Supervision of Professor Neeta Kantamneni

Lincoln, Nebraska

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POWER, PRIVILEGE, AND FRATERNITY MEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF SEX AND  
SEXUAL VIOLENCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Justine Diener O'Leary, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2021

Advisor: Neeta Kantamneni

Sexual violence is a prevalent concern on college campuses (see Washington Post & Kaiser Family Foundation, 2015; Cantor et al., 2015). Men are the primary perpetrators of sexual violence (Black et al., 2011), with particular groups, such as fraternity men, particularly prone to perpetrating sexual violence (Foubert et al., 2007). The CDC (2014, 2021) recommends utilizing a social-ecological model of prevention that address risk factors at four levels: individual, relational, community, and societal. The purpose of the present transcendental phenomenological pilot study was to explore fraternity men's perceptions of systemic influences on sex, consent, and sexual violence. Utilizing a modified social-ecological framework, I asked participants to describe their experiences with and perceptions of sex, romantic relationships, consent, masculinity, gender roles, alcohol use, and sexual violence as well as their perceptions of the systemic influences (i.e., individual, relational, community, and societal) on these areas. Ten White, heterosexual, cisgender, Christian men (i.e., men with privilege and power) participated. Five textual (i.e., Views on Sex, Relationships, and Consent; Views on Masculinity and Gender Roles; Perceptions of Greek life; Witnessing Sexual Violence; and Thoughts on Prevention) and four structural (i.e., Individual, Relational, Community, and Societal) themes, as well as subthemes, emerged. Practical implications, future research directions, and limitations of the present study are also discussed.

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## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Rape Culture	2
Sexual Violence on College Campuses	3
Fraternity Men	4
Theoretical Framework	7
The Current Study	15
Chapter 2: Literature Review	19
Sexual Violence Perpetration	20
Consent	22
Self-Selection vs. Socialization	31
Modified Social-Ecological Model of Prevention	34
Conclusion	58
Chapter 3: Method	60
Guiding Questions	60
Qualitative Phenomenological Approach	61
IRB and Ethical Considerations	65
Procedures	66
Validity Strategies	72
Chapter 4: Results	77
Textural Description	77
Structural Description	107
Conclusion	123

Chapter 5: Discussion	125
Textural Themes	125
Structural Themes	133
Synthesis of Essence	139
Prevention Implications	140
Limitations and Future Directions	146
Conclusion	152
References	155
Appendix A: Informed Consent	180
Appendix B: Recruitment Blurb	184
Appendix C: Interview Protocol	185
Appendix D: External Audit	187
Appendix E: Table 2	189
Appendix F: Table 3	190
Appendix G: Memoing Example	193

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Accounts of sexual violence continue to feature prominently in the media, spurred, in part, by the resurgence of the Me Too movement, with high profile individuals being accused of and held accountable for prior sexual violence perpetration. College campuses are not protected from this scrutiny, with many accounts of sexual misconduct being exposed throughout the country over the past several years. Understandably so, as sexual violence continues to be a pervasive problem on college campuses, with 20% of students who identify as women, 5% of students who identify as men, and 24% of students who identify as trans reporting victimization (Washington Post & Kaiser Family Foundation, 2015; Cantor et al., 2015). Further underscoring this problem, reports suggest over 80% of assaults go unreported to the authorities, meaning the aforementioned statistics are likely understated (Sinozich & Langston, 2014). Seventy-five percent of survivors report they knew the perpetrator, dispelling the “stranger in the bushes” myth that sexual violence occurs at the hands of a deviant predator rather than a known, seemingly “normal” individual (Sinozich & Langston, 2014). Importantly, while scholarship tends to focus on women as survivors of sexual violence, the truth is people of all gender identities are affected, with some groups at greater risk of victimization than others. For example, transgender students may experience the highest rates of victimization compared with other students (Cantor et al., 2015).

While people of all gender identities can be perpetrators of sexual violence, it is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men (Black et al., 2011). One potential at-risk male peer group is fraternities, who may perpetuate rape culture and serve as hotspots for sexual

violence (e.g., Seabrook et al., 2016). Examples of fraternity sexual assault are prevalent in the media. For example, the two fraternities at Swarthmore College recently disbanded after documents exposing one of the fraternity's cavalier and boastful attitude toward sexual violence were released, coupled with countless survivors coming forward sharing their stories (Bauer-Wolf, 2019). In another example, a survivor of sexual violence whose perpetrator, a fraternity member, was expelled, filed a lawsuit against her perpetrator, his fraternity, and the University of California—Los Angeles Interfraternity Council due to their negligence in reprimanding the fraternity (Bauer-Wolf, 2018). The lawsuit alleges the fraternity and fraternity council created an environment of heavy drinking and lack of supervision that facilitated the occurrence of the assault. These examples highlight the need for ongoing efforts to reduce sexual violence perpetration specifically within fraternities on college campuses.

### **Rape Culture**

One important macro influence on sexual violence is rape culture, which is defined as “a set of general cultural beliefs supporting men's violence against women, including the idea that this violence is a fact of life, that there is an association between violence and sexuality, that men are active while women are passive, and that men have a right to sexual intercourse” (Phipps et al., 2018, p. 1). Rape culture has long been implicated in the perpetration of sexual violence, although it has particularly been framed as a problem of male violence perpetrated against women. This conceptualization, however, is heteronormative and discounts the violence that occurs against gender diverse individuals, who are often at heightened risk for victimization. In the current study, I conceptualize rape culture as harmful to individuals of all gender identities.

Further, rape culture, which encourages rigid gender roles and adherence to hypermasculinity, and devalues diverse expressions of gender, harms all people under its pernicious grasp, including men. Research regarding rape culture and sexual violence will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

### **Sexual Violence on College Campuses**

As noted above, male-perpetrated sexual violence remains a pervasive problem on college campuses across the United States. Sexual violence is an umbrella term which encompasses a number of sexually violent behaviors, such as sexual assault, rape, attempted assault, sexual harassment, and intimate partner violence, among others (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network [RAINN], 2019). According to the Department of Justice (DOJ), sexual assault is defined as “any nonconsensual sexual act proscribed by Federal, tribal, or State law, including when the victim lacks capacity to consent” (DOJ, n.d.). It is important to note that this definition includes coercive behaviors (e.g., taking advantage of power differences, using verbal coercion), forceful or violent behavior, and incapacitation (e.g., alcohol intoxication). The significance of the problem on college campuses was stated above, but bears repeating—20% of students who identify as women, 5% of students who identify as men, and 24% of students who identify as trans report victimization (Washington Post & Kaiser Family Foundation, 2015; Cantor et al., 2015).

These statistics are concerning given the potential for adverse outcomes of sexual violence to survivors/victims. There are well-established consequences of sexual violence to survivors, including adverse mental, physical, and interpersonal impacts (e.g., Acierno et al., 2002; Follette & Pistorello, 2007; RAINN, 2019). The prevalence of sexual

violence on college campuses is a violation of Title IX, which exists to ensure equal access to education, free from discrimination, for all individuals regardless of sex at all institutions or educational programs receiving Federal funding (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). As of August 2, 2019, the Department of Education listed 766 Title IX complaints against post-secondary education institutions which were listed with a “currently under investigation” label (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2019). Individuals fearing for their safety and vulnerability to sexual abuse while at college should be protected by Title IX; however, many colleges are currently violating this education amendment given the large number of students victimizing other students.

Consent is also important to consider when conceptualizing sexual violence perpetration. Sexual consent may be defined differently in different states, but what is clear is that sexual violence occurs when some sort of sexual act, defined broadly, is committed without a person’s freely given consent. A person cannot freely give consent if they lack the capacity to consent due to reasons such as alcohol or drug use, ability status, and power differences. Students’ attitudes toward and understanding of consent is essential to understanding their overall views toward sex and sexual violence. Chapter Two will provide an overview of consent literature as it relates to fraternity men’s perceptions of sex and sexual violence. In particular, research examining how attitudes toward consent relate to gender norms and the traditional sexual script will be explored (e.g., Jozkowski et al., 2017).

### **Fraternity Men**

While people of all gender identities can be both survivors/victims and perpetrators, men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators of sexual violence (Black et al.,

2011). Further, members of specific male peer groups, such as fraternities and athletics, may be more likely to perpetrate sexual violence. There are myriad established correlates of sexual violence among men, such as: rape myth acceptance, conformity to masculine norms, belief in traditional gender roles, adherence to the traditional sexual scripts, perceived pressure to conform to masculine gender norms, attitudes toward consent, and norms surrounding alcohol use. These correlates are explored briefly, below, and in more detail in Chapter Two.

Fraternities are one male peer group, in particular, that are more likely to perpetrate sexual violence. Numerous authors have published statistics speaking to the increased risk of gang rape within fraternities, and both quantitative and qualitative studies have explored the heightened risk for perpetration among fraternity men (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2006; Bleecker & Murnen, 2005; Boeringer, 1999; Boeringer et al., 1991; Boswell & Spade, 1996; Corpew & Mitchell, 2014; Foubert et al., 2011; Franklin et al., 2012; Jozkowski & Wiersma-Mosley, 2017; Kingree & Thompson, 2013; Martin, 2016; Martin & Hummer, 1989; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007; Rhoads, 1995; Seabrook et al., 2016; Waterman et al., 2020). Specifically, researchers have shown fraternity men may endorse more sexually aggressive and hypermasculine attitudes, express greater conformity to masculine norms, greater pressure from friends to portray masculine norms, greater objectification of women, greater rape myth acceptance, and increased engagement in more sexually deceptive behaviors than non-fraternity men (Corpew & Mitchell, 2014; Seabrook et al., 2016). Given these known risk factors and their relationship with sexual violence perpetration, more research regarding fraternity men

and sexual violence is needed in order to determine effective prevention and intervention strategies.

Understanding the relationship between fraternity membership and sexual violence perpetration also requires an examination of power and privilege (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, and class privilege). Fraternity membership is expensive, requiring additional dues and fees not charged to non-affiliated students. For example, Chang (2014) reported that at Kansas University, fraternity dues could be as much as \$5,300 per semester. This additional expense may limit membership to those individuals with class privilege and the ability to afford these fees.

This class privilege is likely compounded by other privileges afforded to men within fraternities, such as gender, sexual orientation, and racial privilege. According to Chang (2014), many colleges and universities do not collect demographic data for Greek affiliation. However, Chang reported that Princeton is one university that does collect this data, with “White and higher income students...much more likely to join fraternities and sororities—77% of sorority members and 73% of fraternity members were White” (para. 12). Chang further cited that 95% of Princeton sorority and fraternity members were from the “richest quarter of America” with “over 25% of Greek members...from the top 1%” (para. 13).

Taking a socialist feminist perspective, Jozkowski and Wiersma-Mosley (2017) discussed why understanding these intersecting privileges is important and how it influences fraternity men’s power and status on college campuses and creates environments supportive of sexual violence. Jozkowski and Wiersma-Mosley argued that fraternity men have substantial power and status on college campuses because of these

intersecting privileged identities and their ability to host parties on and off campus, which is a major social currency at universities. They wrote: “These factors create a dynamic in the Greek microcosm of universities in which powerful individuals join Greek organizations, and in turn, power is maintained and even increased through membership in Greek organizations” (pp. 93-94). The ability to host parties positions fraternity men in a powerful position not granted to sorority women and students living in residence halls, often allowing them to exploit and take advantage of this power with little university oversight.

Jozkowi and Wiersma-Wosley further noted that institutions, which often promote patriarchal ideals by only hiring men to the highest levels of administration, perpetuate “institutional sexism and patriarchal control at the administration level, which complements the sexism and patriarchal control that occurs at the student level in the party culture” (p. 94). Key to the current study is an understanding that fraternity men often represent the most privileged individuals in US society, giving them power and status on campuses which can be used to facilitate rape culture, further misogynistic ideals, and perpetrate sexual violence. These privileges may also shield fraternity men from understanding (or desiring to understand) the full extent of the prevalence of sexual violence on college campuses or their role in the problem and solution.

### **Theoretical Framework**

As noted previously, many researchers examining fraternity men’s perpetration of sexual violence have focused on individual level factors, with fewer authors focusing on the sociocultural and systemic ways in which sexual violence occurs on a college campus. The Sexual Health Initiative to Foster Transformation (SHIFT) research team at

Columbia University is an exception to this general statement since they have focused on social-ecological influences on sexual violence. In the current study, I utilized a modified social-ecological model of prevention, explained below, to frame the literature review and interview protocol.

### ***Modified Social-Ecological Model of Prevention***

The CDC recommend a social-ecological model for the prevention of violence (CDC, 2014, 2021). This model takes into account four levels of influence when considering how to best prevent the occurrence of violence, including: the individual, their relationships (e.g., peer, partner, parents), their community or organizational affiliations, and broad societal factors. At the individual level, for example, prevention might focus on individual attitudes and beliefs toward sexuality and gender norms, whereas at the relational level, prevention might focus on peer or social group norms that perpetuate sexual violence (CDC, 2014, 2021). The community or organizational level might refer to one's fraternity and the norms surrounding sex and sexual violence promoted by them. At the final, level, macro cultural or societal contexts are taken into consideration, such as the norms of the particular community in which the campus resides (CDC, 2014, 2021).

In support of such an approach, Smith Slep et al. (2014) concluded that an ecological approach (i.e., considering individual, family, workplace, and community factors) to intimate partner violence perpetration is warranted. In their study, which included a large sample of active-duty Air Force members and their spouses, factors at each of the ecological levels significantly contributed to the model, which predicted intimate partner violence perpetration. Although this quantitative study examines a

different population (i.e., military), the findings provide support for the use of a social-ecological framework for studying sexual violence, suggesting each level is important to consider when examining sexual violence perpetration.

Researchers have proposed potential explanations for these findings, including individual factors (e.g., rape-supportive attitudes, conformity to toxic masculinity, beliefs about obtaining consent, adherence to traditional sexual script, pornography consumption; Boeringer, 1999; Foubert et al., 2011; Foubert et al., 2006; Seabrook et al., 2016; Waterman et al., 2020) and group factors (e.g., peer norms, perceived pressure to uphold masculine norms; Kingree & Thompson, 2013; Seabrook et al., 2016), but more research is needed to examine *why* male peer groups are at heightened risk for sexual violence perpetration. Harway and Steel (2015) implored researchers to focus on specific cultural groups known to perpetrate sexual violence, especially via qualitative research, in order to “understand exactly how their perpetration of sexual assault is related to the salient culture in which they belong” (p. 377).

The SHIFT research team at Columbia represents an effort to answer the above calls for contextualized research. The SHIFT team is a research initiative that “examines the individual, interpersonal, and structure (cultural, community, and institutional) factors that shape sexual health and sexual violence for undergraduates at Columbia and Barnard” (Columbia University, 2019). Utilizing a public health approach, this research team conducts studies that examine factors beyond the individual (e.g., institutional) to inform sexual violence prevention. Utilizing ethnography, Community-based Participatory Research, and quantitative research, these researchers have produced multiple studies of relevance to the present study (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2018; Chin et

al., 2019; Hirsch et al., 2019; Khan et al., 2020; Mellins et al., 2017; Santelli et al., 2018; Walsh et al., 2019; Wamboldt et al., 2019).

Although these studies will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, a brief summary is presented here. In these studies, researchers focused on important content areas related to sexual violence, including consent (Chin et al., 2019; Hirsch et al., 2019), sexual violence victimization and perpetration (e.g., prevalence and risk factors; Mellins et al., 2017; Walsh et al., 2019), bystander intervention behaviors (Wamboldt et al., 2019), sex education (e.g., comprehensive sex education prior to college as protective against sexual violence; Santelli et al., 2018), and social-ecological contexts of sexual violence (e.g., providing support for a social-ecological approach to understanding sexual violence with consideration of constructs such as power and intersectionality; Armstrong et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2020). Chin et al. (2019) and Hirsch et al. (2019) explored contextual influences on the navigation of sexual consent, including time (e.g., the length of a relationship or the time in the calendar year) and social dimensions (e.g., heterosexual scripts, peer groups). Both authors argued that prevention practices targeting consent require consideration of contextual factors (i.e., consent is not a static event or construct). Similarly, Wamboldt et al. (2019) found that social dynamics influence individuals' willingness to intervene as bystanders (e.g., a desire to protect popular men). Walsh et al. (2019) found that sexual assault perpetration was correlated with monthly binge drinking, adherence to traditional masculinity, and belief in and use of nonverbal consent communication/strategies. The above constructs were explored in the present study and provide support for a social-ecological approach to sexual violence prevention.

**Individual.** Individual factors explored in the current study include rape myth acceptance, gender role beliefs, and alcohol use. Each of these constructs have established relations with sexual violence perpetration among college men, broadly, and fraternity men, specifically. Rape myth acceptance relates to the endorsement of stereotyped and generally false ideas about sexual violence victims and perpetrators and perpetuates victim blaming and rape culture (Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995). Among college men, greater rape myth acceptance has been associated with masculinity, sexual dysfunctional beliefs, hostile sexist beliefs, rape acknowledgement, consent, rape intention, and sexual violence perpetration (Barnett et al., 2017; Reed et al., 2019; Silver & Hovick, 2018; Taschler & West, 2017; Yapp & Quayle, 2018). Among fraternity men, specifically, rape myth acceptance has been associated with pornography consumption and the presence of degrading images of women in one's residence hall room (Bleecker & Murnen, 2005; Foubert et al., 2011).

Masculinity has also been established as an important individual variable related to consent and sexual violence. For example, conformity to masculine norms (e.g., norms promoting power over women, promiscuity, and violence) has been associated with making unwanted sexual advance toward women among college men (Mikorski & Szymanski, 2016). Hypermasculinity, which is extreme adherence to masculine gender role norms, such as violence and impulsivity, and hostile masculinity (i.e., exhibiting dominance and distrust of women) have been associated with sexual aggression among young men (Casey et al., 2017; Murnen et al., 2002). Fraternity membership has established relations with hypermasculinity, and conformity to masculine norms, pressure to adhere to masculinity, and sexual objectification of women was found in one study to

explain the relationship between fraternity membership and sexual violence (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007; Seabrook et al., 2016).

Additionally, alcohol use has been implicated in sexual violence perpetration and understanding of consent among fraternity men. Previous research suggests high risk alcohol use may explain the relationship between fraternity membership and sexual aggression (Kingree & Thompson, 2013). Researchers have also discussed the presence of party culture within fraternities and how this culture is related to sexual violence perpetration (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2006). That is, fraternity men may hold power on college campuses because they have an important social resource—the ability to host parties with alcohol—which may facilitate their ability to take advantage of vulnerable populations on campus (Armstrong et al., 2006; Harris & Schmalz, 2016; Jozkowski & Wiersma-Mosley, 2017).

**Relational.** Peer relations and norms also relate to fraternity men’s sexual violence perpetration. The Male Peer Support Model is a framework that explains how male peer support and group norms influence men’s violence perpetration. Specifically, this model explains that dating relationships lead to stress, which leads men to seek out social support from their male peers who may provide resources or advice that facilitate abusive behaviors (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). This model is further affected by systemic influences, such as social patriarchy, rape culture, heavy alcohol use, limited masculine identities, group secrecy, and sexual objectification of women. Support for this theory and the role of peers in sexual consent and violence attitudes and behaviors is evident in findings that establish relations among peer pressure to have sex, to sexually

coerce and assault, to display limited masculine identities, and sexual violence (Franklin et al., 2012; Seabrook et al., 2018).

**Organizational/Community.** Fraternities are often homogenous groups with power and privilege on college campuses, and men who belong to fraternities have been implicated as an at-risk population for sexual violence perpetration. Theoretical debate exists regarding whether men self-select into fraternities based on pre-existing attitudes, beliefs and behaviors (e.g., greater rape myth acceptance), or whether men are socialized into the norms of their fraternity which causes them to develop rape-supportive beliefs and sexually violent behaviors (e.g., Godenzi et al., 2001; Waterman et al., 2020). Evidence for both theories exist, implying that the answer may be complicated; thus, a deeper understanding of fraternity men's beliefs in different social-ecological contexts is warranted. That is, how do fraternity men perceive their pre-existing personality characteristics, attitudes, and beliefs influence their understanding of sex, consent, and sexual violence, and how do they perceive their different contexts (i.e., relational, organizational, and community) impact these constructs?

Specific aspects of fraternity culture, such as hostility toward and objectification of women, rigid conceptualizations of masculinity, and rape myth acceptance have been implicated in creating an atmosphere conducive to sexual violence perpetration among fraternity men (e.g., Rhoads, 1995). Furthermore, the use of alcohol and party culture for sexual coercion is a staple of fraternity culture that has been examined by previous researchers (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2006; Martin & Hummer, 1989). Considered in tandem with male peer support, discussed previously, fraternity culture may exemplify a

unique context in which men are socialized or accepted into an environment that normalizes hypermasculinity, rape myth acceptance, and sexual violence against others.

The university culture (i.e., specific campus norms) and climate (i.e., students' feelings of safety on campus; Mazar & Kirkner, 2016) also influence fraternity men's perceptions of sex, consent, and sexual violence perpetration in a number of ways.

Aspects of campus culture that have relations to sexual violence perpetration include factors such as norms around alcohol use, the prominence of Greek life and athletics, tuition cost, and whether the school is a public or private institution (Wiersma-Mosley, Jozkowski & Martinez, 2017). Additionally, campus policies around alcohol consumption, such as whether fraternities are granted special access to host parties, may facilitate sexual violence by granting fraternity men social capital and power over vulnerable populations in unsupervised spaces (Armstrong et al., 2006; Jozkowski & Wiersma-Mosley, 2017; Martin & Hummer, 1989).

**Societal.** Macro, societal factors, such as rape culture, campus culture and traditional sexual scripts, may also be related to sexual violence on college campuses. Rape culture, defined above, is a societal level influence that contributes to individuals' perceptions of sex, consent, and sexual violence. Researchers have operationalized rape culture and determined it is comprised of several constructs, including hostile and benevolent sexism, adversarial sexual beliefs, traditional gender roles, hostility toward women, and acceptance of violence (Johnson & Johnson, 2017). Within fraternities, researchers have found manifestations of rape culture, such as subordinating women, valuing male over female friendships, and endorsing rape myths (Boswell & Spade, 1996; Giraldi & Monk-Turner, 2017).

Understanding societal norms around the consent process and how, collectively, we think about sexual relations also has implications for fraternity men's perceptions of sexual consent and violence. The traditional sexual script is the normatively accepted cognitive script for the social process of sexual interaction and includes concepts such as the sexual double standard (e.g., praising men for sexual promiscuity and devaluing women for the same thing; Byers, 1996; Frith & Kitzinger, 2001). These expectations for sexual activity, typically described in gender binary terms, relate to sexual violence in a number of ways. Researchers have established relations among the traditional sexual script and sexual behavior, consent, and violence perpetration (e.g., Brady et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2016; Jozkowski et al., 2017; Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013). Specifically, researchers have found college students endorse the traditional sexual script and utilize it to inform consent negotiations (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013; Jozkowski et al., 2017).

Researchers have also found a relationship between pornography consumption and sexual relationships, suggesting pornography may socialize individuals regarding their sexual relationships and inform their sexual scripts (Sun et al., 2016). This relationship may become especially problematic if the pornography individuals are viewing is violent or promotes sexual violence. Taken together, these macro level factors suggest the need to explore, in more detail, the fraternity men's perceptions of the systemic influences on sexual consent and violence.

### **The Current Study**

The purpose of the current transcendental phenomenological qualitative study was to explore fraternity men's perceptions of sex, consent, and sexual violence on a Midwestern college campus. I explored a modified social-ecological model of prevention,

including fraternity men's perceptions of individual, relational, organizational, and community levels of influence on sex, consent, and sexual violence. Individual factors included rape myth acceptance, masculinity and gender role beliefs, and alcohol use. Relational influences comprised peers, and, specifically, the Male Peer Support Model. Community influences included the role of the fraternity in fraternity men's experiences of sex, consent, and sexual violence. Societal level influences included the particular college campus on which the men reside, the sociopolitical influences of American rape culture, and the traditional sexual script. Each of these levels of influence may add to our understanding of why fraternity men are an at-risk group for sexual violence perpetration and provide additional insight into the influence of self-selection or socialization into fraternities and their norms. Table 1 provides an example of how the modified social-ecological model of prevention applies to the current study.

Importantly, I utilized a *modified* version of the social-ecological model in the present study. It was modified because I am only focusing on individual level beliefs. While I am interested in systemic influences on fraternity men's perceptions of the current areas of interest, in the present study I was unable to truly explore these system-wide influences because I only spoke to individuals and did not explore systems. I explored participants' perceptions of relational, organizational, and macro level influences, but I was unable to directly investigate them. A true social-ecological approach would require that I observe, explore, and study peer groups norms, organizations, and societal influences directly, rather than by proxy via individual's perception. While the current study still provides useful insight into these contexts, it is

only through the eyes of the current participants and, therefore, does not provide a direct examination of these influences.

Table 1

*Modified Social-Ecological Model Matched with Constructs from the Present Study*

	<b>Related Construct 1</b>	<b>Related Construct 2</b>	<b>Related Construct 3</b>
<b>Individual</b>	Religion	Gender roles	Alcohol use
<b>Relational</b>	Peers	Family	Partners
<b>Community</b>	Fraternity	College	
<b>Macro</b>	Media	Individualism	

While previous researchers have examined many of these constructs, to my knowledge, a specific study utilizing a modified social-ecological model of prevention within a qualitative paradigm to understand fraternity men's experiences with sex, consent, and sexual violence has not been conducted. The current study may have implications for future research on other college campuses, as well as inform future research aimed at explicitly testing mediators between fraternity membership and sexual aggression. Additionally, there may be important implications for prevention efforts on the particular campus in which the study is being conducted, as well as potential to determine whether the findings apply in other social-ecological contexts.

A philosophical paradigm is necessary in order to frame a qualitative study and inform questions asked and one's approach to the study. In the present study, I utilized a critical feminist approach, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three. Briefly, a critical approach is utilized when "the primary purpose of research is not simply to study the social world but to change it...researchers conduct studies to critique and transform social relations by revealing the underlying sources of social control, power relations, and inequality" (Neuman, 2011, p. 108-109). Importantly, this paradigm fits with the aims of

the current study because the goal was to better understand fraternity men's perceptions of sex, consent, and sexual violence through the lens of a modified social-ecological model of prevention. Essential to this approach is understanding the systemic influences on fraternity men's experiences of sex, consent, and sexual violence with the primary aim of informing sexual violence prevention efforts targeting fraternity men.

The current chapter provided a brief overview of the significance of the problem, primary research aims, and relevant constructs. Chapter Two will provide an in-depth literature review of relevant topics, including rape myth acceptance, masculinity and gender roles, alcohol use, consent, peer relationships, fraternity culture, campus culture, rape culture, and the traditional sexual script. Chapter Three will explore research questions, methods, researcher positioning, Institutional Review Board (IRB) and ethical considerations, participant information, procedures, and validity strategies. In Chapter Four, I will describe the findings and major themes that emerged in the present study. Finally, in Chapter Five, I will contextualize these findings within the extant literature and discuss limitations, practical implications, and future directions.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Countless examples reported in popular media suggest rape culture and sexual violence perpetration are alive and well in fraternities across the U.S. Recent examples were explored in the introduction, in which instances of sexual assault at fraternities at Swarthmore and UCLA were recounted (Bauer-Wolf, 2019; Watanabe, 2018).

