EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT IN AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGIATE WOMEN WITH MEMBERSHIP IN GREEK-LETTER SORORITIES AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION

by

CIERA VICTORIA SCOTT

(Under the direction of Bernadette Heckman)

ABSTRACT

Sexual assault describes any form of sexual contact between individuals that occurred without clear, expressed consent by the trauma survivor (Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network, 2015). A national study reported that 27.7 of 1,000 college-aged women will be sexually assaulted (Fisher et al., 2000). Sorority membership is a risk factor for sexual assault in college-aged women due to high rates of alcohol consumption experienced at Greek social events (Minow & Einolf, 2009). Research disparities exist regarding sexual assault's impact on collegiate women of color with sorority membership (Barrick et al., 2012; Krebs et al., 2011; Henry, 2009).

The purpose of this psychological study was to explore the perceptions that self-identified African American women with membership in Greek-letter sororities at a predominantly white institution (PWI) possessed regarding sexual assault. A qualitative methodology known as transcendental phenomenology, centered in Empowerment Feminist Therapy and Black Feminist Theory, served as the theoretical foundation of the researcher's exploration of the lived experiences of African American sorority women attending PWIs and their perceptions of sexual

assault. The study participants included a total of 12 self-identified African American women with membership in Greek-letter sororities at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia.

Results of this study included the identification of eight themes related to perceptions of sexual assault in African American sorority members attending PWIs. Participants' interviews provided insight about the sexual assault survivorship status of African American sorority members attending PWIs, demonstrated the impact of racialized and gendered stereotypes on participants' perceived risk for sexual assault, and revealed participants' beliefs about cultural norms for sexual expression and sexual behaviors across genders. In addition, the study participants expressed the multi-faceted manner in which their Greek membership served as both a protective and a risk factor for their potential sexual victimization at a PWI.

INDEX WORDS: Sexual assault, African American/Black, Women, Sororities, Fraternities, Consent, Victim-blaming, Microaggressions

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the African American women across the globe who identify as sexual assault survivors. My greatest hope is that all African American female sexual assault survivors will one day have their trauma accounts heard and positively validated in a supportive and non-judgmental way. It is with great respect and admiration that I imagine the daily lives of African American female sexual assault survivors, both those who have been vocal about their trauma and those who have not felt emotionally or physically safe enough to do so. Each day that African American female sexual assault survivors wake up and choose peace, joy, restoration, and healing is an act of courage and strength.

"I write for those women who do not speak. For those who do not have a voice because they were so terrified, because we are taught to respect fear more than ourselves. We've been taught that silence would save us, but it won't."

-Audre Lorde

20th Century African American writer, feminist, and civil rights activist

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I would first like to express my immense gratitude to God whom I consider to be my Creator and Higher Power. My faith and spirituality constantly grounded me during this dissertation process, providing me with fortitude, happiness, and resilience to healthily sustain my emotional and physical well-being along this journey. It is my belief that God has deeply instilled within me an unmoving purpose, to use my love for emotional connection, social justice, and psychology to serve as a mouthpiece for women of color sexual assault survivors. Thank you God for allowing me to more clearly see, with each passing day, how my life's challenges and triumphs will help me to empower Your people.

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Each of my dissertation committee members have played an invaluable role not only in the progress of this research project, but in my intrapersonal and professional growth. I would like to first thank my major professor, Dr. Bernadette Heckman, for her compassion, patience, and never-ending motivation. Dr. Heckman, I will always remember the conversation between you and I, during which you encouraged me to tackle my topic of sexual assault in African American sorority members as my dissertation topic. Your kind and emboldening words ignited a fire in me regarding this research, while furthering emotional healing within myself during the process. I must also thank Dr. Anneliese Singh for serving as one of my greatest models of authenticity and transparency. Dr. Singh, your fearless spirit greatly inspires me, as I continue to commit myself to improving the lives of historically oppressed and marginalized members of our society. Also, I am thankful for Dr. Singh's passion for qualitative research, as her expertise in this area motivates me to keep raising the bar regarding my personal expectations of what it means to be a proficient qualitative researcher. I must also express my gratitude to Dr. Alan Stewart for his genuine and warmhearted approach in caring for the professional and personal success of his students. Each and every time that you welcomed my questions or concerns with an enthusiastic and sincere heart was a validating and restorative experience.

Lastly, I must thank the 12 African American female sorority members at UGA who served as my study participants. It is with eternal appreciation that I present the results of my research experiences with you. As a collective, my study participants represented the great diversity in personalities and survivorship that exists amongst African American collegiate women with membership in Greek-letter sororities at a predominantly white institution. To my study participants, your immense sense of courage, vulnerability, humor, resilience, and vivacious spirits provided me with the energy and strength to see my dissertation project through

to completion. Please know that I will continue to honor your lived experiences in my future work as a scholar, clinician, researcher, and social justice advocate.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background and Context

"There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives."

-Audre Lorde

Violence against women and sexual assault.

Violence against women can be defined as "any act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life" (United Nations Resolution 48/104, December, 1993; Koss et al., 1994). Both completed and non-completed nonconsensual sexual acts, most commonly referred to as rape, are included in this definition of violence against women (Worell & Remer, 2003; Koss et al, 1994). Rape can be viewed as a "manifestation of gender inequality" and "a mechanism for the subordination of women" (Koss et al., 1994). Patriarchal views continue to dominate the language used in the construction of rape narratives within the criminal justice system, continuing a gender biased view towards this form of violence against women (Easteal, Bartels, & Bradford, 2012). Some feminist commentary describes how restrictive representations of gender-based violence (i. e., date rape) through the media, when streamlined and projected through a patriarchal lens, silences the voices of women whose rape may not fit the socially accepted narrative of sexual violence (Moore, 2011).

Sexual assault is a term used to describe any form of sexual contact between individuals that occurred without clear, expressed consent by the trauma survivor (Rape, Abuse, & Incest

National Network, 2015). This dissertation study was conducted in the State of Georgia, therefore it is also imperative to consider the State of Georgia's definition of sexual assault. The Official Code of Georgia Annotated (2015) states that "a person commits the offense of rape when he has carnal knowledge of 1) a female forcibly and against her will; or 2) a female who is less than ten years of age" (OCGA, § 16-6-11). "Carnal knowledge" describes the act of the male sexual organ penetrating the female sexual organ (OCGA, 2015, § 16-6-11). The researcher experienced the State of Georgia's definition of rape as invalidating against the trauma experiences of some LGBT individuals whose assaults are not encompassed by the term "carnal knowledge" (OCGA, 2015, § 16-6-11). This dissertation study was completed in consideration of RAINN's (2015) definition of sexual assault, while also recognizing that sexual assault harms the emotional health and impairs the daily functioning all survivors, no matter how they self-identify along the spectrums of sexual orientation and gender identity (Gold, Dickstein, Marx, & Lexington, 2009; Rothman, Exner, & Baughman, 2011; Testa et al., 2012).

Cultural implications of sexual assault.

Koss and colleagues (1994) noted that most cultures uphold gendered social structures that include the following—1) imbalanced legal, economic, physical, and educational power distributions between women and men; 2) cultural acceptance of violence against women; 3) societal myths and beliefs centered around victim blaming and the invalidation of women's accusations; 4) heterosexist prejudice that establishes female-male relationships as the cultural norm; and 5) gender role expectations. The aforementioned gendered social structures enable the perpetuation of rape against women throughout the world (Worell & Remer, 2003).

Cultural stigma related to rape allows myths and falsehoods regarding sexual violence against women to be propagated throughout society (Worell & Remer, 2003). Rape myths

consist of attitudes and beliefs that are generally fabricated but are vastly held within society and serve as stereotypes that deny and justify acts of male sexual aggression against women (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Gendered stereotypes declaring that "boys will be boys" normalize male sexual aggression, causing female survivors of relationship and sexual violence to excuse the criminal behavior of their perpetrators (Weiss, 2009). Payne and colleagues (1999) stated that rape myths are maintained in order to disguise the high prevalence rates of rape, to normalize sexual violence against women, and to blame the victim for their trauma so that damaging societal structures such as patriarchy are not challenged or changed.

The majority of rapes do not take place in "dark alleys" but are instead committed in a location familiar to the survivor such as their own home (Abbey et al., 1998). Furthermore, rapes are typically not committed by a stranger to the survivor. On the contrary, more than 50% of rape survivors are victimized by acquaintances that they already know (Greene & Navarrim, 1998). Clark and Carroll (2008) discussed socially constructed acquaintance rape scripts that portray involved individuals as "having had too much to drink," the perpetrator and survivor as "friends who went too far," or suggest that "the man was ready for sex" (Clark & Carroll, 2008).

These acquaintance rape scripts, which depict male sexual aggression as acceptable, may cause female survivors who were assaulted by a male acquaintance to question the validity of their trauma experience (Ryan, 2011). The questioning and subsequent denial of their sexual assault incident could deter female survivors of acquaintance rape from disclosing about their assault to friends, family, law enforcement, mental health providers, or other resources that could aid in their healing process (Ryan, 2011). Research has also demonstrated that non-survivors are more likely to minimize a survivor's rape account, engage in victim-blaming, and pardon the rapist's actions in a date rape scenario versus a rape scenario in which the perpetrator was a

stranger to the survivor (Yamawaki, 2007). An additionally troublesome fact is that African Americans have been shown to display greater acceptance of rape myths than their majority counterparts (Dull & Giacopassi, 1987) which could lead to the invalidation of the lived experiences of African American women who have survived sexual assault (Hill-Collins, 2000). The intersection of race and gender must be recognized when acknowledging the experiences of African American sexual assault survivors (Holzman, 1996). African American women represent 22% of sexual assault cases, reporting disproportionately high rates of weapon use as a part of their sexual trauma (Black et al., 2011; Boykins et al., 2010; Golding, 2006).

The historical exploitation of African American women during the American slave trade should underpin one's exploration of rape in this population that has been marginalized for centuries in the United States (McNair & Neville, 1996). African American women endured severe sexual exploitation during slavery (Hill-Collins, 2000). More specifically, "black women [were] used as breeders, raped for the pleasure and profit of their [slave] owners" (Walker, 1981). Hall (1983) proclaimed the following pertaining to historical representations of African American female sexuality—"In the United States, the fear and fascination of female sexuality was projected onto black women; the passionless lady arose in symbiosis with the primitively sexual slave." Beginning in slavery, African American women were juxtaposed against bourgeois White women as "strong, rapable, or forced into prostitution, super-sexual, and held up as evil, immoral, lazy, and not quite human" (Dill, 1987). As a result, present day African American women are not viewed as credible sources when they report that they have been sexually assaulted and they are socially labeled with stereotypes related to promiscuity that blame them for their victimization (Worell & Remer, 2003).

