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Research Paper

Capstone

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### The Toxicity of Greek Life

Greek life is a staple part of the college system in the United States and can be found at almost every college and university across the country. Kappa Sigma, Theta Chi, Beta Theta Pi, Alpha Beta, or something of the sort. All of these words refer to the fraternities and sororities of Greek life. This culture has become a core tradition among many American universities.

Sororities and Fraternities are sisters and brotherhoods, which are formed around common goals and dreams, building a tight bond among their members. However, throughout the years, Greek life has seemingly become rather toxic. When you think of what sororities and fraternities do, what is the first thing that comes to your mind? Probably partying. There's nothing wrong with partying, however, there has been an alarming number of incidents that have taken place within the Greek life community. These incidents include sexual violence, death, and injury as a result of hazing, roofying, drug usage, overuse of alcohol, etc. In this paper, I argue that Greek life should be abolished, because it perpetuates rape culture and sexual violence, promotes toxic masculinity, and endorses the overuse of alcohol and drugs.

Greek life may be known for its parties and initiation rituals today, however, in the past, Greek life had a different reputation. Phi Beta Kappa is considered the first-ever fraternity, founded in 1776 at the College of William and Mary. Members kept the group a secret and hadn't revealed their secrets to the public until 1831. Other sororities didn't start forming until the

mid-eighteenth century due to colleges being male-only institutions. Today, many fraternities keep their traditions and morals a secret, while others share them with the public. Phi Beta Kappa, along with other groups, was created by students who felt restricted by their school's education. This is what led students, who were searching for more, to form these groups in which they could extend their learning without the restriction of a classroom. During the mid-nineteenth century, various fraternities had established themselves at many national universities. As colleges started picking up on the existence of these groups, many encouraged them, as a way to fuel their students' introspection. Knowledge and curiosity were at the heart of these fraternities, but these students started leaning on each other for more than just that. Through the progression of fraternities, many hoped the main purpose was to stay academically charged, but they started having get-togethers, trips, etc. These events and traditions forever changed the mindsets of members for the worse.

Sexual violence is an issue that has been continuously happening throughout the world for centuries. In the article, *Greek Life and Rape: A Tale as Old as Time* (2020), author Madeline Gaeta, a current student and sorority member at Lafayette College, addresses the topic of rape and assault within the Greek life community and argues that the social structure within the community plays a role in why rape is so common among fraternities. She supports this claim by providing us with statistics, then gives insight into how fraternities run and throw parties, and finally explains why systematic change is necessary. Gaeta's purpose is to confront the unfortunate amount of sexual violence within Greek life to raise awareness and help provide steps colleges can take to start changing Greek life systematically. She implements a critical and formal tone for her audience, the readers of *Students 4 Social Change*, and others passionate about the topic of sexual assault. The statistics show that fraternity men are 3 times more likely

to commit rape or assault and women in sororities are 74% more likely to experience sexual assault than their peers who don't participate in Greek life. The reason for these high numbers is because how the social structure of Greek life is mainly reliant on fraternities. Fraternities are responsible for hosting parties, gatherings, and events. They provide food, hospitality, drinks, music, etc. This allows for fraternity members to feel a sense of superiority, as they feel obligated to receive something in return for the things they provide. Women line up outside, in their best outfits, hoping to look good enough to get in. Once inside, you begin to feel almost obligated to do anything you're told. Tables full of alcohol, and men peer pressuring you into taking your fourth shot of vodka. The women-to-men ratio at these events is alarming as well. Like Madeline Gaeta states, you feel obligated because the men are providing you with everything. They let you into the party for free, you're alone, they provided gallons of hard liquor and booze, music, and games. These fraternities know the power they have over the women attending their events, and they take advantage of that. They get you drunk enough to sleep with because they know you would never willingly do it sober.