Unfortunately, countless other examples exist. In 2010, fraternity men at Yale University infamously chanted “No means yes, yes means anal,” promoting a culture of sexual violence and harassment (Valenti, 2014). In 2014, Georgia Tech disbanded a fraternity for violations, including an instance in which a member sent out an email that labeled women “rape bait” and discussed how to lure women to have sex (Davis, 2014). These instances convey a brazen and cavalier attitude toward sexual aggression among fraternity men and highlight the specific problem college campuses continue to face.

Gaining a deeper understanding of fraternity culture and why fraternities are a particularly risky context for sexual violence perpetration is paramount in order to reduce sexual violence perpetration which remains prevalent across U.S. colleges and universities. Understanding fraternity men’s different social-ecological contexts, including individuals’ attitudes and behaviors, their personal relationships, and the macro cultures they inhabit, is imperative to eradicating sexual violence from college campuses.

The purpose of this literature review is to explore constructs related to men, broadly, and fraternity men, specifically, and sexual consent and violence. Although researchers have examined correlates of fraternity membership and sexual violence, to my knowledge a qualitative study examining fraternity men’s perceptions of sexual consent and violence through a social-ecological lens does not exist. Qualitative and

theoretical research exists that examines fraternity culture in-depth; however, specific research examining how fraternity men's different social contexts influence their perceptions of these constructs, to my knowledge, also does not exist. Therefore, this literature review explores empirical and theoretical literature on sexual violence perpetration, consent, self-selection and socialization, and relevant constructs at each level of a modified social-ecological model of prevention.

### **Sexual Violence Perpetration**

As discussed previously, men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators of sexual violence (Black et al., 2011). For example, in one sample, 14.5% of men reported perpetrating some form of sexual violence (Sutherland et al., 2014). Further, a majority of perpetrators know their victims, who are often acquaintances, friends, or intimate partners (DOJ, 2017). Certain male peer groups, such as fraternity men, athletes, and military personnel, are at heightened risk for sexual violence perpetration (e.g., Mikorski & Szymanski, 2016; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007; Seabrook et al., 2016). Foubert et al. (2007) found fraternity men were approximately three times more likely to commit a sexually coercive act than their non-fraternity peers. Further, a number of studies report the link between fraternities and sexual aggression and conceptualize fraternities as cultures supportive of sexual violence (e.g., Armstrong Hamilton, & Sweeney, 2006; Boeringer et al., 1991; Boswell & Spade, 1996; Franklin et al., 2012; Jozkowski & Wiersma-Mosley, 2017; Lackie & de Man, 1997; Martin, 2016; Martin & Hummer, 1989; Rhoads, 1995; Sanday, 2007; Seabrook et al., 2016). Sanday (2007) outlined a particularly concerning example of a fraternity ritual in which women are gang raped by men in a process known as "pulling train" or "gang banging" in which multiple men have

sex with one woman, who may or may not consent, and who may be too intoxicated to provide consent. This phenomenon, documented in detail in Sanday's book, highlights the sometimes dangerous environment of fraternity culture, in which risky sex and sexual violence are normalized and, sometimes, encouraged or celebrated.

Importantly, perpetrators may utilize tactics and engage in behaviors that are seen as socially acceptable and which may not be collectively seen as sexual violence, despite meeting legal definitions of sexual assault. For example, Brennan et al. (2019) examined college male perpetration across five U.S. universities (n = 1,982). They utilized latent class analysis and found their sample divided into three classes of perpetrators, including those individuals unlikely to perpetrate sexual aggression (88.6%), those individuals who reported using verbal coercion and alcohol (9.8%), and those individuals who reported perpetrating all forms of sexual violence and using all tactics (i.e., verbal pressure, anger, taking advantage of intoxication, threat of physical harm, and use of physical force; 1.5%). Importantly, the authors suggested that group men who reported using alcohol or verbal persuasion would be viewed as a more normative group in that their actions might not be considered by many as sexual violence, whereas the group who reported perpetrating all forms of sexual violence using all tactics would be rejected by society. That is, while society generally considers individuals who perpetrate sexual violence using physical force or violence as obviously wrong, we may not collectively consider other forms of sexual violence to be unacceptable or may not even acknowledge that they are forms of sexual violence. This point is an important implication for the current study because most men, if they perpetrate sexual violence, will fall into the second category. Further, a majority of fraternity men will not perpetrate sexual violence despite

participating in cultures facilitative of violence. Fraternities are heterogenous subcultures and, therefore, certain fraternities may not exhibit heightened risk for sexual violence perpetration. Nonetheless, while many fraternity cultures may condemn overt acts of sexual violence, they may perpetuate norms supportive of normalized, but still unacceptable, forms of sexual violence (e.g., verbal coercion, sex while intoxicated).

Based on the previous findings, in the current study I conceptualized sexual violence as a systemically sanctioned act that is normalized by rape culture rather than an aberrant behavior committed by a select few immoral individuals. Rather than operating under the “stranger in the bushes” myth of perpetrators, in which rape is a rare event that occurs mostly at the hands of strangers unknown to the survivor, it is recognized that sexual violence occurs, more often than not, at the hands of known men thoroughly accepted into mainstream society. In the current study, I conceptualized sexual violence as a normalized, frequent event in a patriarchal, rape-prone society, in which certain members of society (i.e., men) are given privileges and power over others and in which some men take advantage of this privilege by sexually aggressing against societal members with less power (Sanday, 1996). The modified social-ecological model, reviewed later in the chapter, fits with this conception because, rather than exclusively focusing on individual variables that influence violence perpetration, the current study focuses on the systemic influences that facilitate the occurrence of sexual violence.

### **Consent**

Consent relates to how individuals negotiating a sexual encounter agree to participate in sexual activity and is important to a discussion of sexual violence because sexual violence occurs when freely given consent is not obtained. Further, consent is

important to consider when discussing sexual violence perpetration because sexual violence has sometimes been characterized as a miscommunication between sexual partners (e.g., Tannen, 1992). This theory, based on heterosexual relations, posits that men and women differ in their sexual communications, which results in miscommunication and, in the worst-case scenario, acquaintance rape. Some research findings do partially support this hypothesis (e.g., Jozkowski et al., 2014). Jozkowski et al. (2014) established differences between how men and women communicate and understand consent, such as men relying more on nonverbal indicators to indicate and understand consent. This finding may provide some support for the idea that miscommunication occurs within heterosexual sexual situations, especially if women, who were primarily found to use verbal indicators, do not provide the nonverbal indicators men are looking for (Jozkowski et al., 2014). However, Hickman and Muehlenhard (1999) astutely noted that miscommunication likely is not a major factor in sexual violence, but rather “it is more likely that sexually aggressive men selectively ignore or reinterpret what women say to fit what they want to hear, using miscommunication as an excuse for rape” (p. 270).

Others disagree and assert that sexual communication between men and women is generally clear and understood (e.g., Beres, 2010; McCaw & Senn, 1998; O’Byrne, Rapley, & Hansen, 2006; O’Byrne et al., 2008). Beres (2010) found men and women communicated about sex similarly and understood each other’s acceptance and rejection cues. Similarly, O’Byrne and colleagues (2006) concluded that men in their sample were able to understand both verbal and non-verbal sexual refusals. Research findings suggest there are no major differences between men and women regarding their consent

communications and, therefore, miscommunication should not be used as an explanation for sexual violence (Beres, 2014; Brady et al., 2018; Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1999). For example, O’Byrne et al. (2006) found, in their analysis of male focus groups, that men understood the subtleties of a sexual refusal, such as recognizing a nonverbal no from a woman.

In a qualitative study examining both men and women’s views of sexual consent, Beres (2014) found three themes. The first theme was that participants viewed consent as a minimum requirement for sex (i.e., “for acceptable or non-criminal sex”; Beres, 2014, p. 382). Participants contrasted *wanting* to have sex with being *willing* to have sex with the latter being most participants’ definitions of consent. Consent could be communicated with the absence of a “no” or a lack of resistance. A second theme emerged whereby participants described consent as a discrete event rather than an ongoing process. The last theme was that consent was not applicable to participants’ ongoing relationships. Describing one interview, Beres wrote: “This couple saw consent as an explicit request for sexual activity. For them, an explicit request for sex was not required once people were in a relationship” (p. 383). Beres further discussed how the above three themes contrast with recommendations and definitions about consent from sexual violence prevention advocates (e.g., that consent should be affirmative, ongoing, and within long-term relationships). However, Beres, contrasting portions of interviews in which participants were asked to describe their communication during sex, noted: “the results presented here clearly indicate that how people described their practices around negotiating sex is different from how they understand the word consent” (p. 384). Beres

raises the point that language matters and how people understand consent may differ from how they actually approach it in practice.

The above research, and other research, potentially refutes the miscommunication model as an explanation for sexual violence. Furthermore, research findings suggest individuals understand how to communicate and understand consent, despite utilizing language that differs from legal and academic conceptualizations of consent (e.g., Beres, 2014; Jozkowski et al., 2014). Despite a push toward emphasizing consent in sexual violence prevention efforts, researchers argue that there is limited theoretical understanding of consent or literature exploring perceptions of consent among the individuals that such programming targets (Beres, 2014). Therefore, research examining individuals' perceptions of consent, including how they obtain consent and the language they use to discuss it, is imperative to developing more nuanced and effective prevention strategies.

Legal definitions of consent have two important components, including: defining who has the capacity to consent and how consent can be communicated (Beres, 2014). Legal definitions vary by state, but a general definition of consent is freely agreeing to engage in a sexual act, including being of sound mind to do so (e.g., not physically or mentally impaired or intoxicated) and not being threatened by violence or coercion (RAINN, 2019). In the state of the current study, the legal definition of a lack of consent is “the victim was compelled to submit due to use of force or threat of force or coercion, or the victim expressed a lack of consent through words, or the victim expressed a lack of consent through conduct, or the consent, if any was actually given, was the result of the actor’s deception as to the identity of the actor or the nature or purpose of the act on the

part of the actor” (Nebraska Revised Statute 28-318, 2019). Furthermore, the law states the victim can resist verbally or physically, but resistance is not required if it would be “futile to do so.”

Because sexual violence can be broadly understood as a sexual act committed without a person’s freely given consent, understanding how fraternity men perceive and approach consent is vital to gaining a more nuanced understanding of their proclivity toward sexual violence perpetration. Historically, consent has been understood in terms of a “no means no” approach, whereby a clear, verbal or nonverbal no to sexual contact is necessary to indicate a lack of interest in sex (e.g., Beres, 2014). However, preventionists and researchers have explored and promoted a move toward affirmative consent or a “yes means yes” approach to sexual relations, whereby a lack of refusal is not sufficient to engage in sexual activity (e.g., Beres, 2014; Curtis & Burnett, 2017; Humphreys & Herold, 2003). Proponents of this definition of consent advocate for an enthusiastic agreement to sex, rather than simply a lack of a no. The logic for affirmative consent includes a need to eliminate coercion from sexual encounters, whereby someone may be afraid to say no due to power differences or verbal coercion, for example, or may be unable to say no due to incapacitation or intoxication. Therefore, requiring an affirmative approach to consent would require that sexual partners confirm a verbal agreement to sex prior to engaging in sexual activity and continually throughout to ensure that their partner is in full agreement with it.

Critiquing both the affirmative consent and no means no models, Brady et al. (2018) noted “the ‘yes’ model does not really account for unequal power relationships, so cannot fully account for varying levels of pressure or coercion. Meanwhile, the ‘no

model' cannot distinguish between non-responsiveness that may signal consent or when fear renders a victim quiet and motionless" (p. 39). Students in one study responded negatively to Antioch College's policy whereby students would be required to verbally ask for consent at each new stage of sexual activity (Humphreys & Herold, 2003). Given that research has found individuals generally signal consent nonverbally, more information regarding students' perceptions of affirmative consent policies, and whether their actual process of obtaining consent maps onto it, is needed. This information is essential to accurately informing prevention efforts and providing usable techniques for college students to have healthier sexual relationships.

Previous researchers have explored consent attitudes and behaviors among college men and women, in general, and how their consent beliefs influence sexually violent behaviors and attitudes (e.g., Hermann et al., 2018; Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013; Jozkowski & Wiersma, 2015; Warren et al. 2015). Hermann et al. (2018) found that men's greater reported endorsement of hostile masculine norms (i.e., acceptance of violence, power over women, and playboy norms) was related to greater lack of control over asking for consent, greater negative attitudes toward consent, and greater indirect consent behaviors, such as using nonverbal indicators and body language. In a study of heterosexual college men, Warren et al. (2015) found a significant relationship between not understanding sexual consent and sexual aggression perpetration. Additionally, participants' rape myth acceptance, conformity to masculine norms, and peer support of abuse indirectly related to sexual aggression and were fully mediated by lack of understanding of sexual consent. Warren et al.'s study supports the supposition that men's belief systems, such as hypermasculine norms and acceptance of rape myths, relate

to sexual aggression and also underscores the importance of understanding consent to sexual violence.

Other authors have similarly provided support for the relationship between consent and sexual violence. In their study of college men and women, Jozkowski and Wiersma (2015) found that men reported using more direct nonverbal behaviors, communication and initiator behaviors, and pressuring behaviors than women. Findings from Jozkowski and Peterson (2013) also supported the connection between consent and sexually violent attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, four themes emerged from the data, three of which are particularly relevant to the relationship between consent and sexual violence, including endorsement of the traditional sexual script, male aggression toward women, and male deception in obtaining consent. Related to the traditional sexual script, the authors found that participants viewed men as initiators and women as gatekeepers. This finding is important to the conversation around consent because it places the power of asking for consent in men's hands and puts women in the positions of saying yes, no, or nothing. Participants in this study also discussed using aggression to obtain consent (e.g., using their strength, physically pushing a woman's head down in order to receive oral sex, using a directive to begin sex) and deception (e.g., men pretending they inserted their penis into a woman's vagina or anus by mistake). Alarming, one male participant wrote: "Start having sex and then say oops, didn't mean for it to go in, so too late now" (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013, p. 520). In their study of college men and women, Walsh et al. (2019) found that sexual assault perpetration was correlated with constructs relevant to the present study (among others), including: monthly binge drinking, adherence to traditional masculinity, and belief in and use of nonverbal consent

communication/strategies. According to this finding and other research, nonverbal consent strategies may be particularly problematic and associated with sexual violence perpetration.

Researchers on the SHIFT team provided additional insights regarding sexual consent among college students (e.g., Chin et al., 2019; Hirsch et al., 2019). For example, Hirsch et al. (2019) conducted an ethnography, with observations, focus groups, and interviews, examining sexual consent among cisgender, heterosexual college students and uncovered seven dimensions of sexual consent (i.e., gendered heterosexual scripts, sexual citizenship, intersectionality, men's fears of the consequences of doing consent wrong, drunk sex, peer groups, and spatial and temporal factors that affect assumptions about consent). Several of these themes are particularly relevant to the current discussion of consent. The authors' findings provided further support for the man as initiator/woman as gatekeeper trope which has potentially problematic implications for consent and sexual violence if men rely on women's lack of resistance as permission to continue with a sexual act. Other relevant themes included sexual citizenship (i.e., sexual self-determination, such as feeling like one can say no to sex, which may be influenced by socialization), the prevalence of drunk sex (which, in most states, is a situation in which sexual consent cannot be given), and the influence of peer groups (e.g., in making sense of sexual experiences).

Chin et al. (2019) explored the role of time in relation to sexual consent among college students and identified three associated themes: calendar time, relationship time, and sexual time. Calendar time was related to particular events throughout the year, such as fraternity and sorority formals, that influenced consent practices and carried with them

expectations for sexual activity. The authors provided participant quotes exemplifying this theme, such as a participant who disclosed that accepting a date for formal was essentially consenting to hooking-up or sex. This theme was also found in the Hirsch et al.'s (2019) study above. Relationship time was associated with the perception that as the length of a relationship progresses or as the number of times a particular sexual act is engaged in increases, the need for explicit consent diminishes. Sexual time was related to the different times a person might negotiate consent, such as before a sexual encounter, during a sexual encounter, or even making sense of a sexual encounter after the fact. This study provided an important context to consider—time—when understanding sexual consent practices.

A comprehensive review of the literature revealed one study specifically examining consent among fraternity men (Foubert et al., 2006). Their qualitative analysis uncovered four major themes regarding fraternity men's perceptions of consent. These themes included: verbally asking for consent ruins the moment (i.e., preference for nonverbal indicators); some consent signals are clear from women you do not know (e.g., signals that a woman is interested); some consent signals are unclear with women you do not know (e.g., if a woman has been drinking at all, it is difficult to establish consent); and, consent is more clear with women one knows (e.g., determining her level of intoxication).

Overall, researchers concluded that negotiating consent in heterosexual relationships is complicated, but many agreed that a lack of knowledge regarding consent was not the primary issue (e.g., Brady et al., 2018). Therefore, current prevention efforts that focus on teaching students about consent may be misguided, since research suggests

individuals understand consent and are adept at signaling and receiving it (Beres, 2014). Importantly, however, Warren et al. (2015) found that a lack of comprehension of sexual consent mediated the relationship between rape myth acceptance, conformity to masculine norms, peer support of abuse, and reported sexual aggression. This finding highlights the importance of peer relationships either as mechanisms that reinforce problematic individual beliefs and attitudes or that socialize individuals to develop such beliefs.

This result also has important implications for fraternity men's perceptions of sexual consent and violence, explored in the current study. Understanding fraternity men's perceptions of consent and their methods for obtaining consent in their sexual encounters has important implications for sexual violence prevention. For example, there are prevention implications if fraternity men incorrectly believe consent is not necessary to engage in sexual behaviors, do not consider coercion (e.g., verbal, alcohol-facilitated) to be sexual violence, or inappropriately rely on a lack of a no (e.g., ignore non-verbal indicators of lack of consent).

### **Self-Selection vs. Socialization**

Given the established link between fraternity membership and sexual aggression, researchers have explored why such violence disproportionately occurs in these groups and why fraternity culture often includes facets such as rape myth acceptance, hypermasculinity, and sexual aggression. Two theories related to how fraternity culture (or male peer groups, generally) is created have emerged. These theories are self-selection and socialization.

Self-selection suggests men with pre-existing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that relate to sexual violence (e.g., rape myth acceptance, conformity to masculine norms) self-select into fraternities (Waterman et al., 2020). Based on this theory, one explanation for why fraternity culture is related to sexual violence perpetration and rape-supportive attitudes may be that the men who join fraternities are already predisposed to exhibiting these attitudes and behaviors. That is, they bring these pre-existing attitudes into the fraternity and continue to perpetrate sexual violence while there. From this perspective, instead of socializing men into a system of value and beliefs that are strengthened via male bonding, “the fraternity in turn merely provides a vehicle for enacting dispositions that are already held” (Rhoads, 1995, p. 320). The group identity is strengthened, from this perspective, because men with similar values and beliefs seek one another out via the fraternity and, therefore, their own ideals and collective identity are strengthened, as a result. Seabrook et al. (2018) found support for this theory, such that, in their longitudinal study of college men, joining a fraternity did not lead to greater rape myth acceptance or proclivity to rape compared with men who were interested in joining but did not join or men who did not join a fraternity. Likewise, in their longitudinal study of fraternity men and masculine ideologies, Waterman et al. (2020) found that men with more traditional gender role beliefs and men who use sex to cope with negative emotions, compared with other men, were more likely to join fraternities.

Conversely, socialization theories posit that fraternity culture socializes men via specific norms to adopt rape-supportive attitudes, hypermasculine identities, and rape proclivities (e.g., Boeringer et al., 1991; Martin & Hummer, 1989). That is, while men may not have higher levels of attitudes or beliefs associated with sexual aggression at

baseline, after entering into a fraternity and being exposed to and immersed in a rape-supportive culture, they develop increased attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that heighten their risk of perpetrating sexual aggression. Boeringer et al.'s (1991) examination of social learning variables and sexual aggression among fraternity men evidenced similar conclusions. They found that the relationship between fraternity membership and reported future likelihood of using force to obtain sex was explained by social learning variables, including reinforcement of sexual aggression. Further, Martin and Hummer (1989) concluded that "fraternities create a sociocultural context in which the use of coercion in sexual relations with women is normative and in which the mechanisms to keep this pattern of behavior in check are minimal at best and absent at worst" (p. 459). Although they did not specifically test whether fraternity men self-selected into this social context or whether they were socialized to adopt values and beliefs associated with sexual violence, their study provides support for the notion that fraternities are specific social contexts that serve as breeding grounds for rape-supportive attitudes and sexually coercive behaviors. Importantly, authors have explored the Male Peer Support Model of socialization and its relation to sexual aggression (e.g., DeKeseredy, 2017; Schwartz et al., 2001). This model will be explored in more detail in another section of the literature review.

Other researchers suggest both self-selection and socialization influence fraternity men's risk for sexual violence perpetration (e.g., Rhoads, 1995; Warren et al., 2015). For example, Rhoads (1995) offers that "organizational culture [is] a dynamic force that both shapes and is shaped by social interactions" (p. 320). Both socialization into the fraternity culture via rituals such as pledging, chapter meetings, and parties, and self-selection by

men who share a pre-existing set of beliefs consistent with the fraternity's beliefs, exist in tandem and serve to reinforce and strengthen the group identity of the fraternity.

Both of these theories relate to the modified social-ecological model utilized in the present study. This model contextualizes sexual violence within the individual (self-selection), relational, community, and societal levels (socialization). In the current study, I aimed to add to the existing literature on self-selection and socialization as it relates to fraternity membership and sexual violence by exploring constructs at all levels of the modified social-ecological model of prevention.

### **Modified Social-Ecological Model of Prevention**

The CDC (2014, 2021) recommends utilizing a social-ecological model for sexual violence prevention, and a modified version of that framework was utilized to understand fraternity men's perceptions of sexual consent and violence in the current study. I utilized a modified social-ecological model in the present study because I focused on fraternity men's *perceptions* of the systemic influences on sex, consent, and sexual violence. Because I only focused on their perceptions and did not utilize other methods to observe or study these systemic influences, the current study does not represent a true utilization of the social-ecological framework. While I aimed to understand fraternity men's perceptions of the environments that perpetuate rape culture and foster sexual violence, I did not study these systems and environments directly. It is, therefore, important to note that I utilized a modified social-ecological model to frame the present study.

The social-ecological model examines contextual factors of perpetration from four ecological levels, including individual, relational, organizational, and community. Researchers have typically examined the etiology of sexual violence perpetration and

associated attitudes and beliefs at the individual level despite evidence that this approach is insufficient to address this complex societal problem (Casey & Lindhorst, 2009).

Although much of the previous literature focuses on individual level factors, research examining constructs at each of the four levels is explored below.

Limited prior research has examined sexual violence through a social-ecological lens, and most of it has been theoretical or a call for research and prevention efforts to focus on this framework (e.g., Casey & Lindhorst, 2009; CDC, 2014; Heise, 1998; Potter, 2016). Researchers have explored different systemic factors separately, as will be explored below, but to my knowledge a study holistically examining sexual violence in each social-ecological context among fraternity men does not exist. Pezza and Bellotti (1995) utilized a social-ecological model to examine interpersonal violence on college campuses. The authors reviewed the etiology of campus violence via factors such as predisposing factors, contextual variables, situational aspects, and environmental factors. Although a study specifically utilizing the social-ecological model to study fraternity men's perceptions of sexual consent and violence may not exist, previous authors have utilized a similar framework to explore other campus issues.

A major exception to the above is the Sexual Health Initiative to Foster Transformation (SHIFT) research team at Colombia. Their studies (e.g., Chin et al., 2019; Hirsch et al., 2019; Kahn et al., 2020; Santelli et al., 2018; Walsh et al., 2019; Wamboldt et al., 2019) are cited throughout this literature review as well as in the forthcoming discussion chapter. Importantly, these researchers have responded to the call of prevention practitioners and researchers declaring the importance of focusing on social-ecological factors that perpetuate rape culture and result in sexual violence.

Kahn et al. (2020) published an important review paper (as part of the SHIFT team) in support of a social-ecological approach to sexual violence research, prevention, and intervention in which sexual violence is understood within multiple levels and contexts (i.e., individual, relational, organizational, and cultural). Expounding on the benefits of a social-ecological approach (rather than one based solely on characteristics of individual perpetrators as in models based on sociopathy), Khan et al. (2020) wrote: “it means exploring the relationship contexts within which assaults are more or less likely; the organizational environment that may encourage or hinder assaults; and the cultural contexts that generate attitudes and interactional contexts that might be related to assault” (p. 143).

Khan et al. (2020) further underscored the importance of conceptualizing sexual violence as a “normal event” that is “unlikely to be perpetrated by a small group of sociopaths but instead by more typical people (usually men)” (p. 143). The authors additionally emphasized the importance of consent in understanding sexual violence. Khan et al. also reviewed literature in the four levels of the social-ecological model, including individual (e.g., individual rape myth acceptance, acceptance of masculine gender norms/roles), relational (e.g., rape-supportive peers), organizational (e.g., prison, parties, bars, fraternities, athletic teams), and cultural (e.g., rape myths, toxic or hegemonic masculinity). Importantly for the current research, Khan et al. recommended “testing whether factors at each ecological level are associated with risk for perpetration” in order to better inform prevention efforts (p. 156).

The present study is based upon the above information and the calls for future research to examine each level of the social-ecological model. Previous research findings

associated with relevant constructs at each level of the model are explored below. In the current study, I aimed to build upon the forthcoming findings to understand fraternity men's perceptions of the social-ecological factors associated with sex, consent, and sexual violence.

### *Individual*

At the individual level, factors that influence perpetration include personality characteristics, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. In the current study, I examined rape myth acceptance, masculine gender roles, and alcohol use due to their established relations with male-perpetrated sexual aggression. Each of these influences is explored in detail below.

**Rape myth acceptance.** Rape myth acceptance, a defining feature of rape culture, is the acceptance of “prejudicial, stereotyped or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” that serve to justify sexual violence (Burt, 1980, p. 217; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995). Examples of such myths are “When girls go to parties wearing slutty clothes, they are asking for rape” and “If a girl doesn't physically fight back, you can't really say it was rape” (McMahon & Farmer, 2011, p. 77). Rape myths shift the focus of the responsibility of rape from perpetrators to survivors, in a process known as victim-blaming. Victim-blaming is explicitly exemplified in statements such as “If a girl goes to a room alone with a guy at a party, it is her own fault if she is raped” (McMahon & Farmer, 2011, p. 77). These statements frame sexual violence as an unfortunate situation that only occurs against people (often women) who are seen as deserving of the abuse.

Among college men, broadly, rape myth acceptance is related to a number of important constructs, including masculinity, sexual dysfunctional beliefs (i.e., beliefs

about sex and gender roles that relate to sexual disorders), hostile sexist beliefs, rape acknowledgement, consent, rape intention, and sexual violence perpetration (Barnett et al., 2017; Reed et al., 2019; Silver & Hovick, 2018; Taschler & West, 2017; Yapp & Quayle, 2018). Although masculinity has been established as an important construct related to rape myth acceptance (e.g., Lutz-Zois et al., 2015), Barnett et al. (2017) did not replicate this finding. Instead, they found that male sexual dysfunction beliefs, such as concerns related to sexual performance or ideas about domination and control in sexual relationships, predicted greater rape myth acceptance among undergraduate men. Conversely, Lutz-Zois et al. (2015) found that negative attitudes toward women mediated the relationship between traditional masculine ideologies and three types of rape myths (i.e., victim precipitation, victim masochism, and victim fabrication). Among male-identified survivors of sexual violence, greater rape myth acceptance was associated with greater likelihood to be an unacknowledged rape survivor (i.e., to not have disclosed their victimization), although this effect only partially accounted for the relationship (Reed et al., 2019). In their systematic review of the role rape myth acceptance plays in sexual violence, Yapp and Quayle (2018) delineated a number of important conclusions. Importantly, eight of the nine articles in their review reported that rape myth acceptance among men was significantly related to sexual violence.