Sorority life on college campuses: The National Panhellenic Conference and The National Pan-Hellenic Council.

The African American sorority women who participated in this research study self-identified as members of the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) and the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC). Alpha Delta Pi, which was founded in 1851 at Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia, is recognized as the first "secret society for women" and the first Greek-letter sorority (Alpha Delta Pi, 2016). The National Panhellenic Conference, which was founded in 1902, serves as the governing body for a total of 26 international Greek-letter sororities that has served over four million women at colleges and universities across the United States (NPC, 2016). Greek-letter sororities for women that are encompassed by NPC have identified domestic violence awareness, the Ronald McDonald House, the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatrics AIDS' Foundation, and myriad other charitable causes as their selected philanthropies (NPC, 2016).

The National Panhellenic Council, Inc. was founded in 1930 at Howard University, a historically Black institution in Washington, DC (NPHC, 2016). The NPHC consists of nine international Greek-letter women's sororities and men's fraternities that are recognized as historically African American organizations (NPHC, 2016). Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., which was founded in 1908 at Howard University, is renowned as the first Greek-letter sorority established for African American collegiate women (Alpha Kappa Alpha, 2016). Throughout its history, the NPHC has identified myriad organizations of goodwill as the centerpiece of their organization's service initiatives, including St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and the United Negro College Fund (NPHC, 2016).

Impact of sexual assault on college campuses and within Greek Life.

Incidents of sexual assault are rampant amongst college-aged women, with a national study reporting estimates of 27.7 victimizations per 1,000 women (Fisher et al., 2000). Less than 5% of completed or attempted rapes against college-aged women are reported to law enforcement, with most college-aged female sexual assault survivors (66%) disclosing their trauma to close friends but not to family members or university leadership (Ogletree, 1993). A distressing piece of information is that college-aged women typically choose to not formally report a claim against their perpetrator due to guilt, shame, embarrassment, fear of retaliation, not wanting to prosecute an acquaintance, financial dependence on the perpetrator, or lack of knowledge regarding campus resources for sexual assault survivors (Sable et al., 2006).

Greek Life shares an overwhelming stereotypical reputation as the centerpiece of social functions and parties across college campuses nationwide (Ragsdale et al., 2012; Trockel et al., 2008). Alcohol and drug use at fraternity or sorority parties may negatively hinder college students' abilities to engage in consensual sexual activities (Martin & Hummer, 1989) as research has demonstrated that sorority membership is oftentimes a risk factor for sexual assault, especially when a sorority member is intoxicated by alcohol (Foubert et al., 2006; Mohler-Kuo et al., 2004). Furthermore, it should be noted that male fraternity members are more apt to become sexual assault assailants than non-fraternity males (Lackie & deMan, 1997).

Rape myths and attitudes related to sexual violence (Payne et al., 1999; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994) are perpetuated through male social settings such as college fraternities (Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997; Boeringer et al., 1991). Sexual aggression and the utilization of sexual coercion by fraternity members (Malamuth, 1989a, 1989b) proves to be a contributing factor in the maintenance of male violence against college-aged women. Fraternity culture has further shown to propagate hypermasculinity, sexual objectification of women, advocacy for

exploitative sex, and encouragement of female subservience (Sanday, 1990; Martin & Hammer, 1989). Boeringer and colleagues (1991) also discovered that male fraternity members reported significantly higher usage of nonphysical force, drugs, and alcohol to obtain sex than their male peers who did not belong to a fraternity.

Sorority membership has been demonstrated as a risk factor for sexual victimization in college-aged women due to higher rates of alcohol consumption experienced at Greek social events (Minow & Einolf, 2009). Minow and Einolf (2009) conducted a survey at a mid-size public university and determined that 29% of sorority women reported having survived sexual assault during their college tenure, which was four times greater than the instances of sexual assault in non-sorority members (7%). Lottes and Kuriloff (1994) noted that sorority members are socialized by their peers to possess more open attitudes towards sexual activity, which may encourage them to embrace riskier sexual behaviors such as intoxicated sex. Norris and colleagues (1996) investigated perceptions of sexual assault in sorority members and learned that while sorority members were aware of their risk for sexual assault, they tended to view this risk as applying to women other than themselves. The "family-like relationship" between sorority women and fraternity men also decreases women's sensitivity to danger cues as sorority women, as sorority women may view fraternity men as friends and "brothers" who are perceived as less likely to be sexually threatening than their other male acquaintances (Norris et al., 1996).

The literature is nearly devoid of research regarding sexual assault in African American collegiate women which invalidates their lived experiences (Hill-Collins, 2000; hooks, 1999) as potential sexual assault victims. The lack of research pertaining to the perceptions of African American collegiate women with membership in Greek-letter sororities is extremely problematic (Krebs et al., 2009) because mental health practitioners, student support administrators, and

university leadership who work with this population need to understand how these women perceive the role of drugs and alcohol in rape victimization, their comfort in disclosing sexual assault to legal officials or close friends, and the strengths and deficits of sorority membership in helping sexual assault survivors heal from their trauma. Data analyses pertaining to participant interviews revealed crucial details regarding minority women's perception of sexual violence within Greek Life that can be used to develop equitable psycho-educational materials, outreach programs, sexual violence prevention modules, and therapy interventions specific to this underserved population.

Purpose

Sexual violence against women is a pervasive problem whose deleterious effects can negatively impact the life trajectory of trauma survivors (Campbell et al., 2013; Najdowsi et al., 2011; Ullman et al., 2007; Sturza et al., 2005; Kaltman et al., 2005). This study focused primarily on nonconsensual completed or attempted sex acts identified as rape (CDC, 2015; WHO, 2013; RAINN, 2009). Nearly 40 percent (37.4%) of female rape survivors report having been first assaulted between the ages of 18 and 24 which is the age of traditional college students (Black et al., 2011; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011; Gerber & Cherneski, 2006). The researcher sought to explore the perceptions that African American collegiate women possessed regarding sexual assault in the form of completed or attempted nonconsensual sex acts. African American women represent a large portion of sexual assault victims, reporting disproportionately higher rates of weapon use as a part of their sexual trauma (Boykins et al., 2010; Golding, 2006).

Many African American females elect to join a sorority through their university's Greek Life system during their undergraduate career (Greyerbiehl & Mitchell, 2014; Whaley, 2010). Myriad institutions typically house sororities that identify as members of the National

Panhellenic Conference (NPC) or the National Pan-Hellenic Council, Incorporated (NPHC). The NPC consists of 26 member organizations with its first sorority joining the Conference in 1902 (NPC, 2016). The NPC initially admitted sororities that consisted of primarily White members (Torbenson, 2009). The National Pan-Hellenic Council, which was founded in response to racial exclusion from majority Greek organizations, consists of historically Black Greek organizations with its first sorority being founded in 1908 (NPHC, 2016). Culture-specific sororities can exist as a source of academic support, servant leadership opportunities, and social engagement while improving a woman of color's sense of belonging as a student on a predominantly white university campus (Delgado-Guerrero et al., 2014; Stuart, 2008; Ross, 2001).

This study examined the perceptions of sexual assault amongst self-identified African American women who held membership in Greek-letter organizations at a predominantly white institution. The sense of sisterhood and family that is developed through sorority membership can potentially strengthen the willingness of African American college women to self-disclose when they are sexually victimized. It has been noted that social support systems consisting of family members and friends are typically the first individuals to which sexual assault survivors disclose about their trauma (Jacques-Tiura et al., 2010; Ahrens & Campbell, 2000). Furthermore, increasing our understanding of the perceptions of sexual assault amongst African American sorority members at PWIs can positively inform the development of culturally-competent psychoeducational training pertaining to sexual assault on college campuses.

Statement of the Problem

Research disparities exist regarding sexual assault's impact on the emotional health and academic success of minority collegiate women (Barrick et al., 2012; Krebs et al., 2011; Henry, 2009). Additionally, little research has been conducted to specifically investigate the perceptions

of sexual assault amongst African American collegiate women with active membership in Greek-letter sororities. In order to address this problem, the following questions were explored in this study:

1. How accurately will African American collegiate women with active membership in Greek-letter sororities label incidents of sexual assault—as defined by the CDC (2015)—when presented with brief vignettes that illustrate varying levels of nonconsensual sexual activity?
2. How does the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, gender, and sorority membership impact the perceptions of sexual assault in African American collegiate women with active membership in Greek-letter sororities?

General Hypotheses

Based on a review of literature regarding sexual assault, Greek-letter sororities, and the intersections of race, gender, and sorority membership pertaining to sexual assault, two primary hypotheses were proposed regarding this study. The researcher used definitions of sexual assault as explained by the CDC (2015) to explore perceptions of sexual assault via vignettes presented to research participants. The following are the researcher's hypotheses for this study:

Hypothesis 1: African American collegiate women with active membership in Greek-letter sororities will be able to clearly identify a depicted scene of completed, forced penetration (illustrated via a vignette) as sexual assault.

Hypothesis 1 Rationale: College-age women distinctly label sexual trauma incidents as an act of sexual assault at significantly higher rates when physical force was implemented by the perpetrator during the trauma incident, in comparison to sexual trauma incidents where physical force was not present (Kahn et al., 2003; CDC, 2015).

Hypothesis 2: African American collegiate women with active membership in Greek-letter sororities will not be able to clearly identify depicted scenes of 1) attempted, forced penetration, 2) unwanted sexual contact, and 3) a noncontact, unwanted sexual experience as sexual assault.
Hypothesis 2 Rationale: College age women have reported that they are less likely to label a trauma incident as sexual assault, if the survivor was intoxicated via alcohol or drugs at the time of their assault (Schwartz & Leggett, 1999; Kahn & Mathie, 2000). College age women have been demonstrated to more likely label a trauma incident as sexual assault if the perpetrator was a stranger, and less likely to label a trauma incident as sexual assault if the perpetrator was a close acquaintance, romantic partner, or friend (Kahn et al, 2003). The sexual assault vignettes presented during this study included alcohol use by survivors and their perpetrators, acquaintance rape, interpersonal violence, and other forms of sexual violence with close acquaintances and friends of the depicted survivors.

Theoretical Rationale

This study was grounded in the following theoretical and therapeutic frameworks—Empowerment Feminist Therapy (Worell & Remer, 2003) and Black Feminist Theory (Hill-Collins, 2000)—to respect the diverse needs of African American women as a historically marginalized group within psychological research (Arredondo, 2002; Ponterotto & Casas, 1991; Sue & Sue, 1977). Empowerment Feminist Therapy instructs researchers (Singh et al., 2012) who intend to conduct clinical work with women to trust and value the lived experiences of women and to investigate the impact of intersectionality on the lived experiences of women (Worell & Remer, 2003).