Sexual assault is hard to process once you fall victim to it. Many people believe that sexual assault is only a continuous issue due to the idea that many women don't report their assault, and that may be a factor. In the book, *Sexual Assault on Campus: What Colleges and Universities Are Doing About It*, authors Heather M. Karjane, Bonnie S. Fisher, and Francis T. Cullen, faculty in the division of Criminal Justice at the University of Cincinnati, address the topic of sexual assault and argue that colleges and universities are not providing enough for victims nor helping prevent sexual violence on campus. They support this claim by providing us with statistics of reports within universities, then the rate of sexual assault on these campuses, and what colleges are doing to help victims. Karjane, Fisher, and Cullen appear to write in hopes

of providing useful information to colleges and universities on how to provide better for victims in order to increase the rates of sexual assault reports. Unfortunately, only around five percent of attempted or completed assaults are reported to campus authorities and or law enforcement. A good question to ask would be “what are schools doing to increase the rate of reports?” The answer? Not enough. Many victims worry they’ll be brushed off by authorities when reporting. Some worry coming out will ruin their social lives. Our society tends to victim blame in cases of sexual violence. In many cases, people ask victims “How much did you have to drink?”, “Were you asking for it?”, “How were you dressed?”, “Why didn’t you push him off of you?” All of these questions are ignorant. These responses are what prevent people from reporting. Colleges need to provide a better, more anonymous system to help victims feel safe and heard while reporting their experiences. In Karjane, Fisher, and Cullen’s book, they found that only forty-six percent of schools offer anonymous reporting. Furthermore, only half of the schools with an in-person contact procedure provide victims with a phone number, and less than half don’t offer services after certain business hours. Some students also worry about reporting due to certain alcohol policies that schools have, inhibiting more reports. Schools need to implement a confidential experience when victims share their stories of assault. A better experience could help lower the rate of assault on campuses.

Why do these fraternities objectify women and why do they commit these crimes? Toxic masculinity could be the answer. In the article, *Why Is Fraternity Membership Associated with Sexual Assault? Exploring the Roles of Conformity to Masculine Norms, Pressure to Uphold Masculinity, and Objectification of Women (2018)*, authors Rita C. Seabrook, L. Monique Ward, and Soraya Giaccardi, researchers in the Department of Psychology at the University of Michigan, argue that the issues of sexual violence within fraternities stem somewhat from the

pressure felt to uphold masculine norms and objectify women. They support this claim by providing statistics of sexual violence within universities, then conducting surveys at these universities, and finally going into depth on their results. Seabrook, Ward, and Giaccardi appear to write in hopes of providing useful information to college administrators as they further programs to help reduce sexual assault on campus. They adopt a serious and determined tone for their audience, the readers of *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, and those interested in the topic of sexual violence. Fraternities promote toxic masculinity, and by joining one, that's what you will continue to practice. They claim to be a brotherhood, they want to practice manhood. But what does it mean to be a real man? According to fraternities, being a man means showing traditional masculinity. Being heterosexual, being "the man" of the house, don't show too many emotions, etc. Having sexual intercourse is the main part of "masculinity." The more women you sleep with, the more manly you are, otherwise you'll be looked down upon. It's almost like a competition within fraternities, to see who displays the most masculine traits. New members are taught that this behavior is acceptable, relatable, and normal. They are told how to act and what to do. Members are peer pressured into acting in certain ways to feel accepted. They praise each other for sickening behavior. Anyone who wishes to join a fraternity must display such masculinity, and show that to the members before becoming one themselves. This often leads to the issue of hazing.

According to the dictionary, hazing can be defined as "the imposition of strenuous, often humiliating, tasks as part of a program of rigorous physical training and initiation." Fraternities often have freshman and or incoming fraternity brothers partake in dangerous and humiliating activities to be accepted into the group. These activities are often extreme and cause injury, or in worse scenarios, death. These activities are seen as manly and can prove one's worth.