Among fraternity men, specifically, limited research has established relations among rape myth acceptance and other constructs. Compared with men who did not join a fraternity but were interested or men who did not join and were never interested, fraternity men reported higher scores on several rape myth subscales, including: It wasn't rape, he didn't mean to-intoxication, and she lied (Seabrook et al., 2018). Other previous

research has established a relationship between fraternity membership and rape myth acceptance or rape-supportive attitudes (Boeringer, 1999; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007; Seabrook et al., 2018). For example, Bleecker and Murnen (2005) examined the images of women in fraternity men's and non-fraternity men's residence halls, exploring the degree of degradation found in the images, as well as their relation to rape myth acceptance. They found that fraternity men had more images in their rooms, and the images in their rooms were rated by coders as containing more degrading content. Similarly, fraternity men reported higher rape supportive attitudes, and the presence of more degrading images in one's room was associated with higher rape supportive attitudes. In another study, viewing pornography (including sadomasochistic pornography and rape pornography) was related to greater acceptance of rape myths (Foubert et al., 2011). Although more research is needed, it is clear that rape myth acceptance is an important influence on men's sexually aggressive behaviors, and, therefore, should be examined in more detail among fraternity men.

**Masculine gender role.** Adherence to traditional gender roles and masculine norms has been implicated in sexual violence perpetration. Several different constructs relate to the overarching construct of masculinity, including conformity to masculine norms, pressure to uphold traditional masculinity, gender role stress, hostility to women, devaluation of femininity, hegemonic masculinity, and hypermasculinity. Importantly, these constructs and their relations to sexual violence have been explored in previous literature (see McDermott et al. 2015 for a review). One's masculine identity may be based on individual personality characteristics, as well as previous socialization processes and norms from parents, peers, organizations, and society. Thus, the current study

specifically focuses on conformity to masculine norms and hypermasculinity because of the focus on the systemic nature of fraternity culture and sexual violence. Although constructs such as masculine gender role stress and hegemonic masculinity are clearly relevant and important, they are not discussed in detail here due to the intentional focus on norms.

There is extensive previous research regarding masculinity and sexual aggression among college men, with less research focusing specifically on fraternity men. Conformity to masculine norms and hostility toward women have been implicated in men's sexual aggression perpetration (e.g., Carr & VanDeusen, 2004; McDermott et al., 2015; Lackie & de Man, 1997; Mikorski & Szymanski, 2017; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007; Murnen et al., 2002; Reidy et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2015). Conformity to masculine norms is frequently measured by Parent and Moradi's (2011) Conformity to Masculine Norms (CMNI) scale, which includes subcategories, such as playboy norms (e.g., valuing promiscuity), power over women norms, emotional control, risk-taking, and heterosexual self-presentation. Essentially, these norms suggest beliefs that men are superior to women, that heterosexual relations are normative, and men should exploit and secure as many sexual partners as possible, that men should restrict themselves emotionally, and that men need to engage in certain behaviors (such as risk-taking or promiscuity) to prove their manhood.

Research examining masculinity and sexual violence among college men suggests these constructs are related in important ways. For example, greater adherence to masculine norms has been associated with greater reported likelihood or actual perpetration of various forms of sexual violence (e.g., Hunt & Gonsalkorale, 2014).

Constructs such as hypermasculinity (i.e., excessive adherence to the masculine role via risk-taking and violence, for example) and hostile masculinity (i.e., dominance and control coupled with insecurity and distrust of women) have been associated with sexual aggression among young men (Casey et al. 2017; Murnen et al., 2002). Similarly, greater adherence to hypermasculine norms has been associated with greater hostility toward women (Corprew & Mitchell, 2014). In addition, among college men with a strong affiliation with abusive male peers, specific masculine norms (i.e., playboy, power over women, and violence norms) predicted making unwanted sexual advances toward women (Mikorski & Szymanski, 2016). These findings are intuitive, as norms that involve having sex with many women, utilizing dominance and control, and using violent tactics, are congruent with perpetrating sexual aggression.

Previous research has also established a moderate relationship between hypermasculinity and fraternity membership (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). Additionally, Seabrook et al. (2016) found conformity to masculine norms, felt pressure to be masculine, and sexual objectification of women explained the relationship between fraternity membership and sexual violence acceptance. Sweeney (2014) aptly describes the stereotypical image of the fraternity man as it relates to masculinity and sex with the following: “the fraternity man—or frat guy in common parlance—cuts a masculine, heterosexual figure in popular American culture marked by youth and a voracious pursuit of alcohol-induced group revelry and casual sex” (p. 1115). This quote highlights the ways in which narrow and rigid conceptions of masculinity also harm men, by limiting their self-expression and identity options. It also fits with the larger aim of the current

research to dismantle rape culture, reduce sexual violence victimization, and expand conceptions of masculinity specifically within the fraternity context.

**Alcohol use.** Problematic alcohol use has been implicated as a contributor to sexual violence perpetration among male college students and especially presents a problem within fraternity culture. For example, several in-depth studies examining fraternity culture have implicated norms surrounding excessive alcohol use in sexual violence perpetration and discussed the dangerous nature of party culture within fraternities (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2006; Jozkowski & Wiersma-Mosley, 2017; Martin & Hummer, 1989; Mazar & Kirkner, 2016). Party culture is understood as “a student lifestyle of attending parties and engaging in substance use and binge drinking,” and fraternities have been acknowledged as prime facilitators of it (Mazar & Kirkner, 2016, p. 132).

Research suggests before and after fraternity parties are particularly vulnerable times for sexual violence perpetration (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). For example, several qualitative researchers have documented the party culture within fraternities that facilitates party rape (i.e., a distinctive form of campus rape that occurs at parties and is a form of alcohol-facilitated assault; Armstrong et al., 2006). Specifically, researchers suggest fraternity men control an important social resource on campus—the ability to host parties and provide alcohol—and this resource puts them in control of risky situations that allow them to take advantage of vulnerable campus populations (e.g., freshman women; Armstrong et al., 2006; Harris & Schmalz, 2016; Jozkowski & Wiersma-Mosley, 2017). For example, Armstrong and colleagues (2006) recounted how their participants disclosed “getting women drunk, blocking doors, and controlling

transportation [as] common ways men try and prevent women from leaving sexual situations” (p. 491). This statement exemplifies the dangerous ways in which sexual aggression is systematically incorporated into fraternity culture.

Additionally, researchers have examined the role of alcohol in sexual violence among men, in general. For example, in a prospective analysis of college men, Gidycz et al. (2007) found higher levels of problem drinking were associated with reported sexual aggression perpetration at three-month follow-up. Interestingly, they did not find any association with fraternity membership and aggression. However, they noted a low incidence rate of fraternity membership in their sample, and that they did not examine social or cultural norms related to fraternity membership as potential limitations. They advocate for studies that examine social norms, as mere membership in a fraternity does not necessarily imply risk for sexual aggression; for example, if one is in a low-risk fraternity as characterized by Boswell and Spade (1996). In their review of the literature, Abbey (2011) offered explanations for why alcohol use is related to sexual violence, noting that men may use alcohol as an excuse to perpetrate sexual violence, alcohol may lead to cognitive impairments that cause men to avoid cues that a potential partner is not interested, and may cause men to avoid thinking of the consequences of their actions. Importantly, Abbey (2011) suggests alcohol use may interact with other personality characteristics known to be associated with sexual aggression (e.g., hostility toward women). Additionally, in a within-subjects study of men aged 18 to 36 (i.e., not specifically college men), researchers compared their reported incident of sexual violence with and without alcohol and found that the alcohol assault included the use of more isolating and controlling behaviors as well as more use of physical force (Kirwan et al.,

2019). Due to their use of a within-subjects design, the authors concluded this finding provides evidence for the important role alcohol use plays in sexual violence perpetration, beyond personality characteristics. Interestingly, not all studies confirmed the role of alcohol in perceptions of future sexual aggression perpetration (e.g., Untied et al., 2013). Nonetheless, given the confluence of heavy drinking and sexual aggression documented within fraternities, it is important to examine the role of alcohol in those contexts.

Other studies confirm previous qualitative and theoretical discussions of the importance of alcohol use in sexual aggression among fraternity men. For example, Kingree and Thompson (2013) found high risk alcohol use mediated the relationship between fraternity membership and sexual aggression among a sample of college men. Specifically, they accounted for important attitudinal variables (e.g., rape-supportive beliefs, hostility toward women) men had at baseline (i.e., before joining a fraternity), measured which men joined a fraternity between time one and time two, and then measured sexual aggression at time three. They found increases among men who joined a fraternity compared to men who did not in the following variables: perceptions of peer approval of forced sex, peer pressure to have sex, high risk drinking, and number of sexual partners. This finding is important because it provides support for the socialization model of fraternity membership in addition to underscoring the role of risky alcohol use in sexual violence perpetration among fraternity men.

### ***Relational***

One's interpersonal relationships, such as with peers, family of origin, and partners, also influence perpetration attitudes and behaviors. In the current study, I

explored male peer groups, in particular. Peer groups may be particularly influential on fraternity men in this point of their life due to proximity and bonding experiences occurring within their fraternity.

**Peers.** Male peer groups have been implicated as an important social-ecological context where men receive information about sexuality, transmit and receive norms about consent and sexual violence, and receive social support (e.g., DeKeseredy, 2017; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). In the context of the Male Peer Support Model, intimate partner sexual violence is related to specific types of male peer support, including: “frequently drinking with male friends, informational support, and attachment to abusive peers” (DeKeseredy, 2017, p. 126). This model specifically implicates one’s attachment to abusive male peers, as well as the resources they provide, in the relationship between male peer support and sexual violence (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). In the original model, DeKeseredy hypothesized that dating relationships lead to stress (e.g., from sexual problems, from issues related to power and control within the relationship), which leads men to seek out social support from their male peers (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997). This support, in turn, may lead to abusive behaviors against female partners if one’s peers provide resources that “encourage and justify the physical, psychological, and sexual abuse of women (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997, p. 44-45). Importantly, Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997) updated the original model to include systemic influences, such as social patriarchy, rape culture, membership in social groups, heavy use of alcohol, limited masculine identities, group secrecy, sexual objectification of women, and the absence of deterrence.

Several studies provide support for the influence of male peer support on college men's perceived or reported sexual violence perpetration. For example, in one study, association with abusive male peers interacted with key masculinity norms (i.e., playboy, violence, and power over women) to predict unwanted sexual advances toward women (Mikorski & Szymanski, 2017). Likewise, Jacques-Tiura (2010) found a positive relationship between felt peer pressure to have sex "by any means necessary" and sexual assault perpetration. In other studies examining male peer support and sexual violence among Canadian university men, evidence was found suggesting the importance of informational support and association with abusive male peers in predicting sexual abuse (DeKeseredy & Kelly, 1995). Similarly, Schwartz et al. (2001) found, among Canadian university men, that men who consumed alcohol twice or more a week and who had male peer support in the form of encouraging emotional and physical partner abuse were significantly more likely to report perpetrating sexual abuse compared with men who did not have these characteristics.

Researchers have examined the specific ways in which the Male Peer Support Model explains the relations between fraternity membership and sexual violence. Franklin et al. (2012) empirically tested the Male Peer Support Model among fraternity members, with the important addition of a measure of self-control based on theories of crime implicating low self-control in crime perpetration. Although they found support for aspects of the Male Peer Support Model, they only found good model fit to the data when including the measure of self-control (i.e., gender role ideology and alcohol use were predicted by self-control and, then, predicted sexual assault). Additionally, they found partial support for the Male Peer Support Model among fraternity men, whereby

participants “experienced greater levels of peer pressure to have sex, which, in turn, increased the likelihood of sexual assault” (Franklin et al., 2012, p. 1473). They also found support for the role of alcohol and drug use in sexual assault among fraternity men.

Importantly, the Male Peer Support Model provides an explanation for why fraternities are at-risk populations for sexual violence. Specifically, understanding that “spending time with peers who are accepting of sexual violence leads men to be accepting of sexual violence themselves” suggests peers are an important social-ecological context to consider in terms of the norms and informational support they provide, especially as it relates to pressure to have sex, pressure to sexually coerce and assault, and pressure to uphold rigid conceptualizations of masculinity (Seabrook et al. 2018, p. 510).

### ***Community***

In the context of this study, I consider the role of the fraternity in men’s sexual violence perpetration. Through this lens, important considerations include the systemic influences of fraternity life, including the power and privilege afforded to fraternity men on college campuses, the pernicious party culture that operates there, and members’ unique social norms, such as valuing hypermasculinity and devaluing femininity.

**Fraternity culture.** Researchers have examined fraternity culture in-depth both generally and specifically related to sexual violence perpetration. Long known to be contexts at high-risk for sexual violence perpetration, researchers have attempted to explain why this propensity for violence is the case, utilizing both empirical and theoretical approaches (e.g., Boeringer et al., 1991; Boswell & Spade, 1996; Franklin et al., 2012; Jozkowski & Wiersma-Mosley, 2017; Martin, 2016; Martin & Hummer, 1989;

Rhoads, 1995; Sanday, 2007). Understanding organizational norms extends the Male Peer Support Model, discussed previously, because “membership in patriarchal organizations, such as fraternities, further normalizes sexual violence by isolating men from women and reinforcing male social control and dominance” (Seabrook et al., 2018, p. 510).

Rhoads (1995) painted a detailed picture of fraternity culture in their ethnography of fraternity life and concluded there were two major patterns within fraternity culture, including exhibiting hostility toward women and viewing women as passive participants in encounters. Significantly, men within this particular fraternity often blamed victims, objectified women, performed narrow ideas of masculinity, and valued the physicality and attractiveness of their members. Similarly, Boswell and Spade (1996) examined high and low risk fraternities (i.e., based on likelihood of sexual violence within each) and the social contexts that promote rape culture. Notably, they found that men in high-risk fraternities exhibited more hostility toward women, objectified women, viewed them as a means to sex rather than as whole human beings worthy of respect, endorsed the sexual double standard, and experienced pressure to value their relationships with each other over relationships with women. Similar findings emerged in other studies, with an emphasis on masculinity over femininity, objectification of women, and the use of alcohol for sexual coercion (Martin & Hummer, 1989). Strikingly, Martin and Hummer (1989) stated “our research led us to conclude that fraternity norms and practices influence members to view the sexual coercion of women, which is a felony crime, as sport, a contest, or a game” (p. 470).

Armstrong et al. (2006) explored the ways in which the party culture of particular social contexts, such as fraternities, create rape-conducive environments. They discussed the particular influences, including university policies, which encourage heavy drinking within fraternity contexts, giving power to fraternity men who have control over important social resources (e.g., where parties are held, alcohol access). They observed that sexual aggression systematically occurs due to the interaction of both individual and organizational processes (Armstrong et al., 2006). Specifically, they described how university policies disallowing alcohol in residence halls leads students to seek places to party off-campus, such as at fraternities, which are often unmonitored by university officials. These unmonitored parties create an unsafe environment for individuals who are engaging in heavy drinking and who are subjected to unequal power dynamics which facilitate sexual violence. Further, they noted:

Party rape is the result of fun situations that shift—either gradually or quite suddenly—into coercive situations....these forms of coercion are made more effective by organizational arrangements that provide men with control over how partying happens and by expectations that women let loose and trust their party-mates (p. 490, 492).

This lack of university oversight, which gives fraternity men power and dominance on campus and facilitates sexual coercion and dangerous situations was also explored in other studies of fraternity culture (e.g., Jozkowski & Wiersma-Mosley, 2017; Martin & Hummer, 1989).

Other research, explored in more detail in their respective sections, has quantitatively examined specific variables that relate to fraternity membership and sexual

violence. These constructs, such as rape myth acceptance, conformity to masculine norms, and alcohol use, also contribute to the creation of fraternity culture. Fraternity culture provides its members immense social support, access to resources, power, and social capital, and other privileges coveted on college campuses. However, for those individuals who are not members, including other non-affiliated men, women, or gender diverse individuals, fraternity culture represents a dangerous bastion of rape culture, hypermasculinity, and heavy alcohol use that is ultimately detrimental to the fraternity men, other individuals on campus, and the campus community as a whole.

Other researchers have identified prosocial attributes of Greek life (i.e., fraternities and sororities). For example, researchers have found individuals in fraternities and sororities have higher graduate degree attainment (Routon & Walker, 2019), graduate school desires, participation in student government, and volunteerism (Routon & Walker, 2014), greater involvement in campus social life, and higher graduation rates (Walker et al., 2015). In addition to benefits for the individual, fraternities and sororities may contribute to the campus community via volunteerism (Routon & Walker, 2014) and socially responsible leadership (e.g., citizenship and connection to the campus environment; Martin et al., 2012).

**Campus culture.** Another important systemic context influencing fraternity men's perceptions of sexual consent and violence and is their campus culture. In this study, campus culture is defined as the specific norms and culture on the campus that participants inhabit. In addition to norms, it is important to consider specific campus policies and administrative culture to understand the macro context in which fraternity men operate. For example, it may be important to consider whether the specific campus

context is a rape-prone context that actively perpetuates rape culture. It may also be important to consider how Greek life is viewed on their particular campus and what privileges and powers are granted to fraternity men by administration and other students. Additionally, understanding administrators' approaches and responsiveness to sexual violence prevention is paramount. This is perhaps best illustrated in President Joe Biden's (Vice President at the time) call to action in which he stated: "When college presidents and chancellors truly commit to ending the scourge of sexual violence in institutions of higher education, they set the highest example of what we expect from students, faculty, and administration. And so I send this message to our college and university leaders: Your leadership matters. And your actions reverberate across the nation, indeed around the world" (Biden, 2016, as cited in White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault, 2017, p. 1). How university administration responds to sexual aggression on campus sets the tone for how sexual violence is treated by the larger campus community. Further, it impacts students' feelings of safety, as well as individuals' willingness to openly engage in dangerous rape culture beliefs and behaviors.

Limited previous research has empirically examined the role of campus and administrative culture and policy on sexual violence perpetration. For example, in their analysis of the data of 1,423 public and private four-year universities with populations of at least 1,000, Wiersma-Mosley et al. (2017) found compelling information regarding the importance of overall campus culture to sexual violence. First, the authors found, based on Clery Act reporting, that 59% of campuses reported one or more rapes occurring on campus in 2014. Second, the authors reported significant differences between campuses reporting rape and those campuses not reporting rape. Specifically, higher number of

liquor violations and greater fraternity and athletic presence were related to higher rates of rape. Other related variables included higher tuition cost, higher athletic net worth, and public institutions. This information suggests focusing on larger campus climate factors, such as presence of alcohol, importance of athletics, and significance of Greek life, are important to understanding factors that facilitate sexual violence perpetration on college campuses.

Other theoretical examinations of campus culture that relate to fraternities and sexual violence were discussed earlier (e.g., alcohol use). The role of campus policy and administration in facilitating party culture within fraternities due to restrictions on alcohol use in residence halls was discussed in the alcohol section of this proposal. Additionally, understanding campus climate, which is defined as “how safe students feel while participating in college life, whether or not students feel harassed or threatened, feelings of acceptance as a minority student, and ideas of how the university would respond to violent incidents,” is key (Mazar & Kirkner, 2016, p. 133). This relates to the perception of what resources are available to survivors of sexual violence, and how the university will respond to Title IX complaints, for example. Importantly, because fraternities are part of campus culture, they both impact and are impacted by the overarching campus climate (Mazar & Kirkner, 2016). How universities respond to acts of sexual violence on campus may influence perpetrators’ and survivors’ behaviors. For example, a university administration that victim blames or refuses to pursue disciplinary actions against perpetrators risks facilitating future violent behavior and dissuading survivors from coming forward. Overall, because less empirical research exists, to my knowledge, regarding specific campus-level variables and their impact on sexual violence, the current

study will explore fraternity member's perceptions of how alcohol, Greek life, and sexual violence are perceived on their particular campus via norms and administrative policies.

### *Societal*

This level of the modified social-ecological model utilized in the present study relates to the larger societal factors that influence fraternity men's sexual violence perpetration. These factors are macro, cultural factors that create environments supportive of violence (CDC, 2021). In the context of this study, the larger systemic factors that are considered include rape culture, campus culture, and the traditional sexual script.

**Rape culture.** Rape culture can be defined as “the prevalent rape of women by male acquaintances, which is exacerbated in the aftermath by negative social responses including attributions of victim culpability” (Miller, 2019, abstract). Rentschler (2014) notes rape culture “targets the cultural practices that reproduce and justify the perpetration of sexual violence” rather than explicitly on individual perpetrators (p. 67). Essentially, a rape culture is one in which violence, primarily perpetrated by men, is normalized and expected, with survivors' concerns often dismissed, or worse, in which survivors are blamed for their own victimization. Further, it is institutionalized, such that male perpetration is reinforced through systems such as the criminal justice system, and the absence of policies that support survivors (Johnson et al., 1997; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 2005). It should be noted, again, that rape culture historically has considered the systemic impact of sexual violence by men against women. However, these heterosexist and gender-binary notions are outdated. Rape culture impacts all members of a rape-prone society, and, while male-perpetrated sexual aggression is most common, all individuals are impacted by it. Further, as noted previously, certain marginalized

populations (e.g., gender diverse individuals) within society are unequally impacted by this oppression. While much previous literature conceptualizes rape culture as violence against women, in the current study I aim to broaden this conceptualization toward understanding the pernicious effects of rape culture on all members of society.

Johnson and Johnson (2017) created and provided initial support for a measurement of cultural variables long theorized to be characteristic of rape culture, including: traditional gender roles, hostile and benevolent sexism, hostility toward women, adversarial sexual beliefs, and acceptance of violence. Many of these constructs have been explored previously in this literature review. Thus, utilizing the framework of rape culture as an overarching macro-level social-ecological context is supported by previous research.

Rape culture is relevant to the current study because the assumption is that, in a society such as the United States which is plagued by rape culture, all members of society are affected by it and internalize related norms, attitudes, and beliefs. As such, fraternity men likely have incorporated, consciously or otherwise, aspects of rape culture, such as the acceptance of rape myths, problematic views on sexuality and consent, and the acceptance of sexual aggression as part of the normal sexual script (e.g., Byers, 1996). As noted previously, in the current study, the heterosexist notion of rape culture as sexual violence primarily perpetrated by men against women is rejected. Instead, it is noted that rape culture facilitates sexual violence by men (although not exclusively) who can be both perpetrators and victims and who may victimize individuals of all gender identities.

As stated above, researchers define rape culture via hostile and benevolent sexism, adversarial sexual beliefs, traditional gender roles, hostility toward women, and

acceptance of violence (Johnson & Johnson, 2017). Many of these constructs were explored previously in this literature review. Additional research has explored the particular manifestation of rape culture within fraternities (e.g., Boswell & Spade, 1996; Girdali & Monk-Turner, 2017; Jozkowski & Wiersma-Mosley, 2017). For example, Boswell and Spade (1996) discussed how the segregation of men and women by fraternities, in which there is pressure to spend time with one's fraternity brothers and forsake friendly relations with women, perpetuates rape culture by subordinating and disrespecting women and creating literal distance between them. Thus, fraternities as a social setting and literal physical space, in this context, play a role in perpetuating rape culture on college campuses. In another study, Girdali and Monk-Turner (2017) explored social media posts and subsequent commentary as representations of rape culture. They found that individuals dismissed rape and responded to an act of sexual aggression (i.e., a banner at a fraternity that had the message "Freshman daughter drop off" and "Rowdy and fun. Hope your baby girl is ready for a good time") by normalizing this instance and describing it as fun, funny, and trivial. This exemplified how fraternities perpetuate aspects of rape culture (e.g., masculinity, sexism, acceptance of violence) and are, in turn, supported by the larger community who also trivializes and normalizes sexual violence.

**Traditional sexual script.** In addition to the specific cultural norms of rape culture and campus culture, societal ideals regarding the traditional sexual script and sexual double standards may influence fraternity men's perceptions of sexual consent and violence. Early work on the sexual script by Gagnon and Simon described the differences between men and women regarding their scripts (i.e., cognitive representations) of the social process of sexual interaction (Frith & Kitzinger, 2001). Sexual scripts are seen as

common knowledge for members of a particular society, whereby everyone simply knows the natural order of sexual interactions and how they are supposed to proceed (Frith & Kitzinger, 2001).

In the current study, I considered Byer's (1996) conceptualization of the traditional sexual scripts. The traditional sexual script delineates how heterosexual relations are supposed to occur between men and women, such as how sex occurs, who initiates it, where and when it occurs, and what the expected behaviors are (Byers, 1996). Byers (1996) further described the tenets of the traditional sexual script as follows: men always want and pursue sex, and women are the opposite; women are judged negatively for engaging in sexual encounters, whereas men are judged positively; men initiate sex whereas women respond passively and cautiously to men's sexual requests; women refuse sex, at least via token resistance, and men aggressively pursue them; women are defined by their romantic relationships and must restrict sexual access to enhance their romantic worth; and, women need to be emotional and nurturing in their relationships, whereas men should be emotionless and controlled. These societal values set up a sexual double standard and increase the likelihood of sexual coercion and assault, as men feel pressure to prove their manhood by engaging with many sexual partners. Further, society condemns women that do embrace sexuality such that survivors of sexual violence are often blamed for their own victimization.

The traditional sexual script is an important macro lens through which to understand fraternity men's attitudes and behaviors toward sexual consent and violence. Specifically, understanding fraternity men's beliefs about sexual encounters (e.g., who is the initiator, how sex will impact one's status), the way they navigate them (e.g., how

they obtain consent), and how they view gender roles and sex (e.g., whether they endorse the sexual double standard) can provide insight into why fraternities are at-risk for sexual violence. Limited research explores the traditional sexual script as it relates to men's actual sexual behavior and sexual violence perpetration (e.g., Brady et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2016; Jozkowski et al., 2017; Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013). For example, in their study of college men, Sun et al. (2016) found that men's more frequent use of pornography was associated with the following: using pornography for sexual arousal, using it in partnered sexual activity, and enjoying sexual intimacy less. They concluded that pornography is increasingly part of men's sexual socialization (i.e., their sexual scripting) which influences how they view actual sexual relationships. Hust et al. (2019) found similar results whereby experience with heterosexual scripts in men's magazines (e.g., tying sexual performance to masculine identity) was related to sexual coercion intentions among college men and women who read men's magazines. An important implication is that if men frequently view violent pornography, and this becomes a part of their sexual script, this could lead to sexual violence perpetration. More research in this domain is clearly needed to determine whether this has empirical support.

Other researchers have explored the role of the traditional sexual script in consent negotiations among heterosexual partners (e.g., Brady et al., 2018; Jozkowski et al., 2017; Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013). For example, Jozkowski and Peterson (2013) examined college students' consent beliefs and found students endorsed the traditional sexual script, especially men as initiators and women as gatekeepers, when thinking about consent. Similarly, Jozkowski et al. (2017) found that college students endorsed the sexual double standard, such as the idea that "good girls" do not engage in sexual

intercourse, and that men are the pursuers, such as by buying women alcohol, and, therefore, women owe men sex. Men in this study described sex as a competition whereby they must try to convince women to have sex. These results have clear overlap with the traditional sexual script (e.g., men as initiators, men experiencing pressure to have sex) and important implications for sexual violence perpetration.