Empowerment Feminist Therapy (EFT) upholds four primary principles that guide practitioners and researchers who utilize EFT in their work. These four tenets are the following—1) personal and social identities are interdependent, 2) the personal is political, 3) relationships are egalitarian, and 4) women's perspectives are valued (Worell & Remer, 2003). EFT denotes that each person inhabits myriad social locations such as gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, age, and physical and intellectual abilities (Worell & Remer, 2003). Some of these social locations are sources of privilege (i. e., identifying as white, male, heterosexual, physically able) while other social locations are sources of oppression (i. e., identifying as an ethnic minority, lesbian, female). EFT emphasizes the need to increase an individual's awareness of their privileged or oppressed identities through exploration. Per Worell and Remer (2003), framing a person's issues in their cultural contexts plays a crucial role in empowering one's female clients.

EFT embraces the principle that the "Personal is Political" with relation to feminist beliefs surrounding institutionalized sexism, gender-role stereotypes, and other forms of oppression that impact self-identified women throughout society (Worell & Remer, 2003). Gender role socialization and institutional prejudice and discrimination are historically based upon one's gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and minoritized aspects of their identities. Therefore, EFT identifies the need to acknowledge the role of a person's external environment and sources of oppression, which stem from a person's marginalized identities, as a core cause of a person's psychological distress (Wyche & Rice, 1997).

Practitioners and researchers who utilize EFT assert that interpersonal relationships should be as egalitarian as possible (Worell & Remer, 2003). This notion is centered upon the knowledge that most women throughout the world do not share equal levels of status or power

with men and that majority groups historically hold higher status than minority groups (United Nations, 1995). Equal client-counselor relationships decrease the "social control" features of therapy (Sturdivant, 1980) because counselors then own less power to force their personal values onto their clients. Additionally, egalitarian client-counselor relationships should not replicate the power differentials and oppression that women and other marginalized groups presently experience in society (Worell & Remer, 2003). Researchers who implement EFT into their work with ethnic minority study participants should remain cognizant of the existing power dynamics between the researcher and their participants, especially when their participants belong to a historically oppressed cultural group. Furthermore, researchers who utilize EFT should emphasize the importance of women self-defining who they are, devoid of societal norms, and implement methodologies that demonstrate that the lived experiences of women are trusted and valued (Worell & Remer, 2003).

Black Feminist Theory proclaims that the needs, beliefs, and desires of Black women must be viewed through a distinctive cultural lens that acknowledges the historical contexts of the lived experiences of African American women in the United States (Hill-Collins, 2000). United States Black feminist and social justice advocate Pearl Cleage (1993) proclaimed that "we have to see clearly that we [African American women] are a unique group, set undeniably apart because of race and sex with a unique set of challenges." Black Feminist Theory emphasizes the idea that African American women in the United States are negatively impacted by sociocultural domination that encompasses intersecting forms of oppression. Andersen and Collins (1998) stressed that not only race but class, gender, religion, sexuality, and citizenship status are all powerful identities that impact the potential for oppression and marginalization amongst African American women in the United States.

Black Feminist Theory outlines six distinguishing features of the lived experiences of African American women in the United States. These six facets are the following—1) work, family, and black women's oppression, 2) mammies, matriarchs, and other controlling images, 3) the power of self-definition, 4) the sexual politics of black womanhood, 5) black women's love relationships, and 6) black women and motherhood (Hill-Collins, 2000). Hill-Collins (2000) delineated two main problems with the traditional, idealized family concept in the United States and its application to the lives of African American women. Primarily, the assumption that women balance a split between the public arena of paid employment and the private arena of unpaid family responsibilities has not been the historical experience of black women in the United States (Hill-Collins, 2000). During the American slave trade, Black women "worked without pay in the allegedly public sphere of Southern agriculture and had their family privacy routinely violated" (Hill-Collins, 2000). Additionally, Black women historically have not upheld the Western gender stereotype that women are solely nurturers who do not seek employment to financially contribute to their household. Because of this misleading and generalized attribution of traditional gender roles onto Black women, they are sometimes viewed as "less feminine" because they earn money as employees outside of the home and, as a result, are unable to devote the entirety of their time to their children (Hill-Collins, 2000).

In alignment with Black Feminist Theory, Cheryl Gilkes (1983a) noted that "Black women's assertiveness and their use of every expression of racism to launch multiple assaults against the entire fabric of inequality have been a consistent, multifaceted threat to the status quo. As punishment, Black women have been assaulted with a variety of negative images." As Hill-Collins (2000) summates, these negative images span from the "Mammy"—the obedient, asexual, and faithful domestic servant—to "the Welfare Mother," a stereotype that encompasses

the notion that Black women are hypersexual "breeders" for the purposes of attaining financial assistance from the government. Negative attributions by American society pertaining to Black women's sexuality may destructively impact Black women's experiences of sexual violence, placing them at greater risk for sexual victimization due to the dehumanizing nature of these stereotypes.

Black feminists emphasize the importance of Black women's ability to use their personal voices and reconstruct American society's marginalization of them as the "Other" (Hill-Collins, 2000). O'Neale (1986) stated that Black women must create safe spaces within their personal environments to "observe the feminine images of the 'larger' culture, realize that these models are at best unsuitable and at worst destructive to them, and go about the business of fashioning themselves after the prevalent, historical Black female role models in their own community." This significant tenet of Black Feminist Theory integrates well with Empowerment Feminist Therapy (Worell & Remer, 2003) and its emphasis on valuing the lived experiences and self-defined images of women from diverse backgrounds.

Black Feminist Theory relies upon historical representations of Black women in the United States as a way to explore connections between the past and present sexual objectification of women from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Gilman (1985) shared the story of Sarah Bartmann, also known as the "Hottentot Venus," a Black woman who was sexually exploited in early 19th century Europe. Bartmann was greatly displayed at popular social events in Paris during which she usually wore small amounts of clothing as a form of entertainment to party guests (Gilman, 1985). Bartmann was subjugated as a representation of "deviant sexuality" because of her large buttocks and genitalia (Gilman, 1985). Bartmann was abused as a public pornographic object whose personal value was reduced to her body parts. Black feminists argue that the historical

exploitation of African American women on a global scale is one of the root causes of the racist and sexist attitudes that perpetuate sexual violence against this population (Hill-Collins, 2000).

During her psychological investigation with African American sorority women in this study, the researcher was committed to honoring the notion that the intersection between race and gender impacts this population's experience of trauma and sexual violence in different ways than women of other ethnicities (Hill-Collins, 2000). Empowerment Feminist Therapy and Black Feminist Theory (Worell & Remer, 2003; Hill-Collins, 2000) impacted the primary investigator's development of her data collection and data management materials, as well as her interactions with her study participants. The researcher acknowledged that study participants may hold power, privilege, and social status with respect to their Greek membership while also experiencing varying levels of systemic oppression due to the intersectionality of their race and gender at a predominantly white institution.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Related Research

"Without community, there is no liberation...but community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist."

-Audre Lorde

Defining Sexual Assault

The term sexual assault encompasses multiple harmful acts that produce detrimental damage to the physical and emotional health of its survivors. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2015) define sexual assault as any sexual act committed against a person who did not consent to the act. A nonconsensual sexual act infers that the victim was conscious and did not consent, was unable to consent due to a debilitating circumstance such as unconsciousness, or explicitly refused to permit the occurrence of the act (CDC, 2015).

There are seven varying forms of sexual assault as defined by the CDC (2015)—"1) completed or attempted forced penetration, 2) completed or attempted alcohol/drug-facilitated penetration, 3) completed or attempted forced acts in which a victim is made to penetrate a perpetrator or someone else, 4) completed or attempted alcohol/drug-facilitated acts in which a victim is made to penetrate a perpetrator or someone else, 5) non-physically forced penetration which occurs after a person is pressured verbally or through intimidation or misuse of authority to consent or acquiesce, 6) unwanted sexual contact, and 7) non-contact unwanted sexual experiences."

The following definitions of the aforementioned types of sexual assault will allow for further understanding of the implicit distinctions that exist between each sex act. Completed or attempted forced penetration of a survivor involves nonconsensual oral, anal, or vaginal penetration facilitated by the perpetrator's use of concrete or threatened physical force (CDC, 2015). Completed or attempted alcohol or drug-facilitated penetration of a survivor includes nonconsensual oral, anal, or vaginal penetration in which the survivor was unable to provide consent due to being voluntarily or involuntarily intoxicated by alcohol or drugs (CDC, 2015). Completed or attempted forced sexual acts, where the survivor is pressured to penetrate the perpetrator or someone else, occurs when the survivor is "physically forced or threatened with physical harm" to complete the act (CDC, 2015). Completed or attempted alcohol or drug-facilitated sexual acts in which the survivor is pressured to penetrate a perpetrator or another individual includes the survivors' inability to consent to said acts due to being incapacitated by substances (CDC, 2015).

Examples of non-physically forced penetration may include a survivor feeling sexually pressured by the perpetrator's use of influence or authority or the perpetrator's repetitive requests to have sex with the survivor, as well as the survivor being threatened by the spread of rumors in the event that they do not have sex with the perpetrator (CDC, 2015). Unwanted sexual contact denotes nonconsensual, purposeful touching of a person's genitals, buttocks, breast, groin, anus, or inner thigh (CDC, 2015). This intentional touching can occur either directly against the victim's body parts or through a barrier of clothing. Non-contact unwanted sexual experiences differ from the abovementioned forms of sexual assault in that they do not involve any physical contact between the perpetrator and the victim. Rather, non-contact sexual abuse refers to the following acts—unwanted exposure to pornography, voyeurism, intentional exposure of a person

to exhibitionism, behavioral or verbal sexual harassment, taking nude photographs of a person without their knowledge or consent, or threatening a person with sexual assault to attain another goal (CDC, 2015).

According to the Centers for Disease Control (2012), approximately 20 percent (18.3%) of women report having been sexually victimized during their lifetime. Additionally, nearly 40 percent (37.4%) of female sexual assault survivors disclosed that they were first assaulted between the ages of 18 and 24 (Black et al., 2011). Furthermore, Krebs et al. (2009) discovered that almost 20 percent (19%) of undergraduate women revealed that they had fallen victim to an attempted or completed sexual assault after enrolling in college. Research consistently demonstrates that the perpetrators of sexual assault are typically well-known to female rape survivors prior to their victimization. According to Black and associates (2011), female rape survivors described more than half (51.1%) of their perpetrators as intimate partners, close to forty percent as acquaintances (40.8%), and over ten percent (12.5%) as family members. A small number of perpetrators of sexual assault against women (13.8%) were denoted as strangers to the victim (Black et al., 2011).