Unfortunately, there have been multiple fatal incidents. Hank Nuwer has an entire database dedicated to hazing-related deaths. Between 1960 and 1970, there was a massive jump in the number of deaths related to hazing. Incidents date back to 1959. One incident took place in 2019 at the University of Nebraska. Rahil Jahil was a member of Lamda Phi Epsilon, and committed suicide after his hazing incident. He was coerced into urinating on other pledges who had allegedly disobeyed senior

members. He was only eighteen.

Another incident took place at

Washington State University in

2019. 19-year-old Samuel Martinez

died of alcohol poisoning after

attending his fraternities event. He

was a member of Alpha Tau

Omega. His family states he was

pressured into pledging to consume

a half-gallon of rum between

himself and other members. The

New York Times states “ his blood-alcohol content was measured at 0.372 after his death, nearly

five times the legal limit.” This is yet another unfortunate hazing incident, out of the thousands

that have taken place over the years. Men who fail to reach these extremes are made fun of and

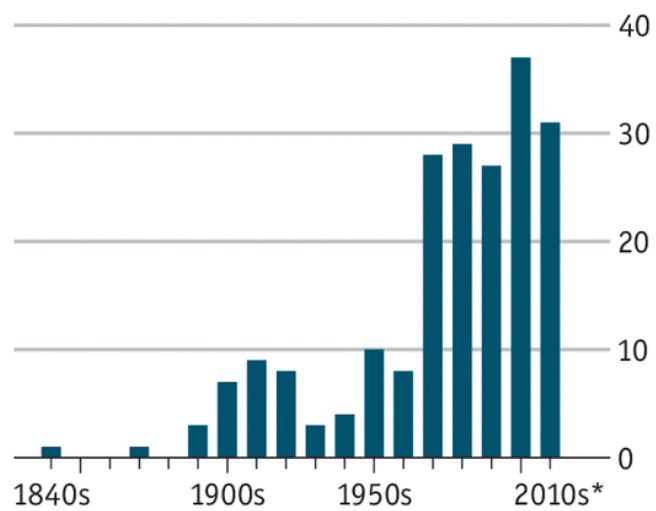
are often teased. Hazing can include activities involving alcohol and drugs as well. Fraternity

brothers make it a competition to see who can drink the most, who can take the most acid, or

shrooms, smoke the most weed, etc. The higher tolerance for these substances you have, the

## Cruel intentions

United States, hazing deaths by decade



Source: Hank Nuwer

\*To October 12th 2017

Economist.com

more masculine and praised you are. Members are taught that these behaviors are normal and “cool.” Parents are losing their children because of a college organization. Fraternities and Sororities should look out for each other. Care for everyone's safety and well-being. Parents shouldn't have to worry about their children participating in dangerous activities on campus.

Most young adults attend college in the hopes of finally living a fun independent life away from home, and fraternities market themselves as a culture of brotherhood and coming together while partying and maintaining a social life. I propose we abolish Greek life from continuing at colleges and universities. In Madeline Gaeta's article “Greek Life and Rape: A Tale as Old as Time”, she states, “Whether they are members of an official fraternity, a club, or a sports team, they will find ways to socialize and create social hierarchies at school, most of which will involve partying.” She's answering the question of whether or not banning Greek life is the answer. She says “college students are college students”, which may be true, however, not every college student goes to the extremes that fraternities do. They promote rape, enable it, and praise it in ways. There is absolutely no way to completely put a stop to the sexual violence at colleges, however, we sure can lower that rate and provide victims with a safe space to tell their stories. Gaeta goes on to state, “ Banning Greek life would only encourage the formation of underground fraternities, which would be held to no standards as they would exist as unregistered organizations that would be unaffiliated with the school or a national fraternity”, which I also have to somewhat disagree with. I can see where she is coming from and I'm sure that would become an issue if schools allowed it to. We need more security and sexual assault professionals on campus. We need to inform students about what consent is because it is not an eventual “yes”. If schools were strict enough with a no-tolerance policy, these underground fraternities could be put to a stop. Schools need to provide more for students and educate those

more on sexual violence. We can lower the rates of assaults and increase the rates of reports, however, that first step relies upon each university.