### **Conclusion**

A synthesis of the preceding literature review suggests a number of conclusions. Because sexual violence continues to be a major problem on college campuses and, further, is perpetrated more frequently by men in all male peer groups, such as fraternities, it follows that research examining why this is the case is needed. Previous research has examined correlates of fraternity membership and sexual aggression, such as rape myth acceptance, gender role conformity, pornography use, and alcohol use, but further research examining why these variables are related, systematically, to violence within these contexts is warranted. Furthermore, a qualitative effort to document fraternity men's perceptions of sexuality, sexual consent, and sexual violence at each level of the modified social-ecological model has, to my knowledge, not been conducted. This gap is important because the CDC (2014, 2021) recommends a social-ecological approach to violence prevention. Thus, to inform such efforts, research examining the specific ways in which social-ecological contexts at all four levels (e.g., individual, relational, organizational, and community) relate to sexual violence from fraternity men's perspectives, is needed.

The purpose of the current study was to examine fraternity men's perceptions of sexuality, sexual consent, and sexual violence at each of the aforementioned social-

ecological levels from a phenomenological approach. A phenomenological approach is appropriate because there is limited research examining fraternity men and the social-ecological contexts that influence their perceptions of sexual consent and violence. Importantly, individual fraternities represent vastly heterogeneous subcultures; thus, gathering perspectives from numerous different fraternities was key to exploring the ways in which rape culture and sexual violence vary across different fraternities. The present study may have important implications for future research (e.g., quantitatively testing the social-ecological model among fraternity men to explain why it is a social context at risk for violence perpetration) and prevention and intervention efforts. The following chapter outlines the current study's methodology.

### **Chapter 3: Method**

In the first two chapters, I summarized relevant literature regarding correlates of fraternity membership, sexual consent, and sexual violence, including important constructs at all levels of a modified social-ecological model of prevention. I further discussed the significance of the problem of male-perpetrated sexual violence on college campuses. To my knowledge, there are no published studies specifically examining fraternity men's perceptions of sexual consent and sexual violence utilizing a modified social-ecological model of prevention as a theoretical framework. Therefore, the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore fraternity men's perceptions of sexual consent and violence on a Midwestern college campus. Interview questions explored the modified social-ecological model of prevention, including individual, relational, organizational/community, and macro levels of influence on fraternity men's perceptions of sexual consent and violence. In this chapter, I outline the current study's guiding questions, rationale, philosophical paradigm, researcher positioning, IRB and ethical considerations, participants, procedures, and validity strategies.

#### **Guiding Questions**

The central research question explored in this study was the following:

How do fraternity men perceive sexual consent and violence on a Midwestern college campus?

Sub-questions included:

1. What are fraternity men's perceptions of sexuality, consent, gender roles, rape myths, and sexual violence?

2. How are these shaped by each level of the modified Social-Ecological Model of Prevention (i.e., individual, relational, organizational/community and macro/societal)?
3. How have fraternity men observed others participating in rape culture and sexual violence perpetration?
4. What are fraternity men's perceptions of sexual violence prevention programs on the university's campus?

### **Qualitative Phenomenological Approach**

Qualitative research methods are appropriate when the aim of the research is to utilize words, rather than numbers, to describe or understand how individuals interpret their experiences and make meaning of their worlds (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The goal is to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of a few individuals and, particularly, how these individuals interpret or understand their lived experiences. I aimed to construct a holistic account of the participants' experience, with the understanding that the participant is the expert on their experience, and I was there to facilitate the uncovering of meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Qualitative methods were appropriate for the current study because the purpose was to better understand fraternity men's perceptions of sex, consent, and sexual violence. Specifically, the aim was to understand fraternity men's perceptions of how or why sexual violence occurs, their attitudes about sexuality, consent, and gender roles, and whether cultural and community norms influence these attitudes and perceptions. Rather than test specific hypotheses, the goal of the present study was to gain an in-depth understanding of this central phenomenon shared by fraternity men.

### *Transcendental Phenomenology*

Researchers utilize phenomenology to describe and understand the lived experiences of individuals sharing a collective experience and how they make meaning of that experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In transcendental phenomenology, the focus is on description rather than interpretation. Further, the emphasis is on the participants' understanding of their lived experience, rather than the researcher's (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

Transcendental phenomenology is appropriate for the present study because I wanted the participants' experiences and interpretations, rather than my own, to be central. This focus is of particular importance to the present study because the applied goal is to improve sexual assault prevention programming by more accurately tailoring programs to fraternity men. It was imperative to understand, in fraternity men's own words, their attitudes toward sexuality, gender norms, and consent, and the relevance of current sexual violence prevention programming to them. A structural description of the contexts in which they navigate sex, consent, and gender roles is paramount because it may inform prevention efforts by identifying important norms, contexts, or situations to target.

While many prevention programs exist, research findings suggest only two programs meet criteria for having "rigorous evidence of effectiveness for preventing sexual violence," although others show promise of effectiveness (CDC, 2014, p. 2). This finding suggests there may be a disconnect between prevention programs and the audiences they intend to change. By highlighting fraternity men's own words, gaining a deeper understanding of the language they use and the way they discuss these topics,

prevention professionals may be able to change these programs to better reach fraternity men (e.g., using the same language, targeting identified values and beliefs). Although men and, in particular, men with privileged identities (e.g., racial, sexual, class, and religious privilege) have power in society to express their opinions and perceptions, this particular topic is one that is often viewed as private or taboo. Therefore, the present study adds to the current literature by exploring men's (and in this case, privileged men's) perceptions of the systemic influences on sex, consent, masculinity, relationships, and sexual violence. In so doing, the aim is to inform prevention programming and understand how to dismantle oppressive power structures that facilitate sexual violence perpetration. Due to the need to understand this phenomenon in depth from the participants' perspectives, transcendental phenomenology was an appropriate approach.

### ***Philosophical Paradigm***

Paradigms inform all research and include the basic assumptions a researcher makes, their views on the nature of reality, and their understanding of epistemology (Neuman, 2011). In research, philosophical paradigms naturally influence the decisions we make, from the research questions we choose, to which design we select, to interview questions that we ask, and to the intended purpose of our research. In the present study, although also influenced by social constructivism (e.g., understanding the shared realities fraternity men construct within their different ecological contexts that inform their perceptions of sexual consent and violence), the primary lens I utilized was a critical lens. Importantly, I believe that, in addition to creating subjective social realities that are separate from objective reality, there are also important and very real structural realities that impact the way individuals operate in the world (Neuman, 2011). Further, I believe

some values are better than others (e.g., fighting for equality across gender identities and eradicating gender-based violence).

The primary purpose of critical social science is to “reveal what is hidden to liberate and empower people” (Neuman, 2011, p. 116). This fundamental principle coincides with the overarching purpose of the present study, which was to illuminate hidden social-ecological dynamics that inform fraternity men’s perceptions of sexual consent and violence. Ultimately, the goal was to inform sexual assault prevention efforts to transform society, which disadvantages individuals based on gender identity, sexual orientation, and race. Thus, the purpose of this research was to understand how fraternity men construct their realities concerning sexual violence, while also creating change to the overarching patriarchal society that facilitates sexual violence.

### ***Researcher Positioning and Reflexivity***

Creswell & Poth (2018) note the importance of researcher positioning in qualitative research, in which the researcher reflects upon their background and how it may influence their interpretations. I identify as a White, cisgender, heterosexual woman, as well as an intersectional feminist. This worldview colors all aspects of my work, from the problems I choose to study, to the ways in which I interpret events. I strongly believe in dismantling the capitalist, White supremacist patriarchy and all systems of oppression, and in the harmful effects of the patriarchy to people of all gender identities, including men.

In transcendental phenomenology, researchers should utilize bracketing or Epoche, which is when researchers attempt to remain objective by reflecting upon and setting aside their preconceptions and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016). As an intersectional feminist utilizing a social justice, critical lens, it is difficult to be completely objective. However, Epoche does not require the researcher to suspend all beliefs and values; rather, one must continually reflect on these biases throughout the research process and attempt to explore data with fresh eyes to uncover the true essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, while I hope the findings of the present study can be utilized to dismantle systems of oppression and, in particular, the patriarchy, I also continually engaged in reflection and bracketed my assumptions as I reviewed the data in order to prevent my interpretations and biases from overshadowing the experiences of the participants.

### **IRB and Ethical Considerations**

Prior to data collection, I submitted the study for review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. There are several important ethical considerations related to the present study. First, I was aware of the potentially sensitive nature of the topic and the possible stigma attached to discussing topics such as sex or sexual violence. Participants may have felt emotionally uncomfortable or triggered by the questions. I made sure to provide participants with information about psychological resources (included on the informed consent form and verbally described to participants) and to debrief about how the interview went afterward. I also ensured participants understood that participation was completely voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time without consequence to them. I provided participants a detailed informed consent form that I then reviewed with them prior to beginning the interview (Appendix A). I also attempted to protect participants' privacy by assigning pseudonyms to all participants and not utilizing fraternity names in the write-up. Participants were

notified of measures taken to ensure privacy in recruitment materials as well as during the informed consent process.

An additional consideration was my role in reporting any disclosures of sexual violence perpetration or victimization. Upon inspection of UNL's Responsible Employee information, as a graduate student, I am not considered a responsible employee and was not required to make a report should such a disclosure occur. Resources were provided to each participant, so they were aware of opportunities for psychological support (on informed consent document and verbally explained) and I also planned to provide any content-specific resources (e.g., where to go to gain specific support around sexual violence, or where to go to make a report) if needed. No participants requested this information.

Further, I wanted to ensure my research was not harmful to participants and to others potentially affected by the findings. The ultimate goal of the present study was to prevent sexual violence perpetration before it occurs. I was mindful of how my findings could be used and the potential impact this use could have on survivors of sexual violence. I did not want my findings to be interpreted in such a way that rape culture is further perpetuated, such as by victim blaming or framing negative perpetrator behaviors in a positive light. In order to prevent this possibility, I engaged in ongoing reflection, took notes, and utilized an external auditor as well as my dissertation committee for feedback.

## **Procedures**

Prior to collecting data for the present study, I conducted a pilot interview in order to test the interview questions and make adjustments, attempt to gauge whether

participants would be open and honest, and determine whether any changes to sampling or other areas were needed. I interviewed one man currently active in a fraternity. This pilot interview allowed me to reflect and adjust around the order of my interview questions and helped me determine that I could proceed with other participants. No major changes were made as a result of the pilot interview.

### *Participants*

Participants included 10 White, heterosexual, cisgender men ranging in age from 19 to 22 years old. All participants were originally from Nebraska. Each of the men identified as religious, to differing extents, primarily of Christian and Catholic denominations. In terms of social class, all participants identified as either middle or upper middle class. Table 2, which can be found in Appendix E, includes complete demographic information for all participants.

It is important to note that the participants in the present study represent a group of highly privileged men (i.e., race, gender, class, and religious privilege) with substantial power in US society. Their experiences and perceptions are undoubtedly influenced by this privilege as is their awareness of the issues explored in the present study. This limitation is important to note (and will be explored further in the discussion section) since their perceptions may be incongruent with objective reality (i.e., the prevalence of sexual violence perpetration on college campuses, generally, and specifically, perpetration by fraternity men). In the present study, I utilized a critical lens, meaning understanding the potential impact on readers of the present study (including those individuals who may be survivors of sexual violence) was paramount. Understanding

privileged men's perspectives on sexual violence is important, nonetheless, because they are the population at whom prevention efforts need to be targeted.

A priori purposeful sampling (i.e., selecting a specific group of people to study prior to data collection; Hood, 2007) was used, in which I specifically recruited individuals who identify as men, who were enrolled at the specified university, and who were active members of a fraternity (i.e., men who have experienced the identified phenomenon; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). I attempted to recruit participants from different fraternities with the purpose of having a diverse sample of the population in order to represent the heterogeneity of the fraternity experience. I hoped to include participants with different values and cultural experiences by including participants who represented several different fraternities at the university. I recruited participants from Educational Psychology classes, snowball sampling, word-of-mouth, and listservs (e.g., Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life). Although I did not ask participants which fraternity they were in as an attempt to protect their privacy, from their disclosures it appears they were from three or four distinct fraternities. Overall, I utilized convenience and snowball sampling which influenced the makeup of the sample, skewing it toward homogeneity.

Polkinghorne (1989, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018) recommends interviewing five to 25 participants for a phenomenological study, while Starks and Trinidad (2007) note one to 10 participants is typical. Data collection stopped when the analysis reached saturation, in which no new unique insights or information are being added to the themes with the inclusion of new participants (Hood, 2007). I simultaneously interviewed participants, transcribed the interviews, and coded the data. Saturation of themes was reached at 10 participants, at which I began to notice substantial overlap across

participants' significant statements and themes and adding additional participants did not yield any new themes.

### ***Data Collection***

I conducted one semi-structured interview with each participant. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and occurred over the phone. I provided each participant an informed consent document and also explained it prior to beginning the interview. All participants consented to participating in the present study. After consent was obtained, I asked participants to provide demographic information (e.g., age, race, religious identity, years in fraternity). Next, I asked participants a series of semi-structured questions (Appendix C). At the end of the interview, I asked participants if they had any questions and also provided space to process the experience. Two campus counseling resources were provided on the informed consent document and I also verbally discussed them at the beginning of the interview. All participants were given a \$25 Amazon gift card for their participation in the present study. All interview sessions were recorded using an audio recorder and transcribed immediately after. I also took notes throughout each interview and engaged in memoing afterward.

### ***Data Analysis***

I transcribed all audio recordings verbatim. These transcripts were stored on a password protected, secure online database (i.e., Box). Consistent with transcendental phenomenological analysis methods, I simultaneously collected, transcribed, and analyzed the data. I utilized the systematic process recommended by Moustakas (1994), which includes four steps (i.e., Epoche, Phenomenological Reduction, Imaginative Variation, and Synthesis of Meanings and Essences).

The first step is to engage in Epoche, which is to “set aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). This process, also known as bracketing, required me to reflect upon my own biases and assumptions about what I expected to find. This heightened awareness is followed by an attempt to set aside these prejudgments in order to review the data with “new and receptive eyes” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 89). Thus, my goal was to approach the data with as few preconceived notions as possible, allowing the essence of the phenomenon as perceived by the participant to reveal its true nature. I kept notes of my reflections and revisited the transcripts several times in an attempt to keep an open mind.

The second step is to engage in Phenomenological Reduction (i.e., understanding and describing *what* participants have experienced; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994), which is further broken down into approximately five steps, including: bracketing, horizontalizing, deleting repetitive statements, clustering horizons into themes, and organizing a coherent textural description (Moustakas, 1994). First, I utilized bracketing to set aside my expectations and assumptions in order to open my mind to the true essence of the phenomenon. This process began prior to conducting the interviews and any readings of the transcripts and continued throughout data analysis. An example of my memoing can be found in the Appendix G.

Next, I familiarized myself with each transcript by reading through it several times without analyzing it. I then engaged in horizontalization, which values every statement equally and considers each statement’s value to the textural description of the phenomenon. This process involves careful reading and re-reading of each transcript, as well as careful reflection, such that significant statements (i.e., verbatim information from

participants that illuminates their lived experience) emerge (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After identifying significant statements, I continued reviewing the transcripts, deleting any aspects that were irrelevant or repetitive, and ultimately left only the horizons (i.e., the textural meanings; Moustakas, 1994). This process was ongoing, and I reflected upon the phenomenon from different perspectives until it was reduced to its true essence. I then clustered horizons into themes across each of the transcripts. Finally, I constructed a complete textural description of the essence of the phenomenon.

The third overall step outlined by Moustakas (1994) is to engage in Imaginative Variation, which includes considering possible meanings of the phenomenon from multiple perspectives (i.e., utilizing one's imagination to consider multiple functions of why the phenomenon occurs; Moustakas, 1994). This step also includes developing a structural description (i.e., *how* the participants experienced the phenomenon, including important contextual and situational influences; Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this step, I utilized the modified social-ecological model to guide my organization of the structural description, considering the individual, relational, organizational/community, and macro/societal influences on participants' perceptions of sex, consent, and sexual violence.

Imaginative Variation is a process that involves four steps (Moustakas, 1994). I first considered the various possible reasons why the phenomenon occurs as it does (i.e., the underlying structural meanings of the textural descriptions). Second, I explored themes that explain why or how the phenomenon occurs in the way that it does. In the third step, I considered universal structures (e.g., time, space, the self). Fourth, I uncovered significant statements that exemplify the structural themes that depict the

phenomenon. In general, the idea of Imaginative Variation is to consider the structural meaning of the phenomenon from multiple, often opposing perspectives, in order to arrive at the true essence of how the phenomenon came to be.

In the final overall step, I created a synthesis of the essence (i.e., the core meaning) of the phenomenon, including both the textural and structural description (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) notes this “synthesis represents the essences at a particular time and place from the vantage point of an individual researcher following an exhaustive imaginative and reflective study of the phenomenon” (p. 100). Thus, it represents a well-supported understanding of the phenomenon that is grounded in the participants’ words and the researcher’s uncovered themes, but it is non-exhaustive.

### **Validity Strategies**

Creswell and Miller (2000) along with Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend utilizing at least two validation strategies in qualitative research. They also note that one’s choice of validation strategies depends on the particular paradigm they are utilizing in their study. Researchers operating from a constructivist lens operate with the belief that there are many different interpretations and perspectives which are influenced by context (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This paradigm replaces traditional notions of validity and reliability utilized within positivist paradigms, instead advocating for the use of procedures such as trustworthiness (e.g., how credible or confirmable are the findings as interpreted?) and authenticity (e.g., to what extent are the findings as interpreted fair and do they empower action?; Creswell & Miller, 2000).

The critical perspective extends this by suggesting “what governs our perspective about narratives is our historical situatedness of inquiry, a situatedness based on social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender antecedents of the studied situations” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126). From this perspective, the traditional notion of validity is challenged, and, importantly, the researcher must engage in critical reflection regarding their own perspective they bring to the study. Based upon these approaches, I utilized five strategies to explore trustworthiness and authenticity, including: triangulation (including memoing and reflexivity), external auditing and peer review, and thick, rich descriptions; (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Each of these strategies is described in detail below.

***Triangulation: Campus Survey, Memoing and Reflexivity, and Participant Interviews***

In order to reduce the impact of bias in the current study and to provide support for the trustworthiness of my findings, I kept detailed notes and reflections throughout the research process (i.e., study design, interview, coding), reviewed a recent campus safety survey, and diligently read through and coded participant interviews. An example of my memoing is included in Appendix G. This important aspect of the present study allowed me to reflect upon the assumptions I was making as I created the present study and generated the interview protocol, before and after I interviewed participants, and throughout the coding and theme generation process. Continually reflecting, checking my biases and assumptions, and thinking about the participant themes from different angles allowed me, as much as possible, to explore the findings with “new and receptive eyes” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 89) and approximate participants’ true experience of the phenomenon as best as possible. This reflection and memoing allowed me to

conceptualize the findings in an ongoing and iterative process as I simultaneously interviewed participants, wrote and reviewed transcriptions, and coded the data.

While I could not locate a recent Campus Climate Survey at the university of interest, I did locate a recent Campus Safety Survey which was completed included information for the 2019 calendar year (2020 Annual Campus Security and Fire Safety Report). The report includes information about the number of reported crimes on-campus, in on-campus housing, off-campus, and on public property. It is important to note that these statistics only include *reported* crimes, which likely are an underreport of the actual prevalence of sexual violence on the campus. The report includes numbers for “sex offenses,” including rape, fondling, incest, and statutory rape, as well as reported incidents of dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking that occurred on-campus, in on-campus housing, non-campus, and on public property. The total number for reported crimes by type across location for 2019 included: rape (27), fondling (2), incest (0), statutory rape (0), dating violence (12), domestic violence (4), and stalking (22). Including this information helps contextualize the present study’s findings within the particular university at which the study was conducted. While it does not provide information specifically relevant to fraternity men, it does provide limited information about sexual violence prevalence on the specific university, generally.

This report also provided interesting information regarding the university’s approach to sexual violence, including definitions, responsibilities, the investigation process and procedures, the role of the Title IX office, possible sanctions, resources, prevention efforts, and tips for prevention and supporting survivors. The report provided a helpful context regarding university policy and culture around sexual violence, such as

their responsiveness and programming efforts. For example, the report discusses the “U Got This” training, with versions for undergraduate students, graduate students, and employees. New staff, faculty, and students are expected to complete this online training, which includes information regarding sexual harassment, state/legal definitions, prevention, safety, and bystander intervention tips, abuse warning signs, information for campus and local resources, and details regarding the consequence of misconduct. The report also notes that this training includes realistic examples relevant to the campus community. Additional resources such as the campus prevention organization and awareness campaigns are included. As a validity strategy, this report helped to contextualize participants’ experiences and provide further nuance regarding the particular campus environment.

Presented in the results section, the last piece of triangulation was the participants’ own words. By including detailed, exact quotes from participants, I highlighted their experiences of the phenomenon as they experienced it. Providing verbatim quotes reduces bias and improves the trustworthiness of the findings by deemphasizing my interpretations of the phenomenon and accentuating participants’ interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This focus helps to illuminate the true essence of the phenomenon rather than my interpretation of it.

### ***Audit and Peer Review***

In the present study, I utilized an external auditor to verify my findings and check my memoing for bias. I selected a peer who is an advanced counseling psychology doctoral candidate with a background in qualitative research. He reviewed my research process, verified my themes and conclusions, checked my memoing, and reviewed my

study for bias and missing information, based upon recommendations from Carcary (2009). He provided helpful feedback regarding the modified social-ecological model and how to organize the findings coherently and appropriately based on this model. He also provided feedback about overarching themes, often confirming my reflections regarding the role of White male socialization and privilege. This audit review is included in Appendix D.

In addition to this formal external audit, I also received feedback regarding different stages of the research process from my dissertation chair and committee. This feedback helped me to conceptualize my research design, revise my interview protocol, and consider potential limitations. Having these external sources of feedback helped me to understand my potential biases and blind spots, which ultimately helped me to engage with the participants and the findings more openly, deeply, and truthfully.

### ***Thick and Rich Descriptions***

Throughout the results section, I used thick, rich descriptions of participants' accounts, relying primarily on their own words to describe the phenomenon. This choice allows participants' words, thoughts, and perceptions to take precedence over my own interpretations, assumptions, and biases. This attention to detail and focus on participants' words can increase trustworthiness and fidelity of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

## Chapter 4: Results

### Textural Description

According to Moustakas (1994), the textural description delineates what participants experienced in relation to the phenomenon, whereas the structural description outlines the “how,” including structural and contextual influences. In the present study, the textural description corresponds with the following three research questions: 1) What are fraternity men’s perception of sexuality, consent, gender roles, rape myths, and sexual violence? 2) How have fraternity men observed others participating in rape culture and sexual violence perpetration? and 3) What are fraternity men’s perceptions of sexual violence prevention programs on the university’s campus? Five overarching themes emerged in this area, including: 1) Views on sex, relationships, and consent; 2) Views on masculinity and gender roles; 3) Perceptions of Greek life; 4) Witnessing Sexual Violence; and 5) Thoughts on Prevention. This chapter organizes the structural descriptions of the themes according to the modified social ecological model, with themes emerging around Individual Influences, Relational Influences, Community/Organizational Influences, and Macro and Societal Influences. Themes and subthemes are explored below. See Table 3 in Appendix F for a summary of themes, subthemes, and illustrative quotes.

#### *Views on Sex, Relationships, and Consent*

The first theme emerged around participants’ beliefs about sex, relationships, and consent. While a few men discussed differing beliefs, many of the participants discussed the importance of waiting until marriage for sex, defining marriage as the purpose of relationships, and discussing conservative views about the role of physical intimacy in

relationships. Several subthemes emerged within this overarching theme, including Centrality of Marriage, Role of Sex in Relationships, Accountability, Respect for Women (Benevolent Sexism), Pursuing Physical Intimacy, Consent, and “A Drunk Yes is a No Still.”

**Centrality of marriage.** Overwhelmingly, the men in the present study were influenced by their religious beliefs which informed their perspectives on sex and relationships. Key to this belief system the importance of marriage. The foundation for this value was rooted in participants’ religious beliefs. Duncan discussed the importance of marriage and the view that the purpose of dating is to get married in the following statement: “The reason you date is to get married and that’s the only reason that you should date.” Many participants echoed this sentiment, emphasizing marriage as an end goal or *the goal* of dating.

Consistent with the paramount importance of marriage was the belief, espoused by many participants, that sexual intercourse should be saved for marriage. Many of the participants discussed how they were exclusively taught abstinence-only sex education from multiple sources (e.g., school, parents) and shared that they also endorsed and lived by those beliefs. For example, discussing his beliefs about waiting for marriage to engage in sexual intercourse, Chuck shared:

With my religion...nothing’s against dating 900 people as long as you wait until the person you’re gonna marry...Always take your time, get to know them...get comfortable around them...because that’s a huge step in a relationship and it’s not something that is super important to a relationship...you should always wait til marriage to do it.

Many other participants echoed these beliefs about waiting until marriage to have sex.

Heteronormative beliefs were also central to this narrative, with many of the men discussing implicitly and explicitly that marriage is between a man and a woman. While many other participants did not use this explicit language, they exclusively discussed romantic and sexual relationships using gendered language (e.g., using she and he pronouns when discussing romantic relationships and sex). Participants' ideas about sex and romantic relationships were entirely based upon a man/woman dichotomy.

**Role of sex in relationships.** In this subtheme, participants shared overlapping views related to the role of sex in relationships. While most participants agreed that sexual intercourse should be saved for marriage, participants discussed their beliefs regarding sexual and physical intimacy, more broadly. A few of the men dissented regarding sex before marriage and shared about their experiences with sexual intercourse within monogamous relationships. However, most participants shared the belief that sexual intercourse only belongs within marriage.

Mark shared how his views regarding sexual intimacy changed over time, transitioning from liberal to conservative views with different experiences:

Earlier I would...have said that...meaning like early high school years, like, it's not a big deal, you can have sex whenever...And then, I kinda changed to like you should like, it should be active love and you shouldn't have sex until you really love the person. And then, now I'm kinda like why not just wait til marriage? It's...what God says.

Drew similarly shared that he now abstains from sexual intercourse because his past relationships were centered around it, which led to fear of consequences and feelings of guilt.

On a different trajectory, Adam shared how his beliefs about sex became more liberal as he adjusted to the norms of college. He recounted:

It didn't change my beliefs but it maybe changed how tightly I held onto them or like how I viewed this idea of not having sex before marriage....Then eventually I had a girlfriend and this idea of sex started to become more normal for me....I think it made me realize that even people with beliefs, like Christian beliefs...these people were still having sex and whether or not they're married or not...a lot of them were still having sex, but that doesn't have to change their beliefs nor do their beliefs really stop them from doing that often, so I think it kind of changed my view of sex to something that was less frowned upon and like for me personally wasn't something that like made me feel guilty.

Many participants shared the belief that physical intimacy was possible and important in relationships, in the absence of sexual intercourse. For example, Duncan shared how he views hugging and kissing as appropriate expressions of physical intimacy within a romantic relationship. Jordan succinctly described his beliefs about physical intimacy in romantic relationships as "affection not arousal." Most participants agreed that sexual intercourse was important to save for marriage because of their religious beliefs and their view that it is for procreation. A few men dissented and shared that they engaged in sexual intercourse before marriage. For example, Adam shared how his beliefs about sex changed when he entered college, and he was able to reconcile his

religious beliefs with his sexual behaviors, letting go of some of the guilt he had previously felt about sexual intercourse. Others noted they engaged in physical intimacy but not sexual intercourse.