Racial disparities exist regarding sexual assault in minority women (Black et al., 2011). Approximately 22% of African American women report having experienced sexual assault in their lifetime in comparison to their White counterparts (Black et al., 2011). In addition, nearly 15 percent (14.6%) of Hispanic women state that they have survived sexual assault at some point in their lives. More than forty percent (43.7%) of African American women disclosed that they have experienced sexual assault, stalking, or physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner during their lifetime (Black et al., 2011).

The National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) provided invaluable data pertaining to sexual assault and its prevalence rates, characteristics of survivors and perpetrators, racial disparities, negative emotional and physical health outcomes, and implications for future research as it relates to sexual assault. The NVAWS was sponsored through a collaborative effort between the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) by way of a grant with the Center for Policy Research. Specifically, the NVAWS was conducted from November 1995 to May 1996 as a national telephone survey through which women were questioned about different forms of violence against women, including, but not limited to, sexual assault (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006).

A total of 8,000 women and 8,005 men ages 18 and up were interviewed for the NVAWS. It should be noted that while all genders are affected by sexual assault, women comprise the majority of sexual assault survivors and men are primarily identified as the perpetrators of sexual violence (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). Data retrieved through the NVAWS demonstrated that nearly all of the female respondents (99.6%) were sexually assaulted by a male. Additionally, intimate partner violence was a leading form of sexual assault against women. Nearly seventy percent (69.1%) of the female respondents who reported being sexually assaulted by a cohabiting partner or former spouse stated that the victimization occurred before the termination of their relationship with their perpetrator (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). This information debunks the myth that sexual assault against women, particularly at the hands of an intimate partner, solely occurs following a tumultuous end to a romantic relationship.

The NVAWS presented several detailed pieces of information based upon gender differences and experiences of rape. The following data describes characteristics of sexual assault as reported by the adult female respondents to this survey. More than eighty percent

(84.5%) of females reported that their sexual assault occurred in a private setting such as their personal home, the assailant's home, another individual's home, a car, or a motel room (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). Less than twenty percent (19.8%) of this study's female sexual assault survivors reported having been under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of their rape. On the contrary, over sixty percent (66.6%) of female rape survivors noted that their assailant was using drugs or alcohol at the time of their assault. Acts of physical violence accompanied almost forty percent (37.8%) of sexual assaults experienced by female study participants, including being slapped, kicked, bit, hit with an object, choked, or nearly drowned (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). Furthermore, close to half of the female sexual assault survivors (43.1%) disclosed that they feared serious harm to themselves or a loved one during their assault (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006).

Female sexual assault survivors who participated in the NVAWS reported significantly high rates of assault (62.2%) that resulted in completed penetration. More than thirty percent (33%) of female sexual assault survivors in the NVAWS study reported undergoing mental health counseling as a direct result of their most recent assault. Lastly, almost twenty percent (19.4%) of female respondents in the NVAWS noted that they experienced occupational difficulties and lost time at work due to their sexual assault (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006).

Labeling Sexual Assault as "Sexual Assault"

Researchers emphasize that it is immensely important for sexual assault survivors to label their experience as sexual assault. Kahn and colleagues (2003) expressed that "if a woman does not recognize her situation as such [a sexual assault] she will not report the incident and the assailant will not be identified or punished." Kahn and associates (2003) noted that the content of a woman's sexual assault script, or her socialized idea of what constitutes sexual assault, impacts

whether or not she will specifically refer to her own trauma incident as sexual assault. It was noted that women whose sexual assault script involved acquaintance rape along with a violent encounter with a stranger would be more likely to refer to their own experience as sexual assault. Additionally, a woman is potentially less likely to refer to her sexual assault experience as such if the perpetrator was someone with whom she shared a close relationship, for whom she had romantic feelings, or with whom she had previously engaged in consensual sex (Kahn et al., 2003; Koss, 1985; Layman et al., 1996).

Data supports that women who selected to refer to their sexual assault experience as such had endured greater physical violence during their encounter than those survivors who did not label their incidents as sexual assault (Bondurant, 2001). Moreover, female survivors of sexual assault are less likely to refer to their experience as sexual assault if they were greatly impaired by drugs or alcohol during their traumatic event (Schwartz & Leggett, 1999; Kahn & Mathie, 2000). Kahn and colleagues (2003) discovered that women who chose to explicitly label their sexual assault experience were less familiar with the perpetrator and disclosed greater negative emotions, especially with regards to feeling dirty, confused, melancholic, or detached from reality, than those women who did not label their incident as sexual assault. Kahn and associates (2003) also confirmed the trend that women tend to more readily label their sexual assault as such if the sexual act was more blatantly forced. This information denotes that reconstructing society's script for what encompasses sexual assault may empower women to not blame themselves for their assault but instead shift the responsibility for their assault towards their perpetrators.

Impact of Sexual Assault on the Socioemotional Health of Survivors

Sexual assault forces its survivors to confront deleterious emotional health problems as a result of this traumatic experience. Boudreaux and colleagues (1998) conducted an exploration of anxiety and mood disorders in a community sample of sexual assault survivors and discovered that nearly forty percent (39%) of these survivors met criteria for a current anxiety or mood disorder aside from posttraumatic stress disorder. Littleton and Breitkopf (2006) emphasized the importance of recognizing that certain sequelae experienced by sexual assault survivors following their assault can negatively affect their ability to effectively cope with their trauma. For example, sexual assault may induce thoughts of self-blame, shame, or embarrassment about being a survivor (Littleton & Breitkopf, 2006). Unfortunately, sexual assault survivors may encounter invalidating responses from peers, acquaintances, family members, or loved ones regarding their sexual assault experience, such as victim-blaming or minimization of the survivors' trauma incident (Littleton & Breitkopf, 2006). In addition, sexual assault survivors may also experience diminished trust in others, loss of belief in justice for wrongdoings, and a significantly weakened self-perception as a result of their trauma (Roth & Newman, 1991).

Researchers have repeatedly demonstrated that a history of child sexual abuse oftentimes serves as a major risk factor for sexual re-victimization as an adult. Wyatt and colleagues (1992) conducted a study involving African American and White adult women ages 18 to 36 in Los Angeles County. A total of 248 women participated in this study and of these numbers 176 self-identified as sexual abuse survivors. Study participants were administered the Wyatt Sex History Questionnaire (WSHQ), a 478-item structured interview that asked questions related to previous and current consensual and abusive sexual relationships spanning from childhood to adulthood. Wyatt and associates (1992) discovered that among those women who disclosed sexual abuse

that occurred before age 18, that nearly half of them (44%) experienced sexual victimization again as an adult. In addition, these researchers found that the women who were sexually abused during childhood were 2.4 times more likely to endure sexual re-victimization as an adult (Wyatt et al., 1992). One of the most alarming findings of this study was learning that adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse who had been re-victimized after the age of 18 experienced significantly higher rates of unintended and aborted pregnancies. Wyatt and colleagues (1992) contested that this significant health disparity may stem from sexual abuse survivors perceiving themselves as powerless, thereby engaging in higher rates of unprotected sex spontaneously and having trouble with initiating conversations with sexual partners about contraception.

Acierno and associates (1999) conducted The National Women's Study which was a two-year, three-wave longitudinal investigation that utilized a probability sample of over 3,000 adult women. The researchers sought to identify separate risk factors for sexual and physical assault. Acierno and colleagues (1999) also strove to identify separate risk factors associated with post-sexual assault posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and post-physical assault PTSD. The investigators discovered that past victimization, young age, and a diagnosis of active PTSD increased a woman's chances of being sexually assaulted. Acierno and colleagues (1999) also demonstrated that women with a history of depression and alcohol abuse who had experienced physical injury during their sexual assault were at higher risk for reporting PTSD symptoms following a rape.

Childhood sexual abuse continues to present as a predictor of adult sexual assault in women. Ullman and colleagues (2009) conducted a study in which over half (54%) of their participants who had experienced an adult sexual assault disclosed that they had also survived a sexual abuse incident during childhood. For this study, childhood sexual abuse was defined as

completed or attempted sexual assault, sexual coercion, or sexual contact that occurred prior to the age of 14 (Ullman et al., 2009). Ullman and associates (2009) noted that childhood sexual abuse also resulted in more re-experiencing, avoidance, and arousal symptoms which often prompted women who had also survived an adult sexual assault to engage in alcohol use. Adult sexual assault survivors commonly use alcohol as a coping mechanism for unpleasant re-experiencing of the traumatic event as well as self-medication for arousal-related PTSD symptoms (McFarlane, 1998).

Simmel and associates (2012) reported several intriguing findings regarding the relationship between childhood sexual abuse and adult re-victimization in women. Women were more likely to fall victim to sexual assault as adults if physical force had been used during their childhood abuse experience (Simmel et al., 2012). In addition, data demonstrated that adult re-victimization was more likely if the initial childhood sexual abuse incident had occurred between the ages of six and ten (Simmel et al., 2012). The topic of self-disclosure as it relates to sharing details about one's trauma experience with another person was also prevalent in this study (Simmel et al., 2012). The researchers demonstrated that adult survivors of sexual assault were more likely to disclose to a family member, friend, or authority figure about their adult assault experience if a self-disclosure they provided following their childhood sexual abuse incident was subsequently met with positive action (Simmel et al., 2012).

Banyard and associates (2002) delineated thought-provoking differences in adult women who were sexually re-traumatized as adults based upon their marital status in adulthood. In their sample, the researchers noted that higher rates of re-traumatization in unmarried women were associated with higher levels of depression, drug use, homelessness, and lower reported satisfaction with their interpersonal relationships (Banyard et al., 2002). For the married

participants, re-traumatization of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse was significantly correlated with alcohol problems, dissatisfaction in interpersonal relationships, and the number of times the woman had been homeless (Banyard et al., 2002).

Sexual assault has been elevated as a public health emergency by the United States government as supported through empirical data that speaks to the rampant prevalence of sexual assault across college campuses nationwide. The White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault (2014) was enacted by President Barack Obama in an effort to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this crime against women and its impact on our institutions of higher learning. This collaborative initiative has provided recommendations for colleges and universities to utilize in their institutional dialogues surrounding sexual assault and action steps to address sexual assault. These suggestions include the following—administering campus climate surveys to evaluate the extent to which sexual assault is pervasive at a particular school; engaging men in the conversation surrounding sexual assault at a college campus; responding appropriately and effectively when a student reports that they have been sexually assaulted; and increasing the transparency of enforcement actions of schools to improve sexual assault survivors' ease of access to resources (The White House, 2014).