The brother and sister of Greek life may argue that their sororities and fraternities should stick around because of the social life aspect. A key component within fraternities and sororities is the tight bonds formed among members. They are called sisterhoods and brotherhoods for they view one another like family. They claim to provide a perfect environment where students can meet a lot of new people and create long-lasting friendships, building social skills. Between the events thrown and the volunteer opportunities that fraternities and sororities offer, members, claim there are many ways for members to build strong communication skills and leadership skills. However, many of the friendships developed within a sorority and or fraternity, depend on how members adhere to the rules and traditions. There is no quitting when it comes to fraternities and sororities. Once you pledge, you get hazed. Many people have been removed from groups for not following along with hazing activities. Sorority members have also kicked members out for not keeping a good social status. It seems that Greek life mainly cares about how “cool” they come off to others. The word “cool” relates to hazing, parties, looks, and social media. These groups have slowly but surely become toxic. Greek life only adds to the percentage of sexual violence, death, and drug addictions on a college campus. It promotes dangerous and unhealthy lifestyles. All college organizations need to be safe and healthy for students to participate. Participation in Greek life is very time-consuming and strict. It can be extremely distracting for students.

Another argument is that Greek life provides for its members academically. Sororities and fraternities claim there is also a great deal of work going into academic studies. Most organizations require members to have a 2.5 GPA or higher to join and remain a member.



However, this rule does not necessarily result in better academic behavior. According to a study conducted by the University of Miami, Greek life continues to result in lower academic performance. The study looked at data from 34,000 students over 10 years. The study found that members perform at their worst during pledging season. This is due to the high volume of stress and pressure that these organizations put on their members. Students who graduated as members of Greek life ended up having a lower GPA than before they joined a group, and members who left a group before graduating claimed their GPA went up. Another study conducted by Andrew De Donato of Duke University and James Thomas of Yale University was focused on whether or not Greek life affects academic performance. The two researchers studied Duke, which happens to prohibit its students from joining any Greek life organizations until after their first semester. The study found that Greek life does correlate with lower GPAs and that members of sororities and fraternities seem to register for easier classes in hopes of trying to break the “stereotype” and getting away with less homework and tests. It was also found that Sorority and Fraternity members are more distracted in classes than those who aren’t members. They seem to be more focused on recruiting other members, upholding traditions, and attending events. This is no surprise, as Greek life consistently promotes a lifestyle that is not realistic while attending a university, if not ever.

At the end of the day, Greek life is only causing more harm than good. Colleges shouldn’t provide nor support a culture that promotes toxic masculinity and teaches its members a skewed definition of masculinity. Members of fraternities aren’t going to change their mindsets with the snap of a finger, they need to be forcibly put to a stop. Victims need to receive justice, and these men need to see the real consequences of sexual violence. As I stated earlier, members of sororities are more likely to be assaulted than those who don’t participate in Greek life and

members of fraternities are three times more likely to commit an act of assault than non-Greek life members. The fraternities of Greek life promote a culture that celebrates a skewed image of what masculinity means. Praising substance abuse, sexual abuse, and verbal abuse is not what it means to be a real man. Members of Sororities and Fraternities fight to keep their organizations up and running, hoping schools can get past the deaths, violence, and addictions. They argue that Greek life promotes positivity, friendship, support, and family. They try to maintain a good reputation when it comes to academics. However, they fail to prove themselves. Studies show that Sororities and Fraternities correlate with lower GPAs, less hard work, and a lack of motivation. Members peer pressure each other to partake in acts of violence and substance abuse, trying to prove one's worth. Greek life is the main component in these sexual assault cases and substance abuse incidents that take place on college campuses, and we have to put an end to it. Schools must ensure a safe and healthy learning environment for young adults entering the real world.