**Accountability.** One core subtheme that emerged was accountability. To participants, accountability meant being responsible and a leader, and looking after themselves and others (e.g., fraternity brothers, women). Participants consistently utilized this word to describe their values related to different topics, such as accountability to their fraternity brothers, responsible alcohol use, and masculinity.

Accountability came up frequently in relation to participants' views of Greek life, with participants describing how their fraternity was a positive influence in their life because of the accountability they felt toward their brothers. For example, Adam shared: "I'm surrounded by people who are challenging me in good ways and pushing me to not only like excel academically but also to put myself out there...to like serve others and be a part of organizations that serve others." Accountability in this context was additionally related to several different areas, such as academic, leadership, responsible alcohol use, and relationships. Adam discussed how accountability takes place systemically within his fraternity. He stated:

I think a lot that just has to do with accountability, like...the moment we hear something about one of our members like doing something that we would not look upon fondly, like if we hear anything, even remotely close to somebody like doing something they shouldn't have with a girl...we hold them accountable...it's definitely dealt with by our fraternity.

Kenny similarly applied the value of accountability to potentially problematic behaviors his brothers might engage in and the importance of personal and collective responsibility.

He shared:

We take it very seriously and like we kinda hold onto the fact that like you're accountable

for your actions but you're also accountable for like the actions of your brothers so like if you see something going on, like you kinda might wanna step in and be like hey man, like, just like let's just go home tonight or like let's get you some water like that kinda stuff.

Participants discussed accountability in relation to alcohol use and described how their fraternity encouraged responsible alcohol use and looking out for one another.

Overall, accountability appeared to be both an individual and collective value held by participants. Particularly within the context of their fraternity, participants discussed how they were accountable to each other in several ways. For some of the men, accountability translated into bystander intervention when problematic behaviors were occurring, in order to protect women, their brothers, and their fraternity's reputation. In this way, participants understood that their individual actions reflected upon their fraternity and they were responsible for behaving appropriately.

**Respect for women (benevolent sexism).** Another subtheme that emerged was the importance to participants of respect for women and being a "gentleman." Respect for women was defined by how men treat and interact with women, in terms of their actions, attitudes, and language. Benevolent sexism is included as a parenthetical subtheme because participants often discussed a desire to protect women and take care of them

which, although generally well-intended, was often patronizing and infantilizing of women.

One example came from Robbie, who shared:

We even have a rule where no girls can be in the house after two a.m....Just the simple things like we always make sure we're always walking girls home or opening the door for them, and it seems so simple but like we've talked to a lot of girls on campus, and they're not used to that...which is really sad how guys can't do that anymore.

Jordan similarly discussed the ways in which his fraternity values respecting women. He stated: "We need to be that fraternity, be that group of men, that shows women that they can be respected and still experience emotional and physical love."

Participants also discussed how masculinity means serving as a protector.

Participants shared how respect for women extends to protecting them in multiple ways. For example, Chuck expounded upon the rule in his fraternity that no women are allowed in the house after two in the morning. He noted: "We always want to make sure that they're respected and safe. And that they're not, you know, doing anything bad." Jordan discussed his beliefs regarding how respecting women translates to protecting them, sharing:

It's sacrificial love and talking to a girl about where her boundaries are, and if you think that they're too far than what she deserves, telling her that no, you...deserve better than even that, like, a guy will be able to love you more in your marriage if he is able to sacrifice not doing that now.

Overall, participants' views about respect for women were intertwined with their belief that women should be protected and that men should do the protecting. For some participants, this protection included protection of women from themselves, particularly in sexual situations.

**Pursuing Physical Intimacy.** Another important subtheme to emerge was how participants pursue physical intimacy with their partners and how they know when someone is interested in pursuing physical intimacy with them. Many participants had difficulty describing the process of showing interest and knowing when someone is interested in physical intimacy. Participants described how the process felt intangible or just occurred naturally. Nonetheless, participants attempted to describe how they indicate their interest in physical intimacy, as well as the cues they look for to know their partner is interested.

***How they show.*** Participants recounted the ways in which they navigate physical and sexual relationships and how they indicate to their partner they are interested. Jordan shared how he shows interest by teasing which then progresses into physical touch or proximity, describing this process as “going toward that flirting and then maybe sit down next to her and put my arm around her and go from there.” Lance shared the following:

I know when my girlfriend and I kissed for the first time, like neither one of us said yes or anything, but you, we could just kinda both tell. And it just seemed natural. So, I don't know, with something like that, I personally don't think that you need to verbally affirm that if you're certain that...pretty certain that the other person, just based on their body language, based on their actions, is open to that.

He further clarified that men need to be careful due to allegations of sexual assault and how it is important to ask for verbal consent for sexual intercourse, although maybe less important for other sexual behaviors. He also noted he may need to rethink his views on obtaining consent for kissing, although he reiterated that he was unsure if that was necessary. While many participants acknowledged the importance of verbal consent, many men also expressed confusion, uncertainty, and awkwardness regarding how to proceed in this way in their actual relationships.

*How they know.* Participants also discussed how they know when someone is interested in sex or physical intimacy. A primary theme that emerged was that men primarily look for nonverbal cues from their partners. Common indicators described by the participants were body language, physical contact, physical proximity, teasing, and “flirting.” Ben shared how, for him, body language is the biggest indicator of interest, such as “the closer someone is willing to sit to you or...however much physical contact you have with that person.” Kenny shared a similar approach, noting: “just being close or just like sitting next to each other, the same kinda stuff like if that’s reciprocated or like if she initiates it, I take that as like a sign of being interested.”

Participants also expressed the importance of obtaining verbal consent, particularly when pursuing sexual intercourse. They discussed how clear communication is important. For example, Adam discussed how sex generally unfolds in the context of a relationship and how it involves ample conversation prior to engaging in sexual behavior. He shared:

When I have been in a sexual relationship, it’s been very natural and there’s a lot of communication...So it’s not like it’s just all of a sudden...it’s a more natural

progression, so there's communication and like acknowledgement that like, okay, we are gonna do this, like this is something that is not like out of the blue or unexpected, necessarily.

In general, the male participants shared overlapping ideas regarding how they pursue physical intimacy, as well as how they know when their partner is interested. Participants expressed awareness about the importance of obtaining verbal consent while also sharing that actual physical interactions unfold "naturally" and, often, non-verbally.

**Consent.** Participants discussed their views on sexual consent, including beliefs informed by their religion, explicit teachings from parents, educators, and college programming, and their fraternities. They overwhelmingly endorsed the importance of verbal consent for sexual interactions. For example, Robbie said: "Specifically for sexual, in sexual terms, there should be clear consent, like there shouldn't even be a point one percentage of a...doubt that both of the people are okay with it."

However, their awareness of the importance of verbal consent in sexual relationships did not always align with their approach to physical intimacy in practice. While many men did share that they obtain verbal consent for sexual intercourse, or for the first time any sexual behavior occurs (e.g., for the first kiss), many participants shared that they do not always obtain verbal consent for every subsequent sexual interaction or behavior, especially as the relationship progresses. For example, Adam stated: "As the relationship goes and you kind of get comfortable with each other, you reach a point where there's not necessarily always the same kind of like verbal agreement." Participants' thresholds for type of consent needed varied, with some participants emphasizing a need for verbal consent for the first kiss and others sharing particular

concern about obtaining verbal consent for sexual intercourse and less concern about consent for kissing.

This uncertainty regarding obtaining verbal consent and how that might shift with different relationships or behaviors was perhaps best illustrated by Lance, who shared:

As far as attraction goes, I feel like...it can be hard sometimes to read people. Especially as a guy. So, it's important to get like that verbal consent like with sex...if you don't get the verbal consent by like an able-mind, like someone in a good mind...not like drunk or those kinda things, like then it's completely not okay...that's necessary in order to have sex. As far as like getting...more attraction within a relationship...even like a kiss or something, I feel like that's something that might have...like mixed feelings about it by both men and women...I know when like my girlfriend and I kissed for the first time, like neither one of us said yes or anything, but...we could just kinda both tell.

Lance further elaborated that the process of kissing felt like a natural progression that may or may not require verbal consent. He also shared his view that navigating consent can be difficult for men who may be confused by situations involving sexual intimacy. As Lance worked through his thoughts on consent, he magnified a concern raised by other men in the present study. Specifically, many men expressed their understanding of the need for clear communication and verbal consent, while also discussing how interactions unfold "naturally," with a particular emphasis on non-verbal cues. Men also discussed how they feel the need to obtain clear consent because of the prevalence of sexual assault and sexual assault allegations. For some participants, the

need for clear communication was due to a fear of negative consequences, rather than an explicit concern for consent, in and of itself.

“**A drunk yes is a no still.**” Participants discussed the role of alcohol as it relates to sex, consent, and sexual violence. Many men discussed how alcohol often reduce inhibitions and may lead to greater physical intimacy or desire for sexual relationships.

Ben succinctly described the direct relationship between alcohol and sex, noting:

“They’re like directly related where you would see like as alcohol use increases...sexual activity increases...Fraternities that party more often and, I guess just consume more alcohol like per member, probably have more sexual activity.” Discussing alcohol as a social facilitator, Robbie shared that people “use it as a social lubricant...Because they want it to possibly lead to sex and they know that that does happen a lot in college...a lot of people use it to relax themselves to maybe get something sexually.”

Other men discussed the relationship between alcohol and sex and how alcohol might loosen inhibitions regarding sex. For example, Kenny shared:

I think, not just in my fraternity, but...in college as a whole, like, I think if you drink you’re more likely to maybe have sex or...have sex and then maybe regret it in the morning...just cuz drinking alcohol can kinda skew your views. You can have a lot more lapses in judgment if you’ve been drinking. So then...you’re put into situations that...you’d probably be more wary of if you were sober. And, on the flip side, like you can, like, pursue things that you probably wouldn’t pursue if you were sober.

Participants also discussed their understanding of the relationship between alcohol, consent, and sexual violence, which they learned from fraternity and university

trainings. Lance described explicit conversations in his fraternity related to the link between alcohol and sexual violence. He shared:

I think alcohol can definitely kind of move people toward letting loose a little bit more. And I think in some instances that can...lead to sex or kinda more intimate behavior. It's something that we've stressed...if someone's like too drunk, it is like not okay to sleep with them, and same goes for you like if you're too drunk like it's not okay for...you to sleep with someone...When we have like our fraternity conversations, we like emphasize that you know like if someone's drunk like they can't give consent. Like they're not in their right state of mind, they can't give consent.

Similarly, Mark shared: "We're...taught...a drunk yes is a no still." Several participants emphasized these specific conversations within their fraternities and the shared understanding that individuals cannot consent to sex when consuming alcohol.

### ***Views on Masculinity and Gender Roles***

Participants discussed their views on masculinity and gender roles. Men also responded to questions about gender roles, particularly questions about the appropriate sexual behavior for men and women, as well as the roles for men and women within sexual and romantic relationships. Participants' views on masculinity and gender roles are described and the subtheme, Appropriate Sexual Behaviors, is also explored.

Participants described their views on masculinity and how they define manhood. Many men discussed how their views of masculinity differ from traditional societal notions of manhood and how they think their peers define masculinity. For example, some of the men noted how their peers might define masculinity based on qualities like

strength, interest in business, sexual domination, and status. Many of the men discussed how this discrepancy is due to their religious beliefs. For example, Jordan stated:

Being a man is so warped by the world, and people are constantly trying to portray it by these...ideal muscular movie characters that have no fear and always get the girl and stuff, and that's just, I think that is a very, very bad portrayal of men because it's convincing our young men, who are in their developmental stages of adolescence, to think that they have to be strong or that they can't step into vulnerability, that they can't be humble, and it just leads them away from living a...a true love sacrificial, virtuous life.

In some ways a rejection of toxic masculinity, men in the present study discussed how their views of masculinity reflected character traits, such as sacrifice, responsibility, accountability, selflessness, respect, and leadership and serving in a provider (i.e., head of household) and protector role. For example, Adam shared:

A lot of people would say like kind of...has to do with kind of physical stature but also doing things that people associated with a man doing as like fixing shit, being outside...kind of the stereotypical man's man...for me, personally, I think my idea of what being a man is comes from a lot more from...my family, so, the idea of...sacrifice and like taking care of your family and being the kind of shoulder to lean on for your family...someone who is responsible and trustworthy and is accountable for their actions and doesn't take for granted their kind of role and like understands that like people might be looking at you when you are doing things, you need to be responsible for your actions and like behave in a way that you would...be proud if somebody else was watching you.

In general, participants rejected the notion that masculinity means physical strength and toughness and, instead, embraced a more nuanced view of masculinity that incorporated their religious beliefs and family values.

Participants described their views of masculinity in relation to gender roles and a binary conception of masculinity and femininity. For example, Kenny stated:

“Masculinity to me is...when I think of it compared to, like, femininity, masculinity would be more...willing to take charge...or kinda lead. Not necessarily take charge, but lead.” Men also discussed masculinity associated with their views on marriage, which were often informed by their religious beliefs (e.g., leadership, man as head of the household). For example, Drew described the importance of being a good father in the following statement: “Being able to provide for a family and, you know, being a role model to a future kid...just being able to tell yourself that you’re a good role model for your kids and being able to look after a family.” Participants described how they constructed their beliefs about masculinity in relation to their projected role in their future families as well as from observations of their fathers and grandfathers.

**Appropriate sexual behaviors.** I asked participants their thoughts regarding the appropriate ways for men and women to behave sexually in order to better understand their views on gender roles and masculinity. Surprisingly, most participants did not believe there are differences in appropriate sexual behavior for men and women. Many men discussed how their ideas about appropriate sexual behavior were based on their religious beliefs, often drawing back to their beliefs related to abstinence and the importance of marriage, for both men and women. For example, Duncan shared: “I think it’s exactly the same that she, that both sides should give consent and it should only be

when you're married." Overwhelmingly, men in the present study held the same expectations for men and women regarding appropriate sexual behavior.

Participants' views on appropriately sexual behavior also seemed to change over time. Robbie recounted how his views since high school, sharing:

When I was in high school, I think I kind of had this idea of...not really understanding how a girl could like go and sleep with a bunch of guys...what you imagine is like the stereotypical like idea of like oh she goes and makes out with a bunch of guys or she goes and has sex and she's like not in a relationship, kind of that idea of like...is she a slut or something like that? But then once I got to college...when I entered my first relationship...my girlfriend has like had sex with people before me and I think I kind of like had to convince myself that...you really have no say in like how she goes about her sexual encounters especially before she met you. So...I kind of gained this understanding like this really has nothing to do with me and this is not any of my like business.

A few participants did discuss their beliefs about the differences between men and women regarding sex. For example, Jordan explicitly mentioned traditional sexual scripts when discussing navigating sexual and romantic relationships. He shared:

I believe through experience and through studies and different things that a guy has a lot more control...I understand that there's...gender roles and unwritten scripts in this and stuff like that, and I do not believe that those have to be followed, but in most all of the situations that I've been in, it's just what is actually natural. So, I think that the male's part in this, along with the gatekeeper and what we've been saying, protecting her heart...So I think his role is to always keep...the other's

innocence in mind and make sure that he's not stepping into that, that stages of self-arousal or arousal of the other person... One script that I have, that I've seen actually happen is, when we're doing something, just that I be the person to verbalize and say, is this okay? Is this something I can do, is this something that you can do, is this okay? And asking the question, and then the woman being the person that gives the consent or says yes or no to that question that I asked.

Robbie also shared his perception that sex impacts women's and men's emotions differently:

Even if the women don't think it's a big deal either, guys and girls are just built differently emotionally and everything and it can have a lot bigger of an effect on women than it can on men... It can just lead to... emotionally unstable things happening... There's statistics out there and just from conversations I've had with... some girls in my own life that, you know, after something like having sex, a guy can be just not even think much of it the next day and... it could go both ways, but more times than not in my personal experience, I've seen it go where the guy just doesn't really care like the very next day and the girl... is a little more affected by it and had a more of an emotional experience, and is a little more hurt when the guy, you know, doesn't talk to her any more.

Overall, participants' views regarding appropriate sexual behaviors for men and women aligned with their religious and family values. However, contrary to expectations based on the literature, participants held similar expectations for men and women regarding appropriate sexual behavior. While some participants acknowledged differing roles held by men and women (e.g., man as initiator, woman as gatekeeper), most

participants held both parties responsible for establishing consent and communicating about sexual activities.

### *Perceptions of Greek Life*

Participants discussed their experiences in Greek life, as well as stereotypes about fraternities and the public's perception of them. Most of the participants indicated awareness of the stereotypes surrounding fraternities, such as those stereotypes regarding the prevalence of sexual violence within fraternities and their reputation around alcohol use and party culture. According to some participants, there is little truth to the stereotypes. For others, their first-hand accounts and stories shared by female friends provided support for the stereotypes. Others acknowledged that many of the stereotypes were true but did not represent their specific fraternity's culture. Below are the participants' perspectives regarding Greek life on their campus, including the following subthemes: "Building Up Leaders," "Everything You Hear is True, but not Everything That's True is What You Hear," and "Froshes" and Jungle Juice.

**"Building Up Leaders."** Participants discussed the reasons why they chose to join their fraternities and the positive experiences they had within them. They specifically mentioned positive contributions of fraternities to the campus community, such as volunteerism, leadership, and academic accountability. Participants discussed how they believed fraternities were beneficial for the individuals involved in them as well as for the greater campus community. For example, Robbie highlighted his fraternity's involvement in volunteerism and shared how they help their church and are involved in leadership programs. Similarly, Lance shared his beliefs that Greek life builds leaders on campus,

results in “a lot of successful alums,” and “is a real asset to the university in terms of just building up leaders.”

Participants also recounted why joining a fraternity was beneficial to them, personally, such as for finding community, building friendships, having additional opportunities on campus, being held accountable academically, and growing personally. For example, Drew shared: “I think Greek life is super beneficial for the people in it and for the university...It’s such an easy way to connect with people and just kinda meet people that have similar values as you.” Many participants shared this view of fraternities as a place of community. Jordan shared his appreciation for “the amount of emotional vulnerability that the guys are willing to have with each other.” He further shared that, within his fraternity, he found that he was “able to talk to other men who have the same thoughts as me.” This theme was overwhelmingly shared across participants, with each man discussing how his fraternity had brought deeper connections with men who shared similar values and helped them cultivate community.

**“Everything you hear is true, but not everything that’s true is what you hear.”** Participants discussed their awareness of the negative stereotypes surrounding fraternities. Many of the men did not agree with these stereotypes, particularly for their own fraternities, although they acknowledged that there was some truth to some of the stereotypes. They also discussed how each fraternity is different, acknowledging that some of the fraternities on their campus had worse reputations than others. Many participants shared that they viewed the stereotypes as exaggerations of the truth, stemming from media portrayals of fraternities or news coverage of particularly bad situations. Participants also verbalized some hesitation regarding speaking on behalf of

other fraternities, instead choosing to highlight the positives of their own experiences, even while acknowledging anecdotal evidence of misbehavior within other fraternities.

A major theme that emerged was the participants' acknowledgement that the stereotypes of fraternities related to sexual violence, hook-up culture, and alcohol use have merit. As Adam stated: "I think everything you hear is true, but not everything that's true is what you hear." They discussed how certain fraternities had "bad" or "good" reputations, and, therefore, understanding how prevalent sexual violence or alcohol use was in a particular fraternity differed based on the specific norms or members of that fraternity. Robbie shared about his unique experience transferring from one fraternity to a more religious fraternity:

In my old fraternity...girls were always staying the night, I mean, and, you know, doing all sorts of stuff, whatever, it was like a little mini frosh in our rooms like all the time. All the guys...they almost encourage each other to I guess take advantage almost. That term might be a little strong, but...I don't think it's out of the park. Take advantage...of women, cuz you know, obviously in college you're...partying and people are drinking and stuff...and then, one thing leads to the next and you know it's almost like a congratulations after you have sex and stuff like that, which I definitely don't agree with...

Adam had similar opinions, noting that while the stereotypes may be true in certain fraternities, he felt this was dependent upon the specific fraternity. This sentiment was exemplified in the following statement: "I don't think there's any, ever any blatant disrespect towards women. But I think that's not the case in a lot of fraternities."

Participants expressed awareness that men in fraternities may be prone to sexual violence. Kenny shared: “I think part of that probably stems from like the fraternities just being prone to that...in the first place, so I mean we are very much like trying not to feed that stereotype any kind of fuel at all.” Other participants voiced this similar motivation, sharing that they are aware of how the public views fraternities and are motivated to avoid sexual assault to not feed the stereotype. The male participants agreed with this stereotype to differing extents, with some participants acknowledging that sexual violence is a prevalent problem within fraternities (although adamantly denying that it was a major concern within *their* fraternity) and others sharing that public perception is often exaggerated and only focused on outliers.

Another salient theme that emerged in this area was the idea that participants’ fraternities were different than others or the exception to the rule. Many participants shared the belief expressed by Mark, “I think my fraternity is different than most,” and, even if they acknowledged the accuracy of stereotypes to a certain extent, many men stated the stereotypes did not apply to their fraternity. Duncan shared this sentiment, stating:

Talking about other fraternities, which I don’t know too much about it, us compared to them...it doesn’t seem like a lot of other fraternities really, I guess, care too much about how they treat people, how they treat women at least because...there’s a lot of like the stereotypes of fraternities that...you just like to party and hook up and stuff like that. And...at least from what I’ve heard, I’m sure, some of the fraternities here are like that.

Participants expressed some reluctance to speak ill of their or other fraternities, hesitating to generalize and emphasizing that fraternities are made up of individual men. Mark shared: “A given house, necessarily, isn’t good or bad, but like it’s the people in the house that make the house.” According to many participants, they stereotypes existed because of outliers or exceptions to the rule and were not representative of all (or most) fraternities.

This hesitation may also have manifested in fraternity men speaking in socially desirable ways, over-emphasizing the positive aspects of Greek life, or failing to disclose negative experiences or anecdotes. Support for this hypothesis was presented in the following statement by Jordan: “I’ve been portraying my fraternity as very like pure and everything and I wanna express that, like, that is like not completely true.” Similarly, Ben, when asked about his perceptions of how other fraternities talk about women and sex, shared: “I think that’s definitely something that...can really only be fully understood by like actually being in a fraternity for a little while because that’s not something...I think people would really talk to like people outside of the house about.” While most men disclosed that they were honest during the interview, it is unclear whether they were able to be totally authentic and honest given their awareness of the intense scrutiny on fraternities surrounding these topics and a shared culture around protecting each other and keeping certain aspects secret.

**“Froshes” and Jungle Juice.** Another stereotype acknowledge by some of the participants is that fraternities engage in frequent partying and consume large amounts of alcohol. Participants agreed with this stereotype to varying degrees, with many men again emphasizing that it depends on the specific fraternity. Some of the men labeled their

fraternities as having a strong party culture, while others emphasized that their fraternity embraced drinking in moderation. They also discussed the ways in which this party culture was moderated by their university's policies regarding alcohol use (e.g., as a dry campus).

Participants again emphasized the importance of accountability and looking out for their fellow fraternity brothers. They shared about trainings received from their fraternities and the university regarding responsible alcohol use. In general, participants viewed alcohol use and partying as existing on a spectrum, with some fraternities and individuals engaging in more intense behavior in this area than others.

Participants acknowledged the presence of partying and alcohol use in many, if not most, houses on campus, to their knowledge. Adam shared: "I mean, if you wanna party and do drugs, you can definitely do that, like, there's opportunity to do that if you want that in a fraternity." Participants described each fraternity house as varying in terms of the extent of alcohol consumption within their house, with some labeling themselves as "casual drinkers" or drinking in moderation, and others describing a culture of drinking and getting drunk. Many men also discussed how much variability there is in each house, with individual members drinking to various degrees, with some members abstaining altogether. Jordan emphasized: "There's that go out every day and get high or drink or have sex or whatever all the way to people that are leaving the fraternity to join the seminary. The entire spectrum's there."

Participants described hosting off-campus parties because their university has a dry campus. Some men commented that house parties are primarily for underclassmen, with upperclassmen preferring going to bars. Adam called these parties "froshes" and

described what occurs at them (i.e., consumption of hard liquor and mixed drinks called “jungle juice” in a “tightly packed” room with dancing and making out). Other participants described similar parties, which generally involved inviting over multiple sororities.

Participants described campus policies around alcohol use (e.g., no alcohol higher than 15% allowed) as well as trainings they received about safe alcohol use. Several men emphasized the importance of responsible alcohol use, being accountable to one another, and looking out for each other within their fraternities. Kenny shared how, in his fraternity, they “wanna make sure everyone’s...being smart with how much they’re drinking” and he noted: “we’re not naïve about it but we’re also very aware of the dangers.” Mark described intense trainings he received within his fraternity and mentioned a card with numbers to call that he is encouraged to keep in his wallet. He shared: “We’re really strict about no alcohol like in the house...we have a really intense training...first couple weeks we’re there about alcohol use and alcohol safety and what to do in a case where someone may be alcohol poisoned.” Other men recounted similar trainings about accountability and safe alcohol consumption.

The consensus among the participants seemed to be that alcohol use is common and exists on a spectrum of casual drinking to heaving drinking. Generally, however, men noted they are not pressured to drink, and men are accepted even if they do not consume alcohol. For these participants, the university’s targeted efforts at reducing alcohol consumption influenced them and potentially impacted their attitudes and behaviors around alcohol.

### ***Witnessing Sexual Violence***

Participants responded to questions regarding their fraternity's culture around sex, as well as examples of situations in which they witnessed other men enacting rape culture or perpetrating sexual violence. Participants had difficulty responding to this question and several men were unable to answer. Several participants discussed their experiences with and observations of rape culture, including subtle manifestations such as jokes and objectification, as well as more overt manifestations, such as sexual harassment and assault. Participants also made statements consistent with victim-blaming and rape myth acceptance.

The participants identified the extent to which they were aware of sexual violence, disrespect toward women, and relationship violence and abuse. While many men insisted that their fraternities were different, they acknowledged hearing stories about other fraternities engaging in sexually violent behavior. Adam recounted the following:

But it's like everyone I talk to who has like hooked up with someone or been in relationships with someone in another fraternity has had issues with it. Whether it's verbal abuse, emotional abuse...manipulation, or even like sexual assault or like taking advantage of them when they're either drunk or like not in any kind of state to like provide consent.

Adam further elaborated that when he has heard stories of sexual violence or negative relationship behavior: "two times out of three, that person was in a fraternity." Similarly, Jordan described a sexual assault that occurred within his own fraternity, sharing:

We had a guy last semester who had relations with a woman who, where they were all drunk and a lot of them don't remember it...and, he was kind of getting into

some legalities with that, and she was trying to figure out if she was gonna take it to court.

Jordan further elaborated on how this situation was handled by his fraternity. He shared that the fraternity brothers met in a secret meeting to determine how to handle the perpetrator. Ultimately, they agreed to a mutual drop whereby the fraternity dropped the perpetrator, and the perpetrator dropped the fraternity in order to “keep some respect.” About his fraternity’s handling of the situation, Jordan said: “I think that it was a very good message to send to everyone else that like no this really is a serious thing that we want to, we want to establish in our, that we don’t want you doing that.” However, his use of the word “relations” rather than sexual assault underscores the ongoing issue and problematic responses given after sexual violence occurs. Lance also described witnessing sexual harassment against a female friend at a fraternity formal. He shared: “This guy came up to one of my friends...just like kinda started hitting on her in a really...disrespectful and shallow way...calling her hot or something along those lines when it was definitely not warranted or like wanted.”