Racial Disparities in Sexual Assault Research

Sexual assault amongst ethnic minority women necessitates in-depth investigation due to the impact of race and gender on the experience of sexual violence. Littleton and colleagues (2013) sought to explore differences in risk factors and coping behaviors based upon racial differences in college-aged survivors of sexual assault. The researchers investigated ethnic differences in rates of binge drinking and substance-induced impairment that was present during a woman's sexual assault incident. Littleton and associates (2013) also examined racial

differences in survivors' utilization of hazardous drinking and sexual behavior to cope with depressive and anxiety symptoms experienced in the aftermath of sexual assault. The college-aged sexual assault survivors self-identified as European American, African American, Latina, or Asian American. All study participants were queried about their sexual assault history and whether or they had engaged in binge drinking prior to the assault. In addition, the trauma survivors were surveyed as to whether or not they had been using any illegal substances at the time of their sexual assault. Lastly, the study participants were assessed for current depression and anxiety symptoms via empirically supported self-report scales.

Littleton and colleagues (2013) found no statistical differences in depressive symptoms across ethnicity. The scholars also observed no differences among the women regarding their reported use of sexual behavior to reduce negative psychological effects of trauma. However, the researchers did note that Latina women reported significantly higher rates of current anxiety than their European American and African American counterparts. In addition, European American women were discovered to engage in higher rates of hazardous drinking than study participants of different ethnic backgrounds. African American women were found to report lower rates of hazardous drinking than Latina women. Interestingly, it was found that Asian American women were less likely than their European American counterparts to report sexual assault (Littleton et al., 2013). Regarding binge drinking behavior prior to their sexual assault, African American women were less likely to report engaging in this behavior than their European American and Latina peers. Furthermore, African Americans reported lower rates of substance-induced impairment or incapacitation during their sexual assault than their European American colleagues (Littleton et al., 2013).

Ethnic minorities possess a unique set of cultural experiences regarding societal traumas that indubitably impact how they are affected by sexual assault. Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005) compared experiences of racism to more widely-recognized forms of trauma such as domestic violence and rape. The researchers subsequently explored commonalities amongst racist incidents, sexual assault, and domestic violence. Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005) defined racist incidents as "cognitive/affective assaults on one's ethnic self-identification" encompassed by physical or verbal attacks that can be interpreted as threats to one's livelihood. The researchers hypothesized that perpetrators of racist incidents and sexual violence both commit these types of crimes in an effort to maintain power and privilege by perpetuating myths about their survivors. Stereotypes that may be perpetuated against people of color are that they are "lazy, ignorant, uncivilized, dirty, criminal, and/or untrustworthy" (Donovan & Williams, 2002). Furthermore, stereotypes that may be perpetuated specifically against women of color by sexual assault perpetrators are that women of color are "promiscuous, enjoy being raped, are liars, are teasers, and are untrustworthy" (Drieschner & Lange, 1999).

The intersection between race and gender with regards to the experience of rape must be further explored through empirical study. According to Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005), sexual assault and racist incidents both negatively impact the emotional and physical health of individuals who survive both forms of trauma. Survivors of sexual assault experience psychological stressors related to depression, anxiety, anger, and fear which mirror symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). In addition, sexual assault survivors may also report somatic problems such as nausea, headaches, muscle aches, back pain, and sleep problems (Koss, 1993).

Loo and colleagues (2001) delineated racism as a risk factor in the development of PTSD. Survivors of racist incidents may experience memory problems, trouble concentrating, and self-blame (Morris-Prather et al., 1996). Researchers have also noted that similar to sexual assault survivors, survivors of racist incidents may experience trouble with connecting and trusting individuals that share personal characteristics that are similar to those of their perpetrators (Rutter, 1993). Additionally, researchers have noted the negative impact that internalized racism—the internalization of racially-based stereotypes that lower one's positive self-evaluation and well-being—has on ethnic minorities. Internalized racism due to racist incidents has been associated with higher rates of alcohol consumption, lower self-esteem, depressive symptoms, and chronic health problems (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000).

A potential connection between trauma exposure, PTSD, and major depression has been investigated within African Americans seeking health services in primary care settings (Alim et al., 2006). Alim and colleagues (2006) noted that African Americans are more likely than other ethnic groups to pursue treatment for psychiatric disorders in a primary care setting. The researchers interviewed nearly 600 adult African American men and women and found that almost 25% of respondents reported having experienced sexual assault. Of the female respondents who endorsed a sexual assault history, 60% of them reported emotional and physical health issues congruent with PTSD symptoms (Alim et al., 2006). In addition, 44% of the females who disclosed a sexual assault history reported having experienced symptoms in alignment with a major depressive episode. Lastly, 46% of the females who reported a history of sexual assault also endorsed a history of substance abuse (Alim et al., 2006).

Suicidality in ethnic minority female survivors of sexual assault has not received as much attention as other mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse.

Kaslow and colleagues (2000) analyzed responses from 238 African American adult women who had presented to a large, public health care hospital in a metropolitan city in the Southeastern United States for various healthcare issues. Over half of these women were seeking medical care following a non-fatal suicide attempt. Kaslow and associates (2000) discovered that 40% of the women had a history of other suicide attempts, in addition to the attempt for which they were currently being hospitalized. Kaslow and colleagues (2000) discovered that "of those who reported making a prior suicide attempt, 39% had made one prior attempt, 24% had made two prior attempts, 16% had made three prior attempts, and 21% had made four or more prior attempts."

Overdose by way of over-the-counter, prescription, or illicit drugs accounted for almost 80% of the suicide attempts committed by this population (Kaslow et al., 2000). Other methods of suicide utilized by this population included cutting (10%), ingestion of another poisonous substances (6%), asphyxiation or carbon monoxide (2%), jumping (1%), hanging (1%), and lethal gun force (1%). The women who had attempted suicide reported higher rates of physical and nonphysical partner abuse, in addition to marital maladjustment, than the women who presented to the hospital for medical reasons other than suicide (Kaslow et al., 2000). In addition, the women who had attempted suicide also reported higher rates of family-of-origin problems, more specifically childhood maltreatment (Kaslow et al., 2000). It should be noted that suicide is the third leading cause of death among young adults aged 15 to 24 years, accounting for 20% of all deaths within this age group (CDC, 2012).

Feelings of shame, guilt, or fear oftentimes deter sexual assault survivors from seeking mental health treatment following their trauma event. Alvidrez and colleagues (2011) conducted a study to investigate potential ethnic differences in mental health help seeking behaviors in

sexual assault survivors. The researchers used a convenience sample of more than 100 women from diverse backgrounds who visited San Francisco General Hospital for emergency medical treatment after a sexual assault (Alvidrez et al., 2011). The study participants also had access to trauma-centered mental health services that were associated with San Francisco General Hospital.

Alvidrez and colleagues (2011) discovered that African American women were less likely than White women to participate in mental health services during the year following their sexual assault. In this study, 82% of the White women engaged in at least four therapy sessions while only 40% of the African Americans attended four or more therapy sessions (Alvidrez et al., 2011). Alvidrez and associates (2011) noted that ethnic matching between trauma survivors and their therapists could increase retention of African American females in therapy. The researchers also shared that racial disparities in mental health help seeking behaviors must continue to be explored because of the importance of therapy in trauma recovery (Alvidrez et al., 2011).

Sexual assault survivors face numerous culture-specific barriers that negatively impact the likelihood that they will disclose an abusive incident to family members, close acquaintances, or law enforcement agencies. Neville and Pugh (1997) identified negative viewpoints such as questioning the survivor's credibility, minimizing the survivor's trauma, and blaming the survivor for their sexual assault as principal reasons that survivors elect to not self-disclose regarding their sexual assault. The jezebel stereotype (Donovan & Williams, 2002) which depicts African American women as promiscuous, lustful, and hypersexual may discourage minority female sexual assault survivors from reporting these crimes due to self-blaming. Social support has been observed as a protective factor against depression for African American trauma

survivors (Hage, 2006). In addition, it has been noted that social support systems consisting of family members and friends are typically the first individuals to which sexual assault survivors disclose about their trauma (Ahrens & Campbell, 2000).

Stereotypes about African American Women and Impact on Sexual Assault Risk

African American women living in the United States today continue to be impacted by negative stereotypes founded in historically oppressive and racist perceptions of minority individuals. Stephens and Phillips (2003) emphasized that researchers must acknowledge the impact of White males' construction of African American female sexuality during the 18th and 19th centuries and its role in the perpetuation of the objectification and oversexualization of African American women in modern times. Saartjie "Sarah" Bartmann was a Khoikhoi woman born in South Africa in the late 18th century (Giddings, 1995). The Khoikhoi people were historically recognized for their acuity in farming and raising livestock (Giddings, 1995). In 1810, Bartmann was convinced by Alexander Dunlop, a British military surgeon, to travel to England with promises of fame and fortune as a feature of an exhibition show (Giddings, 1995).

Throughout Bartmann's performances in Europe, she was typically partially nude and White guests were invited to grope and prod her buttocks (Giddings, 1995). Upon her death in 1816, a French zoologist named Georges Cuvier requested her body for dissection and examination (Giddings, 1995). Cuvier's examination of Bartmann's remains concentrated on her sexual organs—her breasts, hymen, vagina, and urethra—with him conducting comparisons between Bartmaan's body parts and those of orangutans to make inductions about their reproductive systems (Giddings, 1995; Stephens & Phillips, 2003). Cuvier drew conclusions that likened the African female body to an animal's, reinforcing society's perception of Black women

as “primitive, wild, sexually uninhibited, and exotic” (Fausto-Sterling, 1995; Stephens & Phillips, 2003).

This construction of Black female sexuality served as a foundation for cultural stereotypes founded during American slavery that would portray Black women on a spectrum, ranging from hypersexual and aggressive, to subservient and asexual (Hill-Collins, 2000; Stephens & Phillips, 2003). The Jezebel stereotype was traditionally portrayed as a fair-skinned, long-haired Black female with a voluptuous body who was promiscuous, exotic, and exploited her sexuality for affection and monetary gifts (Hill-Collins, 2000). The Jezebel stereotype perpetuated sexual violence against Black women during slavery, with White individuals upholding the fabricated belief that slave women practiced seduction of their White slave masters in order to fulfill their animalistic and primitive sexual needs (Hill-Collins, 2000). The Jezebel stereotype places today’s young African American women at risk for sexual assault by maintaining the visage of African American women as “asking for it,” resulting in victim blaming and removal of responsibility from perpetrators of sexual violence against Black women.