Participants also discussed more covert manifestations of rape culture, such as jokes, objectification, and harmful language used to discuss women. For example, Adam described objectifying talk that occurs among fraternity men, sharing: “Kind of offhand comments like...joking around with your friends, like saying they’re gonna do something with so and so’s sister...or like their ex-girlfriend...just like throwing a jab at them.” Robbie shared “there’s a lot of things throughout college...a guy just saying, oh look at...that chick’s ass” and noted that he does not agree with that type of talk. Lance described how another fraternity on campus got in trouble for a sign they placed in their

yard. He shared: “They put a sign at one point before we came to campus about, I think it said like no means yes or something along those lines. I just know it was very like offensive and degrading.”

Participants also made statements consistent with victim-blaming and rape myth acceptance. For example, Robbie said: “If you don’t put yourself in a bad situation, bad things won’t happen...I don’t wanna use the word bad, but just impure situations won’t happen.” Chuck, when discussing a high school classmate who was facing legal consequences for perpetrating sexual violence, shared a victim-blaming belief when he stated: “You gotta be careful. Some girls...they’ll be all over you if they’re drunk or something and it’s just best to...avoid it at all costs cause it could lead you into some trouble.” Other men rejected victim-blaming beliefs, such as Drew when he said: “Some people think that if women dress like with less clothes then they’re asking for it...personally, I don’t think that.”

The fact that many men had difficulty with this question is important in and of itself. A few men also discussed explicit examples of sexual violence, while others described more covert manifestations of rape culture. This theme reveals important insight into fraternity men’s awareness of, participation in, and exposure to rape culture and sexual violence.

### ***Thoughts on Prevention***

Participants shared about their experiences with their university’s sexual violence prevention programming, how effective they found these trainings to be, and ideas about improvement. A few of the participants shared that they had not received any training from the university regarding sexual violence prevention, but these men tended to be

newer fraternity members. Most men shared they had received some training, either from the university or their fraternity. Several men also discussed receiving annual training or multiple trainings throughout their education. Participants' experiences and suggestions are detailed below, within the following subthemes: Experiences with Programming and Suggested Improvements.

**Experiences with programming.** Participants shared their views on the university-led trainings, including about the content and effectiveness of the programming. Several participants shared that, while they understood the importance of sexual violence programming, they experienced the trainings as repetitive, excessive, unnecessary, unengaging, or common sense. Participants also noted that the university trainings may not be taken seriously by fraternity members. Several men noted that programming that shared generic information or simply provided facts or statistics may not have been received as well by fraternity men.

While participants detailed many critiques of the university's approach to sexual violence prevention, they also discussed the positive attributes. For example, Lance shared how learning about the prevalence of sexual violence on college campuses really opened his eyes. He stated:

I just feel like the university understands the real problems that they see within the entire university system...cuz you know, as a fraternity we...might miss something...They always do a good job of hitting every point...helping people understand...how prevalent of an issue it is...When I came to college...I didn't understand how big of an issue it was at campus. Or just, you know, in general. So I think they do like an awesome job of shedding light on that just because it's like

oh wow this is an issue...We need to be better, and...not be a part of these statistics...I think that can kinda be a wake-up call for guys.

Jordan shared a humorous analogy about a bicycle that was used in one training to explain consent. He reflected on how the incorporation of a humorous metaphor helped the audience feel comfortable discussing consent. Other participants expressed appreciation for campus resources, interactive trainings, space to reflect on their values, and personalized trainings. While many men shared critiques about the trainings, such as labeling them repetitive or common sense, in general, the participants expressed an understanding of their value and importance.

**Suggested Improvements.** Participants offered their thoughts regarding how these trainings could be improved in order to increase effectiveness and better target their audience. Several participants shared that personalizing trainings would improve their effectiveness and better reach fraternity men. For example, Mark shared that conducting trainings in smaller groups would facilitate better dialogue and allow for men to ask specific questions they might not ask in a larger group. Ben agreed with this stance on personalization and stated:

Ideally, it could be great...if everybody could have like an individual, one-on-one intervention type deal where...you could talk a little bit about...what people believe and stuff like that, because I think...when people really think about...their values, and like how they wanna be remembered and stuff... people wanna be remembered as being good people...Any type of training that you do it's important to like give some time for people to think about...the long-term

consequences of sexual assault and...what their values point to as far as how they should act in those situations.

As noted above, several men discussed how trainings that simply shared information regarding consent and sexual violence were not viewed as helpful. In order to improve upon this issue, participants noted several additional considerations such as leveraging accountability and peer relationships. For example, Adam shared:

Just because this person's a member of your fraternity, and you don't wanna feel bad, for like pulling him aside or like getting in their face about something...if they're doing something they shouldn't be, you need to hold them accountable in that way.

According to this suggestion, one potential helpful framework might be bystander intervention, leveraging fraternity men as trusted individuals who can help stop problematic behavior in the moment.

Participants also suggested peer educators may be more effective than university officials for reaching their intended audience. For example, Robbie shared:

Every single fraternity and sorority or every single organization on campus has their own kind of talk...or class, whatever you want to call it, and, so it's guys and girls talking to guys and girls they're really close to. I think that would go further...than having some university staff member up in front of a ton of people who are like taking a nap.

Participants discussed the importance of programming being engaging, such as including interactive components and creating a safe space to engage in uncomfortable conversations. Lance shared his ideas about increasing engagement, such as "showing a

video or telling a story” which he felt would be more effective than a PowerPoint presentation. While many participants underscored their understanding of why these trainings are important, they also shared their thoughts on their ineffectiveness and how they could be improved.

### **Structural Description**

Moustakas (1994) defined the structural description as the “how” of the phenomenon, including important contextual and situational influences. In the present study, the structural description corresponds with the second research question, which was the following: How are fraternity men’s perceptions shaped by each level of the modified Social-Ecological Model of Prevention (i.e., individual, relational, organizational, and community)? The following section is organized according to the modified Social-Ecological Model of Prevention, with the following themes: Individual Level Influence: Religious Beliefs, Relational Influences (Family, Peers, Romantic/Sexual Partners), Organizational/Community Influences (School Sex Education, College, Fraternity), and Macro and Societal Influences (Media and Individualism).

#### ***Individual Level Influence: Religious Beliefs***

Participants’ beliefs about romantic relationships, sex, and sexual violence were influenced by their individual values and beliefs. The major influence that emerged in this area was participants’ religious beliefs. Each participant, to greater and lesser extents, discussed the importance of religion in shaping their beliefs about sex, romantic relationships, and masculinity. Participants discussed the ways in which religion shaped their early views on sex and romantic relationships (e.g., believing in waiting until

marriage to have sex, not viewing pornography), as well as their current views (e.g., valuing respect toward women). Discussion of religion permeated nearly every question participants answered, from views on gender roles to definitions of masculinity.

Religious beliefs influenced men's views on masculinity. This impact ranged from implicit, such as learning from the modeling of important relational others in their lives (e.g., fathers), to explicit, such as through the teachings of their religious traditions and explicit messaging from religious leaders. Both implicit and explicit influences shaped their conceptions of masculinity, such as viewing men as leaders, selfless, providers, and protectors.

Participants discussed the ways in which religious leaders and religious teachings influenced their understanding of manhood. For example, Robbie described how the main value associated with masculinity for him is sacrifice, as modeled by religious figures. He elaborated:

I think a real man is somebody who would give up themselves for the ones he loves and just unselfishness...so man is somebody who can lead his peers and his family to heaven and into a relationship with Christ and being unselfish with his actions and with his resources...Perfect example is...Jesus Christ on the crucifix. I mean, he did that for all of us, so I think just that kind of picture is what masculinity is.

Mark similarly shared that his faith "is really where I get my values of a man," including that a man is a leader, and "selfless, serving, and hardworking." Duncan also shared, "with my Catholic faith, you're supposed to be the head of your household" and noted his faith informed his beliefs about man as the provider, as accomplished, and as a leader. As previously discussed, religious beliefs influenced thoughts on relationships

(e.g., the importance of marriage), sex (e.g., no sex before marriage), friendships and fraternity membership (e.g., seeking out fraternities with shared religious values), and treatment of women.

### ***Relational Influences***

Participants constructed meaning about their identities and their perceptions of sex, romantic relationships, and sexual violence in relation to others. Participants were influenced by family members, peers, and romantic and sexual partners. How participants made meaning of their own identities, beliefs, and values was also influenced by these relationships. For example, some men described how they understood masculinity as it contrasts with femininity. Men discussed how they understood and thought about romantic relationships and sex in relation to their future wives. Participants' beliefs were intertwined with those values of their parents, peers, and partners. The influence of others often intersected with other values and beliefs, such as their religious beliefs, which were at times reinforced by important others and, at other times, contradicted them. Some of the participants described how their beliefs changed over time based on the influence of their peers and how different people were more influential at different times in their lives in shaping their views. Several men discussed the role of their romantic partners in shaping their views on romantic relationships and on the role of sex in those relationships. Below, the subthemes of Family, Peers, and Sexual/Romantic Partners are explored.

**Family.** Family emerged as a significant influence on participants' views of sex, romantic relationships, and masculinity. Family played a significant role earlier in participants' lives, especially in their formative childhood years. For many of the men,

these early influences continued to impact them and shape their current beliefs as college-aged adults.

Many of the participants discussed how their parents' relationship influenced their ideas about romantic relationships and marriage. This more implicit influence was communicated through modeling and observations of their parents' relationships. Robbie shared: "My parents have always been a great example...they always treated each other with a lot of respect and I've always admired that." The participants' experiences observing their parents and their relationships created a foundation for their own expectations for future relationships.

For Ben, his views on romantic relationships and sex were shaped by more indirect teachings from his parents. He discussed how he learned a lot about his parents' beliefs about sex and relationships through cautionary tales. He shared:

There wasn't like a super defined time where you know you just like hear about it and learn about it...but it was something that like my family talked about fairly frequently...they were always very clear about disapproving of like...living together with somebody you're not married to, like, if there was somebody who...maybe we knew or something that was like moving in with her boyfriend or girlfriend, like they would often...just say something small...like, yeah, you know, I'm glad that none of my children would make that decision.

Through these informal, cautionary tales, Ben indirectly understood what was expected of him in terms of sex and romantic relationships and he maintained those beliefs as a college student.

Participants also recalled the impact their parents had through explicit conversations about sex and romantic relationships. For some of the participants, their first discussion about sex occurred with their parents. Mark shared that his parents were the first to discuss sex with him and he stated: “There was less biology and more like you wait until you actually love a woman, and when you’re married.” Similarly, Chuck shared that he “learned from my parents, mainly...to always wait for marriage, to not have sexual relations but you can always date.”

For many of the men, their parents’ teachings intersected with their religious beliefs. For example, Duncan shared he learned from both his parents and his church about sex and romantic relationships. He stated: “All of our values, just about, are based off of what the church teaches us and so my parents taught us what the church taught us.” The intersection of family values and faith was a consistent theme throughout participants’ interviews.

Participants’ views on masculinity were also influenced by their families, especially their fathers and grandfathers. Chuck shared how he learned some of the practical knowledge of manhood (e.g., wearing a button-up shirt), as well as intangible values (e.g., be tough, treat others with respect), from his father and grandfather. Participants discussed both implicit and explicit messaging from their parents related to masculinity. Many men cited their fathers as their role models around healthy masculinity. In general, family was a major relational influence on participants’ views of sex, romantic relationships, and masculinity.

**Peers.** Peers were influential on men’s views regarding sex and romantic relationships to greater or lesser extents at various points in each participant’s life. Some

of the men discussed how the influence of their peers changed as they got older, with some men noting more influence from their peers when they were in high school and lesser influence in college. For example, Mark shared how his friends would joke about sex growing up and how he eventually stopped finding those things funny. He described how he started to think for himself about sex and romantic relationships and, over time, “got to like actually...think about it without the influence of other people.” Other men noted similar patterns of shifting influence, with their own values becoming more important as they got older, and their parents or peers mattering to different extents at different times in their lives.

Participants shared how their ideas about relationships were influenced by their peers in high school. For example, Adam shared that he learned from how his friends “interacted with each other at school or like talking to them about...the kinds of things that they did with their girlfriend and like going on dates and stuff like how they went about that.” He elaborated that these discussions and observations were “how you built the understanding of what that was like.”

Men also discussed how joking about sex or pornography or discussing women was common among their peer groups. For example, Lance shared that his friends would joke about sex and pornography and would also “jokingly” discuss his dates. He stated: “You’d go on a date with a girl and then they’d just be like oh, like, did you get to second base?” Other participants recounted similar examples of joking about sex or otherwise objectifying women in conversation. While not all of the men agreed with this type of conversation, many of the men discussed how their peers engaged in it.

Other participants contrasted themselves with their peers, acknowledging that their views on sex and masculinity were likely much different than their same-aged peers. Many men attributed this difference again to their religious beliefs, noting these beliefs often set them apart from other non-religious or less religious men their age. For example, when asked about his views on masculinity, Robbie imagined men his age might think of masculinity as someone who is “big and strong” whereas he prefers to define masculinity by a man’s character traits. Other men constructed their identities in this same way, by contrasting their views with those ideals held by mainstream society or other men their age. In this way, peers were still influential because they provided contrast and strengthened participants’ views related to these topics. While their impact evolved over time, peers remained influential in shaping participants’ beliefs.

**Romantic/Sexual Partners.** Men’s romantic and sexual partners influenced their views on sex and romantic relationships at different points in their lives. For some men, the emergence of a significant romantic relationship was the impetus for their initiation into sexual behavior. Participants discussed how their attitudes about sex changed depending on their current romantic partner (e.g., engaging in more sexual behavior if their partner was interested, or less as they developed different personal values about sex). Jordan shared how his boundaries in sexual relationships were initially determined by the partner he was with and then, over time, he began to understand his own boundaries. He elaborated:

So I’d say those were my opinions growing up in that I didn’t really have any lines set for myself except for maybe intercourse. I wouldn’t have done that. But, as I was exploring what I’m okay with, a lot of it was determined by what the individual

girl whom I was with what her opinions were...It started off as the other person's boundaries, but then when they, the other person had boundaries that were further along than my previous ones, I began to explore that, no this is something that I need to set for myself.

Adam's experience also illustrates the importance of romantic relationships to his understanding of sex and romantic relationships. He shared:

When I was like halfway through my freshman year, I ended up having a girlfriend who I dated for almost 15 months...It was like my first sexual relationship, I would say, and so that kind of like shifted my idea of like how I looked at romantic relationships and like what kind of expectation there was for like physical intimacy, like outside of spending time with each other...And, having that relationship progress to a point where you were having sex and then you were and that was like a normal thing...It becomes, like new kind of normal for you. And I think it's like, it didn't change my beliefs but it maybe changed how tightly I held onto them or like how I viewed this idea of not having sex before marriage.

A more amorphous influence of romantic partners on participants' views of sex and romantic relationships was participants' envisioned future wives. For example, Adam elaborated on his thought process related to sex outside of marriage and how his early sex education that emphasized abstinence still impacts him. He shared: "I'm not married but I've had sex outside of marriage...but I still I think have...that idea of like okay if I'm gonna do something in a sexual relationship, how would my future spouse feel about it?" Jordan provided the most in-depth explanation about his thoughts regarding current

sexual relationships and their potential impact on the future marital relationship for both him and a potential sexual partner. He stated:

I know what I am okay with doing because I know how, how far you can go and still hold someone's innocence so that they will have an awesome relationship. And I think that having just the emotional virtue to be able to be a man, going back to masculinity, and hold a girl's heart and her innocence up so that, if you don't get married, the man that she does marry one day will be able to come to you and say thank you for your relationship that you had with her...To love in a way where she hasn't been broken by a guy who thought that masculinity just meant having sex or being tough or not being able to sacrifice.

In different ways and to different degrees, participants in the present study discussed the importance of current and future romantic and sexual partners on their beliefs.

### ***Organizational/Community Influences***

Participants' beliefs about sex, romantic relationships, and sexual violence were influenced by the organizations and communities to which they belong. These influences were differentially impactful at different times in participants' lives. Three organizational/community subthemes that emerged in the present study were Sex Education, College, and Fraternity.

**School Sex Education.** Participants discussed the impact of sex education in primary and secondary school. For many of the men, this education was not as impactful or influential as other sources of influence, such as their parents, religion, or peers. Participants shared that their school sex education was generally not comprehensive and tended to explore the basics of sex (e.g., biology) without going in depth. Further, many

participants expressed that this education emphasized abstinence-only, which for some men was due to the intersections of their religious beliefs and schooling (e.g., attending private, Christian schools) whereas others said they experienced this same approach at their public schools.

Participants discussed school sex education they received, with some men receiving education as early as elementary school and others as late as high school. For many men, this education was primarily about topics such as biology and puberty, and sexual intercourse was not discussed. For example, Kenny shared about the education he received in middle school, stating: “I’m pretty sure just like the reproductive systems...like kinda what having sex is and...what it can develop like whether that’s like STDs or like pregnancies...I’m pretty sure our school taught like abstinence-only.” Lance shared about his elementary school sex education, sharing: “I wouldn’t say the...sex education we received in school was comprehensive, by any means...We watched the videos...about like puberty and about...general like what sex is.”

For other men, their school reinforced teachings from religious leaders and parents, stressing abstinence and saving sex for marriage. Duncan shared: “So I went to Catholic...school K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade...in all my religion classes and stuff, I’ve always been taught sex is only for people who are married, and it’s only between a man and a woman.” Ben shared about his experience receiving “WAIT Training.” He described this abstinence-only education in the following:

I think it was when we were in like 7<sup>th</sup> grade, was about the only time they ever did anything. They called it...Wait Training...they do it every year with like the whole class, just goes in there...it was a, maybe a couple different days that we went in

and did it, but they just kind of you know explained some of the dangers of it, and of course, like, the importance of safe sex, and all that...one of their main focal points was like the importance of I guess waiting like, that was why they called it wait training, you know, they talked about how like how if you don't, you know, you can get in messy situations pretty fast...if you like get out of control, I guess.

Overall, the consensus among participants was that their school sex education was not comprehensive, focused only on biology or puberty, and stressed abstinence. Men emphasized other influences as more impactful in shaping their beliefs about sex and romantic relationships.

**College.** Another community influence that shaped men's views on sex and romantic relationships was the college environment. For some participants, college reinforced sex as a normative experience. Participants also discussed specific elements of their university and its cultural location within the midwestern US as influential in shaping their beliefs and values.

Participants discussed the ways in which college shifted and shaped their views on sex, relationships, and Greek life. Adam noted how his beliefs around sex and romantic relationships changed considerably after entering college. He shared that, while his religious beliefs remained in terms of valuing an emotional bond with a person prior to engaging in sexual activity, his views become much more flexible and contextual after entering college.

Jordan discussed how entering college changed his views of fraternities, shifting them from more negative views to more positive views with exposure. He shared:

Coming into college I perceived it much differently than I do now which I think is a testament to the people outside falsely...see it for this...club of, maybe, horny guys that want to mess around with their boys and then go and have some flings with girls where they can use them for their own needs. And I think that that is a very, very false accusation.

Other men similarly spoke to how they were not planning to join a fraternity prior to college, either because of accepting stereotypes about fraternities or for other reasons, and how coming to college and meeting men with similar interests shifted their views.

Adam spoke directly to the impact of the college environment on his views about sex and

relationships. He shared:

I'd say not only the things that I was seeing people do around me in college, and then the whole thing of like you're going to parties for the first time, at least for me this was the first time I was going to parties where there was alcohol. And people just like making out in the middle of a crowded room of people, that was like a new experience for me and something I'd not like seen before. And then, we just kind of like get used to that. And then all of a sudden, you're doing that same thing, too.

For many men, college was a transformative experience impacting their values and beliefs.

Several men also commented on their specific campus environment and its specific cultural values with it being in the Midwest. For example, discussing fraternity culture and how it may be different at his campus than in other parts of the country, Adam commented: "And also, just where we're from, being in the Midwest and being at

[this campus], in particular, a lot of the like horror stories that you hear are not things that are happening here, necessarily.” He expounded on why he thinks a fraternity in the Midwest is different than other parts of the state, adding: “Midwest is kind of more well-known for being better mannered...we’re just very like moderate bunch.” Men also commented on the fact that the campus is a dry campus, which influenced the party culture. Overall, participants acknowledged the influence of entering college and entering their specific college situated in the Midwestern US as influential on their beliefs.

**Fraternity.** Participants’ fraternities played an important role in their views regarding sex, romantic relationships, and consent. Participants both selected into fraternities that matched their beliefs *and* were shaped by the beliefs of those members within their chosen fraternities. Participants discussed how they pledged to specific fraternities because of their shared beliefs or friends or family members who had previously been members. Several men discussed how they were not planning to join a fraternity until they discovered their specific fraternity and found community and shared beliefs, often grounded in their religion.

Participants also explained how their views were shaped by their fraternity, both implicitly and explicitly. As discussed previously, participants reported specific rules within their fraternity pertaining to the treatment of women, alcohol use, and sexual behaviors. These rules both influenced and were influenced by the participants’ own views. For example, men recounted specific trainings led by senior fraternity members regarding treatment of women and discussed rules about women (e.g., no women in the house after 2 a.m.; be a gentleman). The specific norms of the fraternity participants belonged to influenced their views and behaviors.

### *Macro and Societal Influences*

Themes emerged related to the influence of societal norms and values on participants' perceptions of sex, relationships, masculinity, and sexual violence. One subtheme that emerged was the role of media (especially pornography and social media). Men discussed their thoughts on media and pornography and the ways in which it shaped their views of sex, consent, sexual violence, and masculinity. They also commented on the ways in which media, such as movies, influenced people's perceptions of Greek life, which many men thought fed into the stereotypes. A second subtheme that emerged as a cultural influence was individualism and the belief in personal responsibility and individual differences. Both subthemes are explored below.

**Media.** Participants in the present study discussed the impact of media (e.g., movies, social media) and pornography on their views of sex, romantic relationships, and consent. To differing degrees, participants acknowledged the impact of media and pornography on their views, with many participants expressing negative views about pornography. Others spoke more broadly about the role of media such as movies, television shows, and social media.

While some of the participants acknowledged that they have consumed pornography and some men acknowledged that pornography served as a source of sexual education for them, many participants expressed negative views about pornography and its impact on people's perceptions of sex and relationships. For example, Jordan shared: "It's something that men as a whole should strive to not do because it...ruins our ability to truly feel a connection with another person." Adam discussed the incongruence between sex as portrayed in pornography and sexual relationships in real life. He

discussed how pornography can influence people's perceptions of what a relationship should be, which he noted is problematic since "the relationship is not something that is really the focal point [in pornography]." Other participants, such as Lance, discussed how pornography contradicts their religious beliefs, since sex is primarily portrayed in pornography as an act pursued for pleasure, rather than an expression of love within a marriage.

Several other men discussed how pornography creates unrealistic expectations about sex that contrast with how it occurs in real life. For example, Jordan commented:

I think [pornography] showed that...it needs to be a lot more intense or you need to go further than anything that I was doing and just seeing that, oh it's what everyone's doing, and kind of latching on to those thoughts that they portray...because it doesn't sell or whatever, there is not much pornography easily accessible that's portrayed as true, here is consent, and it's slow, and it's meaningful...I think that it has grown to be something that portrays it incorrectly as fast-paced, everyone's always willing to cross every single boundary ever and there never needs to be any pauses or discussion for that.

In the above quote, Jordan highlights how pornography does not portray how sex unfolds in real relationships and, more problematically, often does not portray consent.

Other participants spoke more broadly about the role of media, such as movies and television shows, and how it normalizes sex for pleasure and "hook-up" culture.

Kenny expressed his view that media had subconsciously impacted him due to the pervasive portrayal of sex on television and in movies. He shared: "I just think they normalize sex...like, it's just like not even for marriage...one-night stands are pretty

normal now...People having sex and then regretting it the next day is pretty normal now...I think that is a lot due to media.” Robbie spoke more specifically about the role of social media, sharing:

Media definitely influenced it a lot just because, especially on Instagram, like everywhere, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, you see a lot of inappropriate pictures and stuff like that and just a lot of ads and different things floating around...I still come across things on social media, I mean, it’s pretty much inevitable these days...it’s definitely harder because you’re constantly being exposed to things that aren’t the most respectful view of women.

Summarizing many participants’ views on the role of pornography and media, Chuck shared:

Pornography’s, in my opinion...bad. It ruins relationships. People can get addicted to it and it ruins the love between the two people in a marriage...The media...convey that sort of behavior where...you date...it leads to sex. Always. But...in the real world...that’s not really what it’s all about. I always disagreed with like if a movie or TV show kind of like hinted that kind of ideology. I just kind of ignored that cause I knew what my morals were.

**Individualism.** Another subtheme that emerged was the idea of individualism.

Rather than wanting to generalize about fraternity men or even men within their own fraternity, participants cited the belief that many of these values amount to personality and individual differences. This belief may represent a shared US ideology related to individuality and personal responsibility.

This sentiment was especially prevalent when men discussed stereotypes about fraternity men, as well as beliefs about sexual violence. Several participants highlighted that fraternities are comprised of individuals, emphasizing that all behaviors occur on a spectrum and it is inaccurate to generalize. For example, Jordan shared:

A fraternity is made up of individual members, so if there's one guy that does fit the stereotype and 70 guys that don't then...the entire fraternity might fit that stereotype as if he's the one that other people see doing stuff.

Drew shared a similar opinion, noting that differences in sexual behavior and consent are due to personality differences. To illustrate, he shared: "I could see a girl coming up and saying like you wanna have sex?...Or I could see a guy saying the same thing. It just depends on their personality and what kind of person they are."

This subtheme was consistent across transcripts and questions. Participants reiterated that every behavior is on a spectrum and that aberrant behaviors are due to outliers, rather than emblematic of fraternities as a whole. Similarly, many participants viewed the solution to sexual violence as related to individual responsibility, personality, and accountability. When trying to understand why men might perpetrate sexual violence, several participants attributed it to personality (rather than a cultural concern associated with masculinity or male privilege).

## **Conclusion**

Through the above themes and subthemes, I summarized the major findings that emerged from interviews with 10 cisgender, heterosexual, Christian White men involved in different fraternities on one Midwestern college campus. Their perceptions of sex, consent, gender roles, Greek life, and sexual violence were explored in detail above. In

the following chapter, I summarize the synthesis of essence, contextualize the above findings within the literature, discuss limitations of the present study, and present ideas regarding future directions and practical implications.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

Sexual violence is a major problem on college campuses. Researchers have identified fraternity men as at-risk for sexual violence perpetration (e.g., Bannon et al., 2013; Seabrook et al., 2016). The present study explored 10 privileged fraternity men's perceptions of systemic influences on sex, consent, and sexual violence. In previous chapters, I summarized relevant literature, described the present study's methodology, and presented the findings. In this chapter, I will summarize the findings and contextualize them within the extant literature, describe the synthesis of essence, and discuss limitations, practical implications, and future directions.