Wyatt (1998) reminds researchers of how the institution of slavery in the United States greatly altered the experience of sexuality for African slaves in the New World. African slaves in the United States did not have agency over their own bodies and there was a great chance that their first sexual experience was a sexual assault (Wyatt, 1998). Power differentials between African female slaves and their European American slave owners also created a social environment in which African American women had to submit to any sexual advances made towards them by White men in order to avoid punishment which could include physical harm and even death (Wyatt, 1998). The sexual violence committed against multitudes of African

American women during American slavery contradicts the hypersexualized Jezebel stereotype (Wyatt, 1998; Hill-Collins, 2000).

In comparison to the Jezebel stereotype, the Mammy stereotype portrays African American female slaves as benevolent, nurturing caregivers who unselfishly catered to the needs of their White masters (Hill-Collins, 2000). Mammies were depicted as heavy-set, dark-skinned, and asexual women stripped of any physical attractiveness or sexual desirability according to White beauty standards (Hill-Collins, 2000). St. John (2001) examined the Mammy character demonstrated in Margaret Mitchell's infamous novel *Gone with the End* which was published in 1936 and adapted into a cinematic film in 1939. Mitchell's (1936) elaborate illustration of the Mammy character as subservient to Whites is demonstrated in the following excerpt from *Gone with the End*:

> Mammy emerged from the hall, a huge old woman with the small, shrewd eyes of an elephant. She was shining black, pure African, devoted to her last drop of blood to the O'Haras. Ellen's mainstay, the despair of her three daughters, [and] the terror of the other house servants…(p. 25)

The Mammy's culturally imposed silence and dutiful servitude places today's African American women at risk for sexual violence because of the inherent implication that African American women's bodies are to be used for the quiet and unopposed fulfillment of the physical and emotional needs of others.

The Matriarch stereotype portrays African American women as aggressive, unfeminine, tough, and strong (Donovan & Williams, 2002). The quintessential Matriarch emits such an intense amount of strength that she emasculates African American men (Hill-Collins, 2000). Donovan (2007) shared that the matriarch stereotype is just as damaging as the jezebel stereotype

because viewing African American female sexual assault survivors as tough and strong may lead to the minimization of their trauma experience in the event that they are sexually victimized. In addition, attributing the matriarch stereotype to African American females who have experienced sexual assault may also lead to decreased responsibility being accredited to their perpetrators (Donovan, 2007).

Additional sociocultural stereotypes attributed to African American women and their sexuality play a role in this population's experiences of sexual assault. Wyatt (1998) examined the stereotypes of the "workhorse" and the "mammy" and how African American women internalize these messages with regards to their sexuality. A workhorse describes a woman who upholds performance, achievement, and defers her sexual needs while a mammy is an asexual woman who puts the needs of others before herself and utilizes her weight to disguise her sexuality (Wyatt, 1998). Of the African American women that Wyatt (1998) surveyed regarding these negative stereotypes attributed to their sexuality, 85% of the women disclosed that they had heard statements that encompassed either the workhorse or mammy image at some point during their adult lives.

Today's media continues to perpetuate the hypersexualized and desexualized stereotypes that have been projected against African American women for centuries (Hill-Collins, 2000). Myriad social commentaries have drawn critical connections between the Jezebel, Mammy, and Matriarch stereotypes and their present-day iterations in today's movies, television shows, and music. Jackson (2013) points out that the Mammy was "an asexual, dark skinned, wise, large caregiver [who] was a loyal and faithful slave who took care of the [White] master's children and household." The Mammy stereotype made an appearance in the 2011 movie "The Help," which was based on the same-named book written by Kathryn Stockett and published in 2009. In the

movie *The Help*, actors Viola Davis and Octavia Spencer, who both have darker hued skin, played the roles of maids who assisted the white female lead (Emma Stone) in scribing a "tell-all" book that revealed the secret lives of African American maids working for White families in the Jim Crow South (Jackson, 2013). Additionally, the Mammy image can be found in grocery stores on the covers of Aunt Jemima Pancake Mix boxes (Jackson, 2013).

The historical Matriarch stereotype outlined by Hill-Collins (2000) can be found in the reinvented, modern-day "Angry Black Woman" portrayal of African American women. The Matriarch image of African American women depicts them as "hard, strong, emasculating, overbearing, and controlling" (Jackson, 2013). Current reality shows such as *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* and *Basketball Wives* perpetuate the reinvented Matriarch stereotype, through its present-day depiction of the "Angry Black Woman" image. Gordon (2013) asked "how many times have we seen Nene Leakes attempt to put someone in their place or witnessed Evelyn Lozada climbing over tables just to try to get a swing in because somebody looked at her the wrong way?" Nene Leakes and Evelyn Lozada are women of color who have attained reality life stardom on *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* and *Basketball Wives*, respectively. Multiple television networks continue to air shows that propagate the Matriarch and Angry Black Woman stereotypes, while employing women of color to portray these derogatory images for the financial gain of the television network executors.

The Jezebel stereotype, which portrays African American women as individuals who share an enthusiasm for sex and may use their sexuality for financial gain (Hill-Collins, 2000), is greatly maintained through the majority of today's hip hop and rap music videos. Gordon (2013) stated that the modern-day Jezebel is shown to "exaggerate her curves and is objectified as a sexual play thing for men." Furthermore, "most hip hop and rap videos are filled with Jezebels

who are competing for the rap star's attention or already busy stripping down to their birthday suits to make him happy" (Gordon, 2013). The male-dominated industries of hip hop and rap continue to exploit the bodies and sexualities of African American women through the music videos of Lil' Wayne, Big Sean, and countless other musical artists.

The sexual victimization of African American women in the United States rarely gains media attention. However, the indictment and conviction of former Oklahoma City police officer Daniel Holtzclaw for his sexually predatory behavior against African American women in Oklahoma City garnered national coverage (Martinez & Mullen, 2015). In December 2015, Holtzclaw was found guilty of 18 criminal charges, including four counts of forced oral sodomy and four counts of rape in the first degree (Martinez & Mullen, 2015). It is alleged that Holtzclaw sexually assaulted a total of 13 African American women who were in his custody following Holtzclaw's conduction of traffic stops with the survivors (Martinez & Mullen, 2015).

One of Holtzclaw's victims, Shandegron "Sade" Hill, reported that Holtzclaw pulled her over for a traffic stop in December 2013 (Martinez & Mullen, 2015). Hill disclosed that following her traffic stop with Holtzclaw, she was transported to a local hospital where she was then raped by Holtzclaw as she was handcuffed to her hospital bed (Martinez & Mullen, 2015). Lauryn (2015) postulated that "as an officer of the law, [Holtzclaw] intentionally sought out older Black women as his victims because he knew they were less likely to be believed. This is especially terrifying when we consider that Holtzclaw directly represents the institutional victimization of Black women" as a former law enforcement officer.

The cultural propagation of sexualized stereotypes attributes to the perpetuation of sexual assault against African American women, especially given that "Black women and girls are always perceived as having sexualized bodies at any age, which means [they] essentially get

victim-blamed for having bodies" (Lauryn, 2015). Research has demonstrated that African American women are less inclined to disclose sexual assault to formal authorities such as law enforcement or medical practitioners because these individuals are largely viewed as ineffective in providing assistance to people of color (Campbell et al., 2001). The documented sexual victimization of African American women by law enforcement will undoubtedly lead to women of color's continued mistrust of the police. Mistrust of medical practitioners and law enforcement is a pervasive cultural issue within the African American community that certainly adds to the hesitancy that women of color survivors of sexual assault experience in deciding whether or not to self-disclose about their trauma to these types of public service figures.

Membership in Greek Life and Risks of Sexual Assault

Fraternities uphold certain norms and practices such as preoccupation with loyalty, group protection and secrecy, use of alcohol, emphasis on competition, and pride in physical violence that perpetuate sexual violence against women on college campuses (Martin & Hummer, 1989). Copenhaver and Grauerholz (1991) primarily investigated the use of sexual coercion within fraternities on college campuses. This study assessed 140 sorority members at a large, public Midwestern university. The study sample was extremely homogeneous with 99% of the women identifying as White, 82% of women identifying as Protestant or Catholic, and 62% of respondents disclosing their family's annual income as $50,000 or higher (Copenhaver & Grauerholz, 1991). Study participants were administered the Sexual Experiences Survey (Koss & Oros, 1982) which examined respondents' experiences related to a range of sexually coercive incidents ranging from unwanted sexual contact to completed, forced penetration.

Results from the Copenhaver and Grauerholz (1991) study showed that 83% of the sorority members had experienced an act of sexual coercion during their college career.

Additionally, 24% of sorority members had survived attempted penetration while 17% of sorority members had survived incidents that legally qualified as completed acts of sexual assault (Copenhaver & Grauerholz, 1991). Over half (57%) of the sorority members reported sexually coercive incidents that occurred within the context of a fraternity function or with a fraternity member as the perpetrator. Of these cases, 96% of the sorority members and fraternity perpetrators had been using alcohol or drugs prior to the sexually coercive incident (Copenhaver & Grauerholz, 1991).

Researchers have explored the potential connection between sorority membership, acceptance of rape myths, and perceptions of sexual violence against women. Kalof (1993) conducted a seminal study in which 216 undergraduate females—which included 21 sorority members—were administered an 80-item survey that presented questions about women's adherence to gender roles and their personal experiences with sexual coercion. It is recognized that the number of sorority members assessed in this study was limited, but this investigation was one of the first to evaluate this concept in sorority members in this way.

Data analyses revealed that sorority members reported significantly higher levels of acceptance of interpersonal violence and greater acceptance of rape myths (Kalof, 1993). Various rape myths included that women enjoy being forced to have sex, "nice" girls are not capable of being sexually assaulted, and women who are sexually assaulted are promiscuous and have negative social reputations (Kalof, 1993). Further analyses demonstrated that 28.6% of sorority women had been physically coerced into having sex in comparison to 10.8% of non-sorority women. Additionally, results demonstrated that 19% of the sorority women disclosed their status as sexual assault survivors, while 7.1% of the non-sorority women reported having been sexually assaulted (Kalof, 2013). These results exemplify the reality that numerous women

who are physically coerced into having sex do not typically label themselves as having been sexually assaulted (Koss, 1985).

Nurius and colleagues (1996) discovered that sorority and fraternity members expressed different expectations regarding sex, particularly regarding women's resistance to unwanted sex. Women generally perceive their risk of sexual assault by a stranger as greater than their risk of sexual assault by an acquaintance (Furby et al., 1989) which increases their risk of being victimized by fraternity brothers whom they may view as family (Larimer, 1992). The participant sample for Nurius and associates' (1996) study included 34 fraternity men and 66 sorority women, 85.9% of whom were White, and 80% of whom identified as college freshmen and sophomores. Fraternity men's expectations regarding their pursuit of sex were negatively related to their beliefs of the importance of demonstrating their sexual prowess and the notion that women demonstrate their desire for sex through alcohol use and heavy touching (Nurius et al., 1996). Specifically, the more value these fraternity members placed on demonstrating their sexual prowess, the less likely these fraternity members were to stop pursuing sex once they had initiated the process with their female peer (Nurius et al., 1996).

Membership in sororities has been demonstrated to increase collegiate women's risk of being sexually victimized. Mohler and colleagues (2004) discovered that women who live in sorority houses are 200% to 300% more likely to become victims of sexual assault than collegiate women who do not live in sorority houses. Researchers have also examined the impact of pornography on women's gendered socialization to view sexual violence against women as acceptable. Davis and colleagues (2006) assessed the impact of moderate alcohol use on women's perceptions of violent pornographic images. The researchers examined a community sample of 134 female social drinkers who read an eroticized sexual assault depiction after being

administered alcohol (Davis et al., 2006). It was found that study participants who were intoxicated were less likely to label the depicted pornographic scenes as sexual assault than their sober counterparts (Davis et al., 2006). It is important to understand that alcohol intoxication hinders women's abilities to label certain trauma incidents as sexual assault, especially since elevated incidents of alcohol use increases college-aged sorority members' risks of being sexually assaulted (Foubert, 2006).

Bystander behavior has been nefariously influential in the perpetuation of sexual violence against women (Banyard et al., 2004). Bystander behavior consists of an individual being aware of a situation in which another person is being victimized but not making active attempts to rescue or aid the distressed individual (Latane & Darley, 1968). Brosi and colleagues (2011) conducted a study with over 900 sorority members to examine the impact of sorority members' pornography use on bystander behavior regarding sexual assault as well as their acceptance of rape myths.

Participants were assessed via a bystander efficacy scale (Banyard et al., 2005), the Willingness to Help Scale (Banyard et al., 2005), and the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA; Payne et al., 1999) which measured participants' attitudes towards sexual assault and their acceptance of rape myths. The sorority members were asked if they had viewed three types of pornography in the previous 12 months—hardcore pornography (46%), rape pornography (27%), and sado-masochistic pornography (21%). Brosi and associates (2011) discovered that women who viewed sadomasochistic pornography perceived themselves as less able to intervene in an observed sexual assault situation than their counterparts. Additionally, 46% of the sorority members who viewed hardcore pornography reported greater acceptance of rape myths

(Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994) than women who did not view hardcore pornography (Brosi et al., 2011).

In summary, sexual assault encompasses all nonconsensual sex acts (CDC, 2015) ranging from completed, forced penetration to non-contact sexual abuse. Survivors of sexual assault experience negative socio-emotional problems such as PTSD, anxiety, depression, and re-traumatization (Banyard et al., 2002; Acierno et al., 1999; Boudreaux et al., 1998). The historical marginalization of African American women in the United States (Hill-Collins, 2000) and disparaging stereotypes related to their sexuality (Black et al., 2011; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005) increases this population's risk for sexual victimization (Littleton et al., 2013; Kaslow et al., 2000).

Social acceptance of rape myths (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994) based upon gendered and racialized stereotypes negatively impacts sexual assault survivors' abilities to label sexual assault incidents as such and deters them from reporting their experiences of sexual assault to friends, family, or law enforcement (Payne et al., 1999). Furthermore, college-aged women experience higher rates of sexual assault (Krebs et al., 2009) in comparison to women from different age groups. Sorority membership increases college-aged women's risk of being sexually victimized (Ragsdale et al., 2012; Trockel et al., 2008) due to high rates of alcohol and drug use within Greek Life, attitudes of secrecy, and familial bonds created between sororities and fraternities. Limited research exists regarding the perceptions of sexual assault in African American female members of Greek-letter sororities at PWIs. This study sought to more deeply understand attitudes regarding sexual assault amongst this population by respecting and honoring their diverse voices and experiences (Worell & Remer, 2003; Hill-Collins, 2000).

CHAPTER 3

Methods and Procedures

"When I dare to be powerful—to use my strength in the service of my vision—then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid."

-Audre Lorde

Research Design

Because of the limited amount of published scholarship regarding the perceptions of sexual assault in African American female collegiate members of Greek letter sororities, qualitative inquiry was best suited for this study as it enables the creation of new forms of knowing regarding phenomenon as they relate to culturally diverse populations (Morrow, 2007; Morgan, 1997). Phenomenological approaches to qualitative research explore the meaning of the lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon by multiple individuals (Creswell, 2013).

The primary purpose of phenomenology is to condense the experiences of individuals regarding a phenomenon to a depiction of the universal essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Per van Manen (1990), researchers implementing phenomenology to understand a universal experience strive to attain a "grasp of the very nature of the thing." Qualitative researchers using phenomenology identify a phenomenon, or "object," of human experience to explore (van Manen, 1990) such as insomnia, isolation, grief, or anger (Moustakas, 1994). The "object" of human experience that this researcher elected to explore was sexual assault from the

vantage point of African American collegiate women with membership in Greek-letter sororities at a predominantly white institution.

Phenomenology allowed the researcher to further understand sexual assault as a particular human experience on both an individual and collective level while also investigating how her study participants consciously reflected upon the phenomenon of sexual assault, as self-identified African American sorority women (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Wertz, 2005). With regards to this study, the way in which African American collegiate women with membership in Greek-letter sororities articulated their experiences and views about sexual assault provided the researcher with further awareness about this less-known phenomenon. In accordance with phenomenology, the researcher developed a merged description of the identified phenomenon that included what she experienced and how she experienced the phenomenon throughout the data collection and data analysis process (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology finds its roots in the philosophical prose of German philosopher Immanuel Kant whose lifelong work on the study of epistemology, or the theory of knowledge, greatly impacted future philosophers in their quest for understanding the world around them (Rockmore, 2011). Kant's view that knowledge is constructed by the individual human experience eventually lead to the creation of phenomenological methodology (Rockmore, 2011). Edmund Husserl, a German mathematician born in the mid-19th century, as well as other academics and thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger (Spiegelberg, 1982), continued to strengthen phenomenology as a philosophical framework to use in further understanding human behavior.

Phenomenological approaches have since gained recognition as respected methodologies within the field of psychology, having been implemented in the study of perceptions of

depression in women (Røseth et al., 2013), experiences of sound sensitivity and its impact on emotional health in undergraduate students (Wu et al., 2014), and the role of positive interpersonal relationships in coping with Alzheimer's Disease (McGee et al., 2014). Furthermore, phenomenology's practice of placing significance on an individual's perspectives of their own problems lends itself to sufficient use in investigating psychological constructs and the counseling process. For example, phenomenology has been effectively implemented in exploring resiliency in childhood sexual abuse survivors (Singh et al., 2010; Bogar & Hulse-Killacky, 2006).

Phenomenological psychological research involves gathering data through open-ended questions and dialogue (Giorgi, 1985, 1997). Furthermore, a researcher utilizing phenomenology in psychological research is committed to the reflective analysis and interpretation of the described lived experiences of their study participants (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). A specific phenomenological approach, known as transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994), focuses on the description of a phenomenon as perceived by the study participants and less on the perception of the phenomenon by the researcher. This researcher utilized the transcendental approach to phenomenology to guide her research process.

Eligibility requirements for individuals to participate in this study were as follows—(a) must identify as born female, (b) must be at least 18 years of age, (c) must self-identify as African American, (d) must be currently enrolled as an undergraduate student at a predominantly white institution, and (e) must hold active membership in a Greek letter sorority that belongs to the National Panhellenic Conference or the National Pan-Hellenic Council. A total of 12 study participants were involved in this research project, with 10 women holding sorority membership in the National Panhellenic Council, and two women holding membership in the National

Panhellenic Conference. Study participants had been members of their respective sororities for an average of 16.25 months. All study participants self-identified as heterosexual women and none of the study participants identified as first-generation college students.

Regarding the undergraduate classifications for the study participants, the study sample consisted of eight fourth-year students, three third-year students, and one second-year student. The study participants had declared various undergraduate majors at UGA, including the following—Public Relations (3), Digital and Broadcast Journalism and Consumer Journalism (3), Communication Studies (2), Computer Animation (1), Biological Science (1), Middle Grades Education (1), and Economics (1). Study participants also disclosed their relationship status, with participants identifying as the following—single (8), in a relationship (3), and partaking in non-committed dating (1). The study sample included eleven participants who identified as Christian and one participant who identified as Spiritual. A total of four study participants disclosed personal experiences of sexual assault, with two participants reporting incidents of completed, alcohol-facilitated penetration, and two participants revealing accounts of unwanted sexual contact.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Study participants were recruited from the undergraduate student body at the University of Georgia (UGA) in Athens, Georgia. A call for study participants, in the form of a recruitment flyer, was posted via email listservs for campus organizations and student support offices at UGA whose services cater to the needs of undergraduate students from diverse ethnic backgrounds such as Multicultural Services and Programs, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Resource Center, the Black Affairs Council, the Black Educational Support Team (BEST), and the UGA Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of

Colored People (NAACP). Furthermore, the study recruitment flyer was distributed via email listservs for student organizations associated with Greek Life, specifically members of the National Panhellenic Conference and the National Pan-Hellenic Council at UGA. Social media, specifically Facebook, was also employed as a recruitment tool by posting the recruitment flyer onto the investigator's personal Facebook page for her peers to view and voluntarily share with other social media users.

The call for participants instructed interested parties to contact the research investigator to undergo a brief phone screening to assess their eligibility for participation in the study. The telephone eligibility screenings typically took about 10 minutes to complete for each potential candidate. The investigator followed a telephone eligibility screening script which provided further details regarding the purpose of her research, potential benefits and risks related to participation, and information pertaining to privacy, confidentiality, and rights of the participant as outlined by the UGA Institutional Review Board. During the telephone eligibility screening, the researcher asked the potential participants the following questions—1) Were you assigned as a female at birth?, 2) Are you currently 18 years of age or older?, 3) Do you self-identify as African American?, 4) Are you currently enrolled as an undergraduate student at the University of Georgia?, and 5) Are you an active member of a Greek-letter sorority that belongs to the National Panhellenic Conference or the National Panhellenic Council? In an effort to maintain privacy as best as possible, the researcher asked the potential candidates to not answer the questions as they were individually asked. Instead, the researcher requested that the study candidates wait until all of the eligibility screening questions had been asked, at which time they were prompted to share if they had responded "no" to any of the eligibility screening questions.

This practice allowed space for the potential participants to not have to reveal a "yes" answer to any particular question.