### **Textural Themes**

The textural description found through the qualitative interviews with 10 White, heterosexual, Christian, cisgender fraternity men corresponded with the following three research questions: 1) What are fraternity men's perception of sexuality, consent, gender roles, rape myths, and sexual violence?; 2) How have fraternity men observed others participating in rape culture and sexual violence perpetration?; and 3) What are fraternity men's perceptions of sexual violence prevention programs on the university's campus? Five themes emerged, each of which is summarized below. Findings are further contextualized within the extant literature.

### ***Views on Sex, Relationships, and Consent***

Participants discussed their views on sex and romantic relationships. A subtheme that emerged was the belief that dating relationships were entered into in order to find a suitable marriage partner (for some, the *only* purpose for dating). Many men also believed in abstinence before marriage. A few men diverged from this opinion and

discussed sexual intercourse as a normative part of their dating relationships. However, they were in the minority and most men endorsed a rule of “affection not arousal” whereby they explored physical intimacy with their partners but stopped prior to sexual activity.

Men also expressed heteronormative beliefs, exclusively discussing romantic relationships within the gender binary. Although this finding is unsurprising since all participants identified as cisgender, heterosexual men, it is still informative that their understanding of sex and relationships were based solely on this gender binary. This finding is congruent with the construct of benevolent sexism and gender differentiation (i.e., “the notion that ‘men are men’ and ‘women are women’...that each group must stay within certain bounds of stereotypical behavior”; Fraser, 2015, p. 148). The above also coincides with previous qualitative findings of men’s experiences of heteronormativity and heterosexism within fraternities (Hesp & Brooks, 2009). This finding is another example of participants’ power and privilege which may also be influenced by heterosexist fraternity norms that perpetuate oppressive systems.

Participants additionally shared how they navigate physical intimacy within their relationships, including how they know when someone is interested and how they show someone they are interested. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Jozkowski et al., 2014), a primary subtheme was that men look for nonverbal consent cues (e.g., proximity, eye contact, body language) from their partners. Participants expressed they show their interest similarly by utilizing proximity, flirting, and physical touch. This finding coincides with previous research suggesting men and women communicate about consent similarly (e.g., Beres, 2014; Brady et al., 2018; Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1999).

Many men stressed that they know verbal consent is important, specifically for sexual intercourse, but that they often do not obtain verbal consent for activities leading up to it (e.g., kissing). They described the process as unfolding “naturally” and expressed confusion about how verbal consent might fit into that process for activities other than sexual intercourse. Consistent with previous research, participants discussed how the need for verbal consent decreases with the length of a relationship or based upon the sexual behavior (e.g., Beres, 2014; Chin et al., 2019). This finding is alarming for prevention since consent is important at all stages of a relationship and for all sexual behaviors. While men acknowledged the importance of consent, their actual sexual practices seemed to differ slightly. This finding is similar to previous research, such as Beres (2014), who found how participants described their consent practices differed from their actual consent behaviors and their views that consent became less important with the length of the relationship.

Additionally, most participants understood the importance of obtaining verbal consent from someone of sound mind prior to engaging in sexual activity and understood that a person cannot consent when impaired by substances. However, as Brady et al. (2018) highlighted, it is likely that knowledge about consent is not the primary issue in sexual violence, since individuals generally understand consent and know how to signal and receive it (Beres, 2014). While it is positive that participants understand consent, this finding does not necessarily translate to consensual sexual practices and may still be problematic.

### ***Views on Masculinity and Gender Roles***

Participants discussed their beliefs related to masculinity and gender roles.

Participants discussed the ways in which their beliefs about masculinity (e.g., leadership, sacrifice, selflessness, personality traits, provider, protector) differ from their same-aged peers' beliefs (e.g., strength, business prowess, dominance, sexual experience). This finding is surprising given previous research supporting the link between fraternity membership and hypermasculinity (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). It is promising that men in the present study rejected traditional masculine norms frequently tied to sexual violence perpetration (e.g., hostility toward women/hostile masculinity, hypermasculinity; Casey et al., 2017; Murnen et al., 2002). In the context of Seabrook et al.'s (2016) findings showing that the relationship between fraternity membership and sexual violence acceptance was mediated by conformity to masculine norms, pressure to be masculine, and sexual objectification of women, it is positive that men in the present study did not adhere to these problematic masculine norms.

However, participants endorsed benevolent sexist beliefs (i.e., positive but patronizing beliefs toward women; Chapleau et al., 2007; Glick & Fiske, 1996). In the present study, these beliefs included believing men should be protectors of women (i.e., paternalism; Chapleau et al., 2007), protecting them from other men and, often, believing they were protecting women from themselves and their own sexual desires. Participants viewed their role as being "gentlemen" and emphasized the importance of respect toward women. Further, men conceptualized sexual behaviors in relation to imagined future spouses, which represents the heterosexual relations component of benevolent sexism (i.e., women are valuable because they are potential romantic partners for men; Chapleau et al., 2007). This protection and respect, although potentially well-intended, is

infantilizing and challenges women's autonomy and agency (Fraser, 2015). These views become problematic when men prescribe to women how they should behave sexually out of respect for their future husbands, which is heterosexist and dehumanizing to women.

Although these views may seem benign, they place men in a position of power and may be related to rape myth acceptance (i.e., with the exception of paternalism; Chapleau et al., 2007) and victim blame (e.g., Abrams et al., 2003). As Fraser (2015), wrote: "It is precisely because of its insidiousness that benevolent sexism is as dangerous as misogyny" (p. 149). Furthermore, Glick and Fiske (1996, 2001) conceptualized benevolent sexism as one half of ambivalent sexism, the other half being hostile sexism, with their research suggesting both contribute to gender inequality. According to their research, benevolent sexism may allow "men to maintain a positive self-image as protectors and providers who are willing to sacrifice their own needs to care for the women in their lives" which they argue may help to "justify men's greater privilege and power" (Glick & Fiske, 2001, p. 111).

Interestingly, most of the men did not think there were differences in appropriate sexual behavior for men and women. This finding may represent a promising shift toward more egalitarian views on sexual behaviors across gender identities. Some participants did, however, discuss the differing roles men and women play in sexual relationships, more akin to the traditional sexual script found in previous research (e.g., the cognitive representation of how heterosexual relations occur between men and women; Byers, 1996). For example, a few men discussed how men are traditionally the initiators in sexual relationships and women are the gatekeepers, or the ones responsible for consenting to sexual behavior (e.g., Hirsch et al., 2019; Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013).

This finding may be important in the context of limited prior research in which consumption of media portraying traditional sexual scripts was associated with increased sexual coercion (Sun et al., 2016; Hust et al., 2019). Furthermore, scholars conceptualize the traditional sexual script as part of rape culture (e.g., Phipps et al., 2018), in which men are in the position of power (i.e., the active participant) and women's sexual desires are devalued and deemphasized (i.e., they are passive participants), which often may lead to victim-blaming or slut-shaming among women who pursue sex or embody the initiator role.

### ***Perceptions of Greek Life***

Participants discussed their views on Greek life, including their positive experiences, and perceptions of stereotypes, alcohol use, and sexual violence. Positive attributes identified by participants included: connecting with men who share their values; building friendships; academic accountability; leadership; volunteerism; personal growth and challenge; and connecting around their religious beliefs. Participants' discussions of the positive attributes of Greek life are consistent with previous studies. Researchers have found Greek members may have higher graduate degree attainment (Routon & Walker, 2019), graduate school desires, participation in student government and volunteerism (Routon & Walker, 2014), greater involvement in campus social life, and higher graduation rates (Walker et al., 2015).

Participants discussed the stereotypes surrounding fraternities regarding sexual violence, partying, alcohol use, and hook-up culture. The general sentiment was that the stereotypes: 1) were true but were exaggerated; 2) only represented part of the story (e.g., overshadowed the positive contributions of fraternities); 3) occurred at other fraternities

with bad reputations (emphatically *not* in their fraternities); and 4) were due to outliers and not fraternity men, generally. Participants provided examples of instances that confirmed these stereotypes, such as fraternities that engaged in excessive alcohol and drug use, stories they had heard about sexual abuse and violence by fraternity men, and disrespect toward women. Participants agreed that parties and alcohol use were prevalent among their fraternities, but they noted they had also received extensive training about safe alcohol use and engaged in party culture responsibly. This finding is important because there seems to be a disconnect between what participants are willing to disclose about fraternities or what they have personally experienced and established stereotypes and statistics. This incongruence was notable throughout the participant interviews, in which participants acknowledge problematic and risky behavior (e.g., like pairing heavy drinking and sex) but denied knowledge of instances of sexual violence or rape culture. As noted throughout this manuscript, it is important to contextualize this finding with the recognition that the participants in the present study represent a group of men with a significant amount of power and privilege which undoubtedly influenced their responses to questions and their awareness about rape culture and its overt and covert manifestations.

### ***Witnessing Sexual Violence***

In order to understand participants' awareness of the prevalence of sexual violence, I asked questions about language (e.g., how fraternity men discuss women) and experiences observing other men engage in problematic behaviors. Many participants had difficulty answering these questions and shared they had never witnessed or heard about any problematic behaviors or sexual violence. For others, they had heard about or

witnessed such events, but only in *other* fraternities or among *other* groups of men. As noted above, when interpreting these findings, healthy skepticism must be utilized regarding whether these instances are truly outside of participants' awareness, perhaps due to their privileged identities, or whether they were motivated to downplay these instances to protect themselves of their fraternity brothers. This skepticism is warranted given the prevalence of sexual violence perpetration on college campuses and by fraternity men, in particular, meaning that the known prevalence of violence and participants' perceptions are incongruent.

Several participants described witnessing rape culture and sexual violence. These findings are important in the context of the literature on objectification and its relationship to other forms of rape culture and sexual violence (e.g., Seabrook et al., 2016). Men discussed hearing objectifying talk about women (e.g., men frequently commenting on women's bodies or engaging in rating them based on their appearance), joking about women and sex (e.g., joking that they were going to engage in a sexual behavior with another man's sister, in order to taunt him), and sexual harassment (e.g., witnessing other men approaching women at bars or parties and hitting on them in inappropriate and unreciprocated ways).

Several men endorsed rape myths (e.g., bad things only happen if you put yourself in a bad situation; women being drunk and "all over you" can lead to trouble). This finding was important given the established link between rape myth acceptance and sexual violence (e.g., Yapp & Quayle, 2018). It is perhaps more surprising that only a few participants endorsed rape myths given previous findings supporting the relationship

between fraternity membership and rape myth acceptance (e.g., Boeringer, 1999; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007; Seabrook et al., 2018).

Two men discussed hearing about sexual violence perpetration and dating abuse involving fraternity men. One participant described a sexual assault that occurred in the context of alcohol use and another participant reported hearing anecdotes from female friends regarding sexual, emotional, and dating abuse, occurring most frequently by fraternity men. This finding is perhaps most surprising given that *only* two men had heard of such accounts. Given the prevalence of sexual violence, generally, and *specifically* within fraternities (Foubert et al., 2007; Loh et al., 2005), it is surprising that more men had not heard these stories. It is possible that participants were simply unwilling to discuss these incidents, perhaps out of discomfort, or a desire to protect fellow fraternity men.

Reflecting upon this finding, I am reminded of the #yesallwomen hashtag that has trended on social media in recent years, originally in response to the misogynistic mass killings perpetrated in Isla Vista (see Jackson et al., 2019; Pendergrass, 2015; Rodino-Colocino, 2014; Thrift, 2014). This hashtag was a response to the #notallmen hashtag (i.e., “individual men distancing themselves from misogynistic violence by insisting they are the exception”; Jackson et al., 2019, p. 2), and women tweeted #yesallwomen to center the shared experience of sexual violence in women’s lives. Although college men are victims of sexual violence, they are victimized at lower rates than college women (see Mellins et al., 2017 for a population-based study at two universities; Santelli et al., 2018), and may not be aware of the pervasive, constant threat of sexual violence most women endure throughout their lives, *largely at the hands of men*. While not all men are sexually

violent, all men benefit from a system that values masculinity over femininity and often prizes male domination. More importantly, all men must use their privilege and be part of the solution to end this gender-based violence (#allmencan; <https://allmencan.org>).

### **Structural Themes**

I explored the following research question: How are these views shaped by each level of the modified social ecological model of prevention (i.e., individual, relational, organizational, and community)? My purpose was to understand the *how* and the *who* behind participants' beliefs. Fraternity men discussed their perceptions of the influence of individual (i.e., religious beliefs), relational (i.e., peers, family, and romantic/sexual partners), community (i.e., fraternity culture, campus culture, and school sex education), and societal (i.e., rape culture, media/pornography, and individualism) levels of the modified social-ecological model. Major themes, contextualized within the extant literature, are summarized below.

#### ***Individual***

Unexpectedly, the primary individual belief that influenced participants was their religious beliefs. All participants identified as Christian or Catholic and most men described themselves as very religious. Participants' religious beliefs influenced nearly every aspect of their beliefs related to sex, romantic relationships, gender roles, masculinity, Greek life, and alcohol use. Participants discussed the influence of their religious beliefs positively and construed them as a protective factor against things like casual sex, excessive drinking, mistreatment of women, and sexual violence.

Providing support to the notion that religion may be a protective factor, Kingree et al. (2017) found that that increased church attendance among male college students was

associated with lower levels of binge drinking and sexual aggression; further, lower binge drinking explained the relationship between church attendance and sexual aggression. Berkel et al. (2004) found college students' spiritual actions were correlated with more sympathy for female domestic abuse survivors. Conversely, Koch and Ramirez (2010), in a study of undergraduates, found a positive association between Christian fundamentalist beliefs and violence approval and intimate partner violence behaviors. The research is limited regarding fraternity membership and religiosity, in general. In one study, Goldfarb and Eberly (2011) found fraternity men had lower levels of spirituality, spiritual/religious growth, religious commitment and engagement, and religious/social conservatism and higher levels of religious skepticism. Given the strong influence of religious beliefs among participants in the present study, more research is needed examining religiosity, spirituality, and fraternity membership, as well as their role in sexual violence and masculinity beliefs among fraternity men.

### ***Relational***

As expected, participants identified their peers as an important relational influence on their beliefs, especially when younger. Participants discussed how they learned about sex and relationships by hearing about their friends' experiences. They also described how their peers joked about sex or pornography and frequently discussed women in objectifying ways. However, rather than influencing them, many men described how they developed their own beliefs in contrast to their peers' beliefs particularly due to their strong religious beliefs.

Findings in the present study may not provide support for the Male Peer Support Model as it relates to sexual violence or relationship abuse. One key piece of this model

empirically tested among fraternity men was peer pressure to have sex, which increased the likelihood of sexual assault (Franklin et al., 2012). Present study participants denied pressure to have sex within their fraternity. Further exploration of this model is warranted given Schwartz and DeKeseredy's (1997) update to the model that included constructs such as membership in social groups, heavy alcohol use, group secrecy, and objectification of women. In particular, present study participants' responses evidenced elements of group secrecy and silence regarding sexual violence perpetration, exhibited by statements such as not wanting to speak for other fraternity men or the overwhelming difficulty for many participants in identifying instances of sexual violence or rape culture. In his book *Guyland*, Kimmel (2008) discussed the role of men's silence, which facilitates rape culture and sexual violence perpetration by protecting perpetrators. He wrote: "The culture of silence both enables the worst of the guys in their predatory behaviors and at the same time prevents the best of the guys from speaking up about what they really think about all this sexual predation" (p. 238). Given men in the present study did exhibit group secrecy, and endorsed heavy alcohol use and objectification of women, further exploration and testing of this model among fraternity men may be beneficial.

Two unexpected influences that emerged were family and romantic/sexual partners. Participants' described how their parents implicitly (e.g., modeling) and explicitly (e.g., teaching about sex) shaped their views on sex and romantic relationships. Participants' parents also reinforced religious teachings about abstinence, marriage, respect for women, and masculinity.

Participants' romantic and sexual partners were also influential in shaping their beliefs. Several participants discussed how their views on sex before marriage changed

when they started dating women and began engaging in sexual intercourse. Participants routinely spoke about their imagined future wife and how she might feel about their current sexual behaviors, which influenced their current sexual decision-making. While I did not predict this finding, it is unsurprising given the CDC (2021) specifically mentions family members and partners as potentially influential for prevention due to their direct impact on behaviors and environment.

### *Community*

At this level, three subthemes emerged: fraternity culture, campus culture, and school sex education. Fraternity culture influenced men's views on sex and consent via both self-selection and socialization. Via self-selection, participants chose particular fraternities that aligned with their beliefs (e.g., religion) and their beliefs were shaped by their fraternities via socialization (e.g., respect for women, being gentlemen, leadership, norms around alcohol use). Treat et al. (2021) similarly found support for both theories, with joining a fraternity correlated with future sexual aggression, increased binge drinking, and perceiving peers as sexually aggressive (socialization), and frequent binge drinking prior to college correlated with joining a fraternity (self-selection). The present study findings provide support for both self-selection (e.g., Treat et al., 2021; Waterman et al., 2020) and socialization theories (e.g., Boeringer et al., 1991; Martin & Hummer, 1989; Treat et al., 2021).

Campus culture influenced men's views on sex and relationships in several ways, including by normalizing sex. Participants also commented on the specific norms of their college, situated in the Midwest, and how their fraternities represented more moderate organizations than would be found in other regions of the country. Participants

additionally shared that their campus is a dry campus. In Wiersma-Mosley et al.'s (2017) study of 1,423 public and private four-year universities, more liquor violations and greater fraternity and athletic presence on campuses were related to higher rates of rape. The current study's campus not allowing alcohol use within fraternity houses may serve as a protective factor against excessive alcohol use which may have an impact on rates of sexual violence. However, participants shared how parties occur off-campus, which may be problematic if university staff do not have oversight of these parties, meaning problematic and illegal behaviors may occur. This concern was highlighted by Seabrook (2019), who found that fraternity men with an unofficial house (i.e., house not sanctioned by the university) endorsed greater acceptance of sexual violence than non-fraternity members. Further, fraternities with official houses received more intimate partner violence education and were more aware of related resources on campus. These findings highlight the need to understand physical context, particularly related to the level of university oversight possible, which may impact alcohol use and sexual violence perpetration.

School sex education was perceived by men as not comprehensive, often only focusing on biological aspects of sex, such as puberty and participants reported receiving abstinence-only sex education. Participants viewed their school sex education as the least influential on their beliefs about sex and romantic relationships, behind their parents and religious leaders. This finding is disconcerting given previous literature suggesting early, comprehensive sex education is imperative for sexual violence reduction (e.g., Khan et al., 2020; Santelli et al., 2018).

### *Societal*

At this level, two subthemes emerged: media/pornography and individualism. Many participants shared the belief that pornography negatively impacts relationships and skews how people view sex. Despite this belief, some participants shared they consume pornography, with a few participants discussing it as a sex education tool. One participant highlighted the lack of consent portrayed in pornography. If pornography is a primary educational tool for some young men and it does not portray consent, then this may have dangerous implications for sexual interactions. For example, Foubert et al. (2011) found, among fraternity men, pornography viewing was associated with less likelihood of bystander intervention, an increased intent to rape, and greater rape myth acceptance. Other researchers have implicated pornography use in objectification of women and making unwanted sexual advances (Mikorski & Szymanski, 2016).

Regarding individualism, participants repeated a common refrain that men who are sexually violent are outliers and not representative of fraternity men as a whole and that sexual violence was an individual or personality issue. This thought process may be influenced by Western, White ways of thinking that emphasize personal responsibility and promote toxic individuality. This refrain also reminds one of the “Not All Men” hashtag described earlier in this chapter (e.g., Jackson et al., 2019), whereby men are quick to extoll their own virtues and signal that they are the exception to this violence. The point, however, is that even if “not all men” perpetrate sexual violence, all men are involved in a system of power and oppression whereby their male privilege shields them from the experiences that women endure. Instead of extolling individualism, true male allyship looks like recognizing male privilege and educating oneself on the prevalence of violence against women and trans and gender nonconforming folx.

### **Synthesis of Essence**

In addition to summarizing findings, Moustakas (1994) emphasized the importance of synthesizing the essence of the phenomenon (i.e., the core meaning). This core meaning includes universal structures and overarching themes, such as time, space, place, and the self. This synthesis corresponds with the understanding that the current findings represent 10 individuals' perceptions at a particular moment in time and within particular contexts.

As I reflected upon the current findings and contextualized them within the extant literature, I hypothesized universal structures that may be operating for these participants. I thought about overarching themes like White male privilege; class privilege; the influence of Western, White norms; the current sociopolitical climate, including the Me Too Movement, the Abolish Greek life Movement, the racial justice movements, and conversations about dismantling White Supremacy; Gen Z norms around alcohol use and sex; and the ways in which each of these themes intersect with one another. While I am unable to explore each of these themes in more detail in this manuscript and some of these topics are explored elsewhere, it is important to understand the current findings are contextualized within this particular moment in time, in the Midwestern US, in the middle of an historic year due to a major election and a global pandemic. In particular, the role of privilege cannot go unnoted. The participants in the present study represent a group of highly privileged men, with power and status on their college campus. Undoubtedly, each of these influences implicitly and explicitly shaped the present study's participants and their perceptions of sex, Greek life, and sexual violence, including their awareness of the prevalence of sexual violence, their understanding of their role in the

problem and its solution, and their motivation to actively engage to dismantle oppressive systems.

### **Prevention Implications**

Participants described their experiences with sexual violence prevention programming. Alarming, some men shared they had never received any sexual violence prevention training (although these men were often freshmen). Even more concerning, a majority of participants could not think of a time in which a problematic event representing rape culture (e.g., assault, harassment, aggression, objectification, jokes) had occurred. Rather than suggesting that sexual violence is not a problem on this particular campus, these findings suggest several hypotheses: 1) participants are unaware of the true prevalence of sexual violence on their campus due to their privilege or other factors; 2) participants are aware but are choosing not to discuss these instances due to factors such as group secrecy or social desirability; 3) participants are unaware of what would be considered problematic, believing more covert aspects of rape culture are not harmful or problematic (e.g., rape jokes, rape myths). Participants discussed their experiences, including what they thought was effective and what needed improvement.

Many participants understood the importance of such trainings but noted they were not effectively reaching their target audiences. Participants thought the programming was often boring, repetitive, unnecessary, unengaging, and common sense, consistent with previous literature (e.g., programming as a waste of time; Rich et al., 2010). Several men also conceptualized sexual violence as an individual or personality problem, related to a person's morality, seemingly suggesting that, for most men, these trainings are not necessary. This finding is reminiscent of Rich et al.'s (2010) study of

college men, in which one participant shared prevention programming was not relevant to him because it “should be imposed on sex offenders, not your average student” (p. 272). In the present study, participants’ suggestions included personalizing the trainings (e.g., one-on-one format), providing interactive activities (e.g., question-and-answer sessions, videos, speakers) and leveraging peer relationships.

According to the nine principles of effective prevention established by Nation et al. (2003), prevention programs should be comprehensive, include varied teaching methods, have a sufficient dosage, be theory driven, encourage positive relationships, be appropriately timed, be socio-culturally relevant, include outcome evaluation, and be facilitated by a well-trained staff. Participants’ critiques and suggested improvements map on to some of these suggestions. According to Nation et al. (2003), comprehensive programming address precursors and mediators of the problem, utilize multiple interventions (e.g., information and awareness and skill development) and engages systems impacting the problem (e.g., community norms). Nation et al. also encourage active engagement with hands-on experiences focused on skill-building, which is consistent with participants’ suggestions for engaging material and activities. The principle of positive relationships may coincide with participants’ suggestions to utilize peer educators and leverage peer relationships to reduce violence perpetration.

Participants expressed the belief that these trainings were unnecessary and, rather, fraternity men should simply look after one another and step in if they noticed a fraternity brother engaging in problematic behaviors. On the surface, this idea sounds helpful; however, given the prevalence of sexual violence on university campuses and within fraternities, one begins to wonder how “common sense” this type of bystander

intervention really is. In fact, very few men mentioned receiving any formal bystander intervention training. While bystander intervention may be a useful tool for disrupting sexual violence (e.g., Banyard et al., 2007; Banyard et al., 2009; CDC, 2014; Coker et al., 2015; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2011; Kettrey & Marx, 2019), there are often barriers to enacting bystander intervention in practice (e.g., social hierarchies and desire to protect popular men; Wamboldt et al., 2019). It is also interesting to note motivations for intervening among fraternity men, such as those motivations endorsed in the current study (e.g., to not add fuel to the stereotypes). This finding was consistent with Wamboldt et al.'s (2019) finding that heterosexual men would intervene for liability reasons (e.g., fraternities facing consequences if sexual violence occurs at their sponsored events), reputation, and moral commitment. Importantly, in their meta-analysis, Kettrey and Marx (2019) found promise in bystander intervention programs for impacting bystander intervention, but, unfortunately, not sexual violence perpetration. Nonetheless, many prevention programs support leveraging peer relationships (e.g., Foubert, 2000; McMahon et al., 2014) and this approach is supported by Nation et al.'s (2003) guidelines; thus, future training in this area for fraternity men is warranted.

The present study's themes suggest important areas for prevention and student affairs professionals to target in sexual violence prevention programming for White, heterosexual, cisgender fraternity men, including consent (stated vs. utilized in practice), benevolent sexist beliefs, masculine gender roles, alcohol use, and power and privilege. The present findings are important in the context of previous research on the correlates of sexual violence and aggression such as benevolent sexism (e.g., Chapple et al., 2007); alcohol use (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2006; Jozkowski & Wiersma-Mosley, 2017; Martin &

Hummer, 1989; Mazar & Kirkner, 2016); masculinity (e.g., McDermott et al., 2015); pornography consumption (Foubert et al., 2011; Mikorski & Szymanski, 2016), and consent beliefs (e.g., Hermann et al., 2018; Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013; Jozkowski & Wiersma, 2015; Warren et al., 2015). For example, Walsh et al. (2019) found that sexual assault perpetration was correlated with monthly binge drinking, adherence to traditional masculinity, and belief in and use of nonverbal consent communication. This finding is particularly important since men in the present study reported moderate to heavy drinking within their fraternities, traditional masculine beliefs (e.g., provider, protector), and the use of nonverbal consent strategies.

Participants' insights on the positives of Greek life also have important implications for sexual violence prevention. Specifically, it may be important to consider the ways in which these strengths can be leveraged to encourage prosocial behaviors, such as bystander intervention, and to engage fraternity men who value respect for women and consensual sexual relationships as peer educators. Given the value these men place on accountability, responsibility, and leadership, and their emphasis on the importance of education being personalized, it stands to reason that including them in leadership positions in sexual violence prevention programming, with proper training, could be beneficial. Peer education is already a prominent model utilized by many colleges, and studies have examined the effectiveness of utilizing peers in sexual violence prevention (e.g., Foubert, 2000; McMahan et al., 2014).

It is clear that while these men do not think sexual violence is a concern within their particular fraternities, they acknowledge that it is an issue in other houses. In particular, they implicated the role of party culture in sexual behaviors and sexual

violence, suggesting this as an important area for further prevention, intervention, and research pursuits. Overall, leveraging the strengths of Greek life to provide further prevention programming that more appropriately targets fraternity men, such as by personalizing their experience and incorporating the values and norms each particular fraternity holds, may be warranted. Given the extent to which participants emphasized the stark differences among different fraternities, it seems wise to tailor prevention programming to the unique needs and values of each individual fraternity (e.g., see McCready, 2019 for an example of how masculine norms differ across fraternity chapters).

At the same time, this finding may be another way some fraternities engage in the “NotAllMen” perspective, deflecting scrutiny from themselves and suggesting sexual violence is a problem for other fraternities but not for them or their fraternity. Thus, it may be important to balance incorporating the prosocial attributes of Greek life and leveraging peer relationships with the reality that fraternity men may be motivated to understate their involvement in rape culture and sexual violence perpetration or, at the very least, may be unaware of the extent of the problem within their own fraternity. As Jozkowski and Wiersma-Mosley (2017) noted: “Entire fraternities need to be held accountable for such changes to really take hold. Arguments that one or two bad apples are to blame should not be tolerated” (p. 99). Again, an important point of intervention seems to be raising fraternity men’s awareness that sexual violence is a systemic, not an individual, problem and *all men* are part of the solution.

This lack of awareness, exhibited by men in the present study, may be an important first area of intervention. Before teaching men bystander intervention skills or

leveraging the prosocial attributes of Greek life, fraternity men must understand that sexual violence is a problem on college campuses and, furthermore, must recognize the ways in which they contribute to rape culture, irrespective of perpetrating sexual violence themselves. The #allmencan initiative is a helpful framework for such an approach, helping men recognize that, even if they have not perpetrated sexual violence, they are part of a system that facilitates rape and rape-supportive attitudes and, therefore, must also be part of the solution (allmencan, 2021). The #allmencan initiative is a coalition of UK-based organizations (e.g., White Ribbon UK) committed to ending male violence against women, with the core belief that “all men can learn to be better allies to women” (allmencan, 2021). The hashtag of the same name (#allmencan), created by PolicyMic editor Elizabeth Plank was a response to the #yesallwomen hashtag and invited men to describe how being a man or masculine-identifying can be synonymous with being a feminist and a person committed to equity and eradicating sexual violence (Bahadur, 2014). In general, these campaigns suggest that all men, not just perpetrators of sexual violence, need to be part of the solution in dismantling oppressive systems and eradicating sexual violence. As Kimmel (2008) wrote: “The only way to transform Guyland is to break the culture of silence that sustains the Guy Code. Guys do what they do in part because they believe they can get away with it, that other guys won’t say anything, and that the community will basically support them” (p. 288). Thus, for the participants in the present study, the lack of understanding that they are a crucial part of the problem *and* the solution to rape culture and sexual violence is problematic and changing this understanding is crucial. Fraternity men must understand that their

participation in breaking the silence and speaking out against problematic behavior and sexual violence is key to eradicating sexual violence.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The present study has several limitations. First, due to convenience sampling and self-selection, the men in the present study may represent individuals with specific qualities. One unique quality these participants may have is a willingness to participate in a study discussing sensitive topics like sex, consent, and sexual violence. Men who were more comfortable discussing these sensitive topics or men who had previously attended sexual violence prevention programming and were more knowledgeable about the topic may have self-selected into the present study. Participants may also represent a group of men who have not perpetrated sexual violence or are not aware of their previous sexual violence perpetration.

Additionally, the participants in the present study all, to differing extents, identified as religious. This unexpected theme impacted nearly every aspect of the present study. The present study findings must be contextualized with the understanding that individuals who are religious may hold distinctly different views on sex, consent, and romantic relationship than do men who are areligious or less religious. Future researchers should explore the present study's constructs within a more religiously diverse sample.

My identity as a woman likely also impacted the present study's findings. While nearly every participant shared that they were comfortable with the interview and felt that they could be honest, it is certainly possible that their knowledge of my gender identity impacted how they answered questions. Participants may have responded with defensiveness, discomfort, or a desire to protect their fraternity. Particularly given many

participants' emphasis on respect for women, it is entirely possible that they tempered their responses because they were speaking to me. For example, participants may have been unwilling to share honestly about examples of sexual violence or hesitant to use the actual language they use with their fraternity brothers.

It is also possible that participants responded in socially desirable ways due to the sensitive nature of the present study. I may have received the "politically correct" version of participants' thoughts, watered down to not transgress social norms, morality, or legality. It is also possible participants felt protective of their fellow fraternity brothers. Several men made disclaimers before making statements about fraternities, insinuating that they could not speak for other fraternities or did not want to spread any rumors. Several participants also noted that they participated in the present study in order to dispel what they saw as unfair stereotypes about fraternity men. Thus, it is unclear how well the present findings represent the reality of sexual violence among fraternity men. Since the purpose was to understand these particular fraternity men's perceptions, the present findings may still meaningfully contribute to the literature.

Similarly, another potential limitation is the very nature of self-report data. While the purpose of phenomenology is to understand individuals' experiences with a phenomenon from their perspective, one must wonder what is and is not within an individual's awareness. For example, due to the privileged existence White men experience in the US, is it possible that they are unaware of the prevalence of sexual violence because they are the least impacted by it? I was especially struck by this possibility as I reflected upon the difficulty men had with recalling an incidence of sexual violence or rape culture they had witnessed or heard about. Similar to the social media

hashtag, “yes all women,” I found it hard to consider that participants could not think of a single example while at least a handful came to my mind immediately, based on my own and my friends’ experiences. This limitation raises the following question: how reliable are fraternity men, whether intentionally or unintentionally, as spokespeople for the state of sexual violence within fraternities? Do they have the awareness, knowledge, and firsthand experience to accurately portray the prevalence of sexual violence within fraternities? Future researchers might consider interviewing sorority women and other college students about their experiences with fraternity men and sexual violence. While the purpose of the present study was to understand fraternity men’s perspectives about these topics in order to inform primary prevention efforts aimed at reducing sexual violence perpetration, it remains a limitation of the present study that the only source of information was the fraternity men themselves.

Another limitation is the heterogeneity among fraternity men as a larger population and the relative homogeneity within the current sample, resulting from recruitment procedures (i.e., convenience and snowball sampling). Participants within the present study all identified as cisgender, White, heterosexual men with middle to upper middle class socioeconomic statuses. As mentioned previously, they also all identified as religious (specifically, Christian). Due to the exploratory nature of this study, I did not purposively sample *all* or even most of the fraternities on the particular campus. To my best estimates, I sampled approximately three or four of the fraternities located on the campus. Therefore, I was unable to represent the heterogenous experiences of men from different fraternities and with different, intersecting identities. It is likely that these White, cisgender, heterosexual, Christian men’s experiences are different from

individuals with different levels of power and privilege. Future researchers may consider utilizing more intentional recruitment strategies beyond convenience and snowball sampling in order to represent diverse voices and perspectives within the fraternity population.

Participants in the present study also mentioned how specific fraternities on campus have reputations for being sexually abusive or for emphasizing party culture, meaning their experiences with the present study constructs would likely also be different. Future researchers should consider interviewing fraternity men with differing intersecting identities (e.g., race, religion, class, sexual orientation), men from multiple different fraternities, and men from those fraternities with “bad” reputations. That being said, from a critical perspective, understanding White, cisgender, heterosexual, middle-to-upper class men’s perspectives on this topic is important *because* of their social locations and degrees of power and privilege. While it would be informative to explore diverse men’s perspectives, the present findings still meaningfully contribute to our understanding of sexual violence perpetration, especially from a power-based framework (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2018). The current study contributes to the literature by highlighting gaps in privileged fraternity men’s awareness and understanding regarding consent, gender roles, and sexual violence and uncovering important areas for prevention.

### ***Future Directions***

Based on the present study findings, there are multiple areas for future exploration. Future researchers should explore the ways in which fraternity men’s intersecting identities influence their values and beliefs and how these influence sexual violence perpetration and prevention. The present study participants represented a group

of men with very privileged identities and their perceptions of sexual violence perpetration, romantic relationships, masculinity, and consent, are likely influenced by this power and privilege. Future researchers should also include more diverse samples, including men with differing racial, sexual, gender, class, and religious identities, as well as men from a variety of different fraternities.

Different research methods may also be helpful for exploring these phenomena in different ways. A major limitation of the present study was the methodology (i.e., self-report interviews) utilized to explore the researcher questions. This approach relies on honest answers from participants and an awareness of the topics being discussed, which may be limited when participants possess privileged identities. One type of qualitative research that may prove especially helpful in this area is ethnography similar to the studies conducted by Hirsch et al. (2019) and Rhoads (1995). Ethnography may be a particularly useful methodology given the immersion into the culture and decreased reliance on self-report, which may address some of the limitations of the current study. Such an approach would allow researchers to observe fraternity men in their environment and may provide more accurate information regarding systemic influences.

Future researchers should also conduct focus groups or more specific program evaluation research with fraternity men who have participated in prevention programming. Focus groups and program evaluation could help determine areas of effectiveness and growth for prevention programming targeting fraternity men. As practitioners and researchers incorporate relevant themes into prevention programming, researchers should then empirically test the effectiveness of these programs at reducing sexual violence perpetration (Khan et al., 2020).

Another consideration for future researchers is the impact of interviewer identity on fraternity men's willingness to engage openly and honestly. I am a White, cisgender Woman and, while these interviews were conducted over the phone, my perceived gender identity was likely communicated to participants via my name and voice. Future researchers should consider the potential impact of different interview dyads when conducting qualitative research. There are likely benefits and drawbacks to utilizing different gender dyads in the interview process, but reflection on this factor is warranted.

A potentially rich area for future exploration is the role of religion as it relates to sexual violence perpetration and prevention. The paramount importance of religion to the present study's participants and their views on sex, consent, masculinity, and sexual violence was unexpected. Future researchers should explore the role of religion, both as a risk and protective factor, for sexual violence perpetration and prevention. Research examining non-Christian religious beliefs and their impact on fraternity men's perceptions may also be beneficial.

Several other themes deserve more explicit attention. Of particular importance is the role of power, oppression, and privilege among White, heterosexual, cisgender fraternity men and the ways in which these intersecting identities may lead to sexual violence perpetration (see Ray & Rosow, 2012 for an example of White male fraternity privilege). Important considerations include influences such as heteronormativity, sexism, racism, classism, White privilege, religious privilege, and male privilege. The men in the present study held power at several identity locations (e.g., religion, gender, sexuality; see Armstrong et al., 2018 and Jozkowski & Wiersma-Mosley, 2017 for a review of some of these topics). These intersecting privileged identities likely influenced

participants' responses, potentially due to a lack of awareness, a desire to maintain power, or a desire to protect their fellow fraternity brothers. Understanding the ways in which these social locations influence sexual violence perpetration is of utmost importance. Future researchers should explore, in more detail, the ways in which power and privilege facilitate rape-supportive campus environments and prevent fraternity men from actively engaging in the dismantling of oppressive systems.

### **Conclusion**

Sexual violence remains a prevalent problem on college campuses. Primary prevention efforts are needed that target the individuals and social-ecological contexts most likely to perpetrate and perpetuate this violence. Fraternity men are one such group and fraternities are one such context that should be targeted. In the present study, I confirmed the importance of further study of this group of men, including salient social-ecological areas to target and suggestions for improvement in prevention programming.

In the present study, I explored 10 cisgender, heterosexual, White fraternity men's perceptions of sex, consent, and sexual violence. Researchers, policymakers, and student affairs professionals have identified fraternity men as a high-risk group for sexual violence perpetration. Given this research, it is important to understand why fraternity men perpetrate violence and which norms, beliefs, values, and environments contribute to their perpetration. It is also important to understand fraternity men's level of awareness about the prevalence of sexual violence perpetration on college campuses and their role in the problem and the solution. As uncovered in the present study, layers of privilege and other factors may prevent, consciously or unconsciously, fraternity men from

acknowledging the problem of sexual violence on college campuses and taking an active role in preventing it and dismantling oppressive power structures.

Although there are limitations to the present study, the current findings meaningfully contribute to our understanding of this population and illuminate potential targeted areas for prevention. Future researchers should continue to explore this rich research area, both qualitatively and quantitatively, with diverse samples, and with explicit attention to systemic influences and the role of power and privilege. Practitioners should focus on building awareness and motivation among fraternity men, creating buy-in that every individual has responsibility for ending sexual violence on college campuses.

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## Appendix A: Informed Consent



**IRB #:** 20182

**Fraternity Men's Perceptions of Sex, Consent, and Sexual Violence: A Phenomenological Study**

**Primary Investigator:** Justine Diener O'Leary, MA  
email: [jdiener2@unl.edu](mailto:jdiener2@unl.edu)  
Department of Educational Psychology, 114 Teacher's College  
Hall  
Lincoln, NE 68588-0345

**Secondary Investigator:** Neeta Kantamneni, PhD  
Department of Educational Psychology, 114 Teacher's College  
Hall  
Lincoln, NE 68588-0345

**Why are you being asked to be in this research study?**

You are being asked to be in this study because you identify as a man, are enrolled at UNL, and are an active member of a fraternity. You must be 19 years of age or older to participate.

**What is the reason for doing this research study?**

The purpose of this study is to better understand fraternity men's perceptions of sex, consent, romantic relationships, sexual violence, and sexual violence prevention.

**What will be done during this research study?**

You will be asked to complete one individual interview with one researcher, either in-person or via telephone. Interviews are expected to last approximately 60 minutes. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed for data collection and analysis purposes.

**What are the possible risks of being in this research study?**

Risks of participating in this study are minimal. However, risks may include experiencing negative or heightened emotions during or after participation in this study. Should experience a negative emotional response, resources for counseling services are listed below:

Counseling and School Psychology Clinic  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
49 Teachers College Hall, Lincoln, NE 68588  
402-472-1152

Psychological Consultation Center  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
235 Burnett Hall, Lincoln, NE 68588  
402-472-2351

**What are the possible benefits to you?**

You are not expected to get any direct benefit from being in this study.

**What are the possible benefits to other people?**

The benefits to science and/or society may include better understanding of the experiences of fraternity men regarding sex and consent. Further, findings may inform future sexual violence prevention efforts at this university.

**What will being in this research study cost you?**

There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

**Will you be compensated for being in this research study?**

You will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card for your participation in this study.

**What should you do if you have a problem during this research study?**

Your welfare is the major concern of every member of the research team. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form.

Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data.

The audio data will be stored electronically through a secure server and will only be seen by the research team during the study and will be deleted after your interview is transcribed. The interview and demographic information will be stored electronically through a secure server accessed only by the primary researcher. Your name or the name

of your fraternity will not be used in association with your responses; a pseudonym will be assigned instead. Individual quotes, attributed to pseudonyms, may be included in the dissertation or publication to illuminate participants' lived experiences.

The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as group or summarized data and your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

### **What are your rights as a research subject?**

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

For study related questions, please contact the investigator(s) listed at the beginning of this form.

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

- Phone: 1(402)472-6965
- Email: [irb@unl.edu](mailto:irb@unl.edu)

### **What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?**

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study (“withdraw”) at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

### **Documentation of informed consent**

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to be in this research study. By completing the interview, this means that (1) you have read and understood this consent form, (2) you have had the consent form explained to you, (3) you have had your questions answered and (4) you have decided to be in the research study. You may keep this consent form for your records.

**Participant Feedback Survey**

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln wants to know about your research experience. This  
14  
question, multiple-choice survey is anonymous. This survey should be completed after  
your  
participation in this research. Please complete this optional online survey at:  
<http://bit.ly/UNLresearchfeedback>.

## Appendix B: Recruitment Blurb

Dear [name of organization or individual's name],

My name is Justine Diener O'Leary, and I am a doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln under the guidance of Dr. Neeta Kantamneni. I am writing to you regarding my dissertation research study.

I am conducting a qualitative research study examining fraternity men's perceptions of sex, romantic relationships, consent, and sexual violence prevention. Participation will involve one approximately 60 minute interview session conducted over telephone. Participants will be asked for their input regarding their experiences and perceptions of sex, romantic relationships, consent, and sexual violence.

Participation is voluntary and all responses are kept confidential. An individual is eligible to participate if he identifies as a man, is currently involved in a fraternity, and is at least 19 years of age. Participants will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card for their time.

**If you are interested in participating, please email me at [jdiener2@unl.edu](mailto:jdiener2@unl.edu).**

Please also feel free to forward this email to anyone you think might be interested in participating.

I appreciate your consideration. Please do not hesitate to email me with any additional questions.

Warmly,

Justine Diener O'Leary

[jdiener2@unl.edu](mailto:jdiener2@unl.edu)

### Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Demographic questions (Age, Race, Ethnicity, Gender identity, Sexual Orientation, Year in school, Years in fraternity, Years in Nebraska, Religion, Socioeconomic background growing up)

1. Please describe your perception of romantic relationships and sex growing up.
  - a. Prompt: How did you learn about sex and romantic relationships? How did your parents/peers/educators/religious figure/important community members talk about or teach you about sex? Media or pornography?
2. Tell me a little about Greek life on this campus/How is Greek life perceived on this campus?
3. What are your thoughts on what it means to be a man/how do you define masculinity?
4. How do you show someone you are interested in sex?
5. How do you know when someone is interested in sex?
6. What are your thoughts on the appropriate way for a woman to behave sexually?
7. What are your thoughts on the appropriate way for a man to behave sexually?
8. Please describe your fraternity's (male peer group's) culture around alcohol use.
  - a. Prompt: In what ways, if any, are alcohol and sex related in your fraternity or peer groups.
9. Please tell me about your fraternity's (male peer group's) culture surrounding sex.
  - a. Prompt: How do men in your fraternity talk about sex? Consent? Women? Other men?

10. What are your thoughts on this university's approach to sexual violence and sexual consent?
11. Have you received any training or education around sexual violence, or healthy sexual or relationship behavior? If yes, please tell me about this experience.
12. Please tell me about a time you observed other men engaging in sexual behaviors or talking about sex or sexual partners in a way that made you uncomfortable.
  - a. Prompt: In what ways did this situation make you uncomfortable? What feelings or thoughts came up for you?
13. What else would you like to elaborate on that we discussed previously? Is there anything I didn't ask you that I should have asked you?
14. What was it like to discuss these topics with me?

## Appendix D: External Audit

### **General audit process:**

- Review All Codes Excel Document (Initial Coding, Categories, Themes, etc.), Memoing Word Document, and Themes Word Document
- Read through researcher's reported data analysis process
- Reflect on intersection of codes, themes, textural/structural processes, guiding framework

### **Bracketing/Memoing**

I really appreciated the thoroughness of your bracketing procedure, it has made me go back and reflect on whether I put enough into that section. The dichotomy of awareness of your potential biases and their intersection with the reality that those biases come from highlights the depth of thinking related to your reflexivity. It clearly shows up throughout your reflections on participant disclosures as well...even when those disclosures seem thoroughly rooted in male privilege, the male gaze, and sexist ideology.

### **Codes/Themes/Processes**

After going through the codes, themes, textural/structural parts a couple of times just reading through, it feels like you are spot-on with the process of how the codes grouped into themes and how these created the textural and structural processes. I think the link between socialization factors reinforcing heteronormativity feels like it comes through really clearly during your categorizing. One thing that came up for me was that the "white male socialization" piece came up in the structural/influences section and I wondered if there was any way to somehow parse out which parts of that were from the cultural orientation and which were from the gender orientation and how each of these

may have been impacted by the participants' religious orientation (since sex and sexuality in general within white culture, especially in many religious orientations, is often a taboo topic). Anyway, not sure if that's helpful but I found myself reflecting on that piece a lot as creating the stigma that becomes fertile ground for the promotion of heteronormativity, sexual objectification, assault, shame, silence, etc.

Also, I really loved the reflection on Gen Z and the cultural place where we are as a country at this moment in time.

**Framework: Social-Ecological Model of Prevention**

As we discussed, I wondered if the version of this that I found on the CDC's website (Individual, Relationship, Community, and Societal) is the same as that found in your literature base. If it's different than this is related to the structural side and may not be relevant but otherwise you might frame all the fraternity stuff (currently labeled as organizational) as Community and then emphasize societal as learned cultural more-macro things.

Appendix E: Table 2

**Table 2**

*Demographic Characteristics for All Participants in the Present Study (n = 10)*

<b>Name (pseudonym)</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Years in Fraternity</b>	<b>Religious Identity</b>	<b>SES</b>
Kenny	20	White	Heterosexual	Sophomore	2	Christian	Middle Class
Jordan	19	White	Heterosexual	Freshman	1	Roman Catholic	Middle Class
Drew	22	White	Heterosexual	Senior	4	Lutheran	Mid to Upper Class
Adam	21	White	Heterosexual	Junior	3	Protestant	Middle Class
Robbie	19	White	Heterosexual	Sophomore	2	Catholic	Middle Class
Lance	20	White	Heterosexual	Sophomore	2	Nondenominational Christian	Middle Class
Mark	19	White	Heterosexual	Sophomore	1	Lutheran	Middle Class
Ben	19	White	Heterosexual	Freshman	1	Evangelical or Protestant Christian	Upper Middle Class
Chuck	19	White	Heterosexual	Freshman	First year	Roman Catholic	Upper Middle Class
Duncan	19	White	Heterosexual	Freshman	Pledge	Roman Catholic	Middle Class

Appendix F: Table 3

**Table 3**

*Themes, Subthemes, and Illustrative Quotes in the Present Study*

	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Illustrative Quote</b>
<b>Structural</b>			
	Views on Sex, Relationships, and Consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Centrality of marriage</li> <li>b) Role of sex in relationships</li> <li>c) Accountability</li> <li>d) Respect for women (benevolent sexism)</li> <li>e) Pursuing physical intimacy</li> <li>f) Consent</li> <li>g) “A drunk yes is a no still”</li> </ul>	Lance, on physical intimacy: <i>“I know when my girlfriend and I kissed for the first time, like neither one of us said yes or anything, but you, we could just kinda both tell. And it just seemed natural. So, I don’t know, with something like that, I personally don’t think that you need to verbally affirm that if you’re certain that...pretty certain that the other person, just based on their body language, based on their actions, is open to that.”</i>
	Views on Masculinity and Gender Roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Appropriate sexual behaviors</li> </ul>	Jordan, on masculinity: <i>“Being a man is so warped by the world, and people are constantly trying to portray it by these...ideal muscular movie characters that have no fear and always get the girl and stuff, and that’s just, I think that is a very, very bad portrayal of men...”</i>
	Perceptions of Greek Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) “Building up leaders”</li> <li>b) “Everything you hear is true, but not everything that’s true is what you hear”</li> <li>c) “Froshes” and jungle juice</li> </ul>	Duncan, on other fraternities: <i>“...it doesn’t seem like a lot of other fraternities really, I guess, care too much about how they treat people, how they treat women at least because...there’s a lot of like the stereotypes of fraternities that...you just like to party and hook up and stuff like that. And...at least from what I’ve heard, I’m sure, some of the fraternities here are like that.”</i>

	Witnessing Sexual Violence		Adam, on abuse within fraternities: <i>“But it’s like everyone I talk to who has like hooked up with someone or been in relationships with someone in another fraternity has had issues with it. Whether it’s verbal abuse, emotional abuse...manipulation, or even like sexual assault or like taking advantage of them when they’re either drunk or like not in any kind of state to like provide consent.”</i>
	Thoughts on Prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Experiences with programming</li> <li>b) Suggested improvements</li> </ul>	Lance, on university prevention programming: <i>“I just feel like the university understands the real problems that they see within the entire university system...cuz you know, as a fraternity we...might miss something...They always do a good job of hitting every point...helping people understand...how prevalent of an issue it is...When I came to college...I didn’t understand how big of an issue it was at campus. Or just, you know, in general. So I think they do like an awesome job of shedding light on that just because it’s like oh wow this is an issue...We need to be better, and...not be a part of these statistics...I think that can kinda be a wake-up call for guys.”</i>
<b>Textural</b>			
	Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Religious beliefs</li> </ul>	Robbie, on his religious beliefs and masculinity: <i>“I think a real man is somebody who would give up themselves for the ones he loves and just unselfishness...so man is somebody who can lead his peers and his family to heaven and into a relationship with Christ and being unselfish with his actions and with his resources...Perfect example is...Jesus Christ on the crucifix. I mean, he did that for all of us, so I think just that kind of picture is what masculinity is.”</i>

	Relational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Family</li> <li>b) Peers</li> <li>c) Romantic partners</li> </ul>	Robbie, on the influence of his parents on his ideas about relationships: <i>“My parents have always been a great example...they always treated each other with a lot of respect and I’ve always admired that.”</i>
	Organizational/Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) School sex education</li> <li>b) College</li> <li>c) Fraternity</li> </ul>	Adam, on how college changed his perspective: <i>“I’d say not only the things that I was seeing people do around me in college, and then the whole thing of like you’re going to parties for the first time, at least for me this was the first time I was going to parties where there was alcohol. And people just like making out in the middle of a crowded room of people, that was like a new experience for me and something I’d not like seen before. And then, we just kind of like get used to that. And then all of a sudden, you’re doing that same thing, too.”</i>
	Macro/Societal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Media/pornography</li> <li>b) Individualism</li> </ul>	Chuck, on pornography: <i>“Pornography’s, in my opinion...bad. It ruins relationships. People can get addicted to it and it ruins the love between the two people in a marriage...The media...convey that sort of behavior where...you date...it leads to sex. Always. But...in the real world...that’s not really what it’s all about. I always disagreed with like if a movie or TV show kind of like hinted that kind of ideology. I just kind of ignored that cause I knew what my morals were.”</i>

### Appendix G: Memoing Example

\*\*A thought popped into my head—it's great that accountability is such a key piece of fraternity life, but for example with transcript #5, he talks about how he's received little training from the university regarding sexual violence prevention. If there isn't a lot of training, how do they even know what to look out for or what to hold each other accountable on? This could be my bias and my immersion in the literature on sexual violence prevention, but #5 discussed how he has never been at a party and needed to intervene in a situation that made him uncomfortable—is this because nothing has ever happened or just because he hasn't noticed? One question that would be good to ask is—what would be a situation where you would need to intervene? What would indicators be that would clue you in that you needed to intervene? I think about my own experience personally, and I could EASILY answer that question with a number of examples, either personal situations that I have been in, or stories I have heard from others. I have personally intervened in situations at parties, and I have obviously experienced situations that have made me uncomfortable. I recognize that this could be part of my bias being a woman, but I also just wonder about this idea of accountability and kind of self-monitoring. If no one else is monitoring, how do we know the accountability is working?\*

My theoretical justifications for the study—Modified Social Ecological Model of Prevention and Self-Selection vs. Socialization into fraternities

-I wonder if my study really gets at the second part

#8 –he was nice and seemed open and willing to talk and answer questions; I don't think his interview really added much, however. I think I'm reaching saturation, at least for men who

identify religiously, as the theme seems pretty much the same. Especially speaking with men who have had little sexual experience, there's only so much information I can get from them. Also, because I've talked to men from 2, and maybe 3 at most, fraternities, I'm not sure how helpful this study is. I don't know if it makes sense to keep recruiting participants...maybe trying to recruit more broadly through Greek life to see if I can access other fraternities...or if it makes sense to call it good with the information I've collected? 8 participants is good, but obviously doesn't do much to speak to fraternity men's, in general, experience on this campus. I understand the purpose of qualitative research is not generalizability, but since I say I'm looking at fraternity men's perceptions, would it be useful to speak to more fraternity men?

\*what to do about #notallmen? How do I balance telling their stories and perceptions while also utilizing a critical, feminist approach? Obviously there is stuff I can read between the lines knowing what I know, and theories I can utilize to understand their experiences (e.g., benevolent sexism, lack of true understanding of consent, etc.)—how do I balance a transcendental approach with my philosophical and theoretical understanding?

\*I don't want to risk overly empathizing with these men, but at the same time I don't want my biases or preconceptions to get in the way. But I also don't want to be naïve, and I don't want the finished product to be harmful\*