Upon confirmation of their eligibility to take part in this study, the primary investigator and the study participant scheduled a mutually convenient time to conduct the semi-structured interview. In order to promote a sense of security and privacy during the interview process, participants were invited to conduct their interviews with the researcher at the Center for Counseling and Personal Evaluation (CCPE) which is located in 424 Aderhold Hall at UGA. The CCPE serves as the clinical training facility for Community/Professional Counseling master's students as well as Counseling Psychology doctoral students who are enrolled within the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services (CHDS) at UGA. The individual therapy rooms at the CCPE provided a comfortable, quiet, and private space for participant interviews to take place.

Both written and verbal informed consent were obtained from the study participants prior to starting their interviews. Hays and Singh (2012) emphasized three important aspects of acquiring informed consent from study participants when implementing qualitative inquiry—capacity, comprehension, and collaboration. Capacity and comprehension encompasses the participant's ability to grasp information included within the informed consent document, as well as the participant possessing a sufficient level of cognitive ability to fully understand their rights and responsibilities as a research subject (Hays & Singh, 2012). The notion of collaboration emphasizes that within qualitative research, informed consent is an ongoing process where the investigator-participant dyad is constantly discussed and the research process is mutually negotiated (Smythe & Murray, 2000; Hays & Singh, 2012).

Informed consent was viewed by the researcher as a highly important piece of the research process. Study participants identified as African American and female, an intersection of sociocultural identities that have been historically marginalized and oppressed. Furthermore, the researcher was aware of the historical implications of the Tuskegee syphilis experiment on African Americans' mistrust of clinical research and medical practitioners (Corbie-Smith, Thomas, Williams, & Moody-Ayers, 1999). Regarding medical research, Corbie and colleagues (1999) discovered that African Americans viewed signing an informed consent form as surrendering their autonomy and they believed that informed consent's primary function was to protect the legal rights of the medical practitioners. The primary investigator's consideration of cultural implications during the informed consent process supported her commitment to ensuring that all of her study participants fully understood their roles and rights as study participants, while empowering participants through strong rapport building and demonstrating that their personal voices as African American women were valued and heard (Hill-Collins, 2000; Worrell & Remer, 2003).

Upon providing informed consent, the study participants completed a demographic survey answering questions regarding the following personal attributes—age, gender, race/ethnicity, academic classification, program of study, relationship status, sexual orientation, parents' educational level, religious/spiritual orientation, and sorority membership. Study participants also provided the primary investigator with a pseudonym before the interview to be used throughout the entire research process in order to maintain confidentiality.

Prior to engaging in the semi-structured interview, research participants were presented with four vignettes that illustrated varying levels of sexual assault against women as defined by the CDC (2015). Each vignette depicted one of the following acts of sexual violence—1)

completed, forced penetration, 2) attempted, forced penetration, 3) unwanted sexual contact, and 4) a noncontact, unwanted sexual experience. The vignettes were original pieces created by the primary investigator based upon these recognized definitions of sexual assault. The researcher asked each study participant whether she identified the scenes depicted in the vignettes as sexual assault. Subsequently, the researcher implemented thorough follow-up questions and probes to explore the factors that influenced the participants' decision-making process as to whether or not the scenes depicted in the vignettes encompassed acts of sexual violence against women (Hays & Singh, 2012).

The interview protocol included questions that explored the participants' perceptions of varying aspects of sexual assault as an undergraduate African American female member of Greek Life. Both discussions of the vignettes as well as the semi-structured interview were audio-recorded with the written consent of all study participants. Each participant interview lasted between 75 and 120 minutes. The concepts of sex and informed consent, familiarity with a perpetrator, drug and alcohol intoxication, perceived prevalence of sexual assault in Greek Life, intersectionality of race, gender, sorority membership and its impact on perceptions of sexual assault, factors impacting decisions to report sexual assault, awareness of sexual assault survivors in one's sorority, and knowledge of campus and community resources for sexual assault survivors were explored via the semi-structured interview. Each study participant received a $10 RaceTrac gift card as compensation for their involvement in the study (Campbell & Adams, 2009).

Due to the limited amount of research pertaining to the perceptions of sexual assault amongst African American sorority members, the researcher emphasized the need to highlight phenomenology as a vehicle to "reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a

description of the universal essence" (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990) of her specific research topic. The researcher's implementation of vignettes and a semi-structured interview protocol sought to discover the essence of African American sorority members' perceptions of sexual assault as a determined effort to add to psychology's understanding of this research topic. Furthermore, the researcher was committed to valuing the integrity of her African American study participants' lived experiences while honoring the uniqueness of their voices as minority women as demonstrated through her utilization of semi-structured interviews (Hays & Singh, 2012; Worell & Remer, 2003; Hill-Collins, 2000; hooks, 1999).

Empowerment Feminist Therapy and Black Feminist Theory served as the theoretical foundation of the researcher's exploration of the lived experiences of African American sorority women attending PWIs and their perceptions of sexual assault (Worell & Remer, 2003; Hill-Collins, 2000; hooks, 1999). Through her integration of Empowerment Feminist Therapy, the researcher exhibited her trust and value of the lived experiences of African American women while fostering exploration of how the intersecting sociocultural identities of her study participants impacted their views of the research topic. In accordance with the tenets of Empowerment Feminist Therapy, the researcher also employed an egalitarian approach to her research interactions with the study participants, to eliminate the presence of power or privilege between the researcher and her participants as best as possible (Worell & Remer, 2003).

Black Feminist Theory informed the researcher's development her of data collection materials, particularly the sexual assault vignettes and the semi-structured interview protocol, as these instruments were created through a cultural lens that acknowledged the historical contexts of African American female sexuality (Hill-Collins, 2000; hooks, 1999). In support of Black Feminist Theory, the researcher strove to increase the Academy's understanding of the lived

experiences of African American women that included an exploration of the sexual politics of Black womanhood, as well as Black women's love and relationships (Hill-Collins, 2000; hooks, 1999). The researcher employed her reflexive journal as an investigative instrument to advance her personal understanding of the participants' shared stories, while also acknowledging her concurrent challenges and triumphs with love and trauma as an African American woman (Hays & Singh, 2012; Hill-Collins, 2000; hooks, 1999; Worell & Remer, 2003).

Researchers employing a phenomenological approach as their primary methodology utilize a technique referred to as epoche, or bracketing, to set aside their biases in order to enforce a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon being explored in their psychological investigation (Husserl, 1970). Epoche, which is a Greek word that means "refraining from judgment," supports the phenomenologist's view that the human experience is best investigated by disregarding and placing aside any previous descriptions or definitions of a phenomenon while the researcher also acknowledges and brackets off their values and assumptions about the identified phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2012). Additionally, phenomenology upholds the notion that research participants should be viewed as co-researchers since they are the owners of vast amounts of personal knowledge about the investigated research experience (Hays & Singh, 2012). Transcendental phenomenology consists of the identification of a phenomenon to study, using the method of bracketing to extract the researcher's personal experiences from the studied phenomenon, and collecting data from myriad individuals with personal experience with the identified phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Colaizzi, 1978; Van Kaam, 1966).

Researcher reflexibility, which describes a researcher's active self-reflection throughout the research process, is an integral part of sound qualitative research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In comparison to quantitative research, qualitative research is unique in that the thoughts,

feelings, and responses of the researcher as they interact with their study participants and their data throughout the investigative process are valued as key pieces of the research process (Stake, 1995). Shaw (2010) poignantly shared the following regarding the manner in which the reflexive process impacts her role as a qualitative researcher—"[the reflexive process encourages me to] proactively manage myself in my interactions with my participants and the world to actively explore how these encounters impact my pre-existing beliefs and knowledge—my fore understandings—in order to understand afresh the phenomena I am studying." The primary investigator for this study maintained a thorough reflexive journal throughout the entire research process, with her entries beginning on the date of her dissertation proposal in October 2014 and continuing through completion of her data analyses in January 2016.

Scholars have noted that reflexive writing during the research process may create anxiety for the investigator for fear of exposing one's personal biases and life experiences, as well as one's ethically difficult encounters with research participants (Scerri et al., 2012). However, reflexive journaling supports the notion that the inherent anxiety and challenges that a qualitative researcher faces while conducting participant interviews must be conjoined with the dutiful responsibility that is required with performing ethical research on sensitive topics such as sexual violence and other forms of trauma (Scerri et al., 2012). The primary investigator acknowledges that during her reflexive process, the journal entries that she found the most challenging to compose were those entries that followed an interview with a study participant who also self-identified as a sexual assault survivor. During her interviews with participants who were sexual assault survivors, the researcher found herself incorporating her background as both a therapist and a fellow trauma survivor into her interviews with these participants. The researcher appropriately self-disclosed about her sexual assault as a way to further validate the experiences

of these particular participants, while also normalizing the trauma responses that participants reportedly experienced following their sexual assault. The primary investigator experienced mild anxiety with being emotionally vulnerable and transparent with her study participants, regarding her status as a sexual assault survivor, and was aware of these emotions as she wrote in detail about these experiences in her reflexive journal.

The primary investigator incorporated Carl Rogers's (1961) core conditions of therapy—authenticity, unconditional positive regard, and empathy—into her reflexive journaling in order to avoid becoming hypercritical of her interactions with study participants and her interpretations of the participant data (Hays & Singh, 2012). Qualitative researchers should be authentic in identifying their genuine thoughts and feelings about their research topic during each stage of their research project (Hays & Singh, 2012). The practice of unconditional positive regard may allow the qualitative researcher to openly acknowledge any "controversial or previously unacknowledged" thoughts the researcher may have towards their data during the research process in addition to how these authentic feelings may impact the researcher's interpretation of participant data (Hays & Singh, 2012). Furthermore, empathy creates a valuable, in-depth reflexive process in that it provides the qualitative researcher with the emotional space to question their motives or intentions behind behaviors such as asking leading prompts that were not originally detailed in their interview protocol (Hays & Singh, 2012).

The reflexive process also allows the qualitative researcher to explore the notions of being an "insider" or an "outsider" as it pertains to their research topic (Hellawell, 2006). Insider research (Merton, 1972) is defined as an investigation in which the researcher is not especially associated with the phenomenon that is being explored, but does indeed have knowledge about the phenomenon prior to the start of the study (Merton, 1972). Outsider research (Hellawell,

2006) is described as a study in which the researcher does not have any previous experience or first-hand knowledge about the investigated phenomenon. The primary investigator for this study strongly identified as an "insider" regarding her research topic. Fawcett and Hearn (2004) also noted that qualitative researchers should explore how their sociocultural identities such as race, gender, disability status, and sexual orientation may impact their interactions with and interpretations of data. Researcher reflexivity that is practiced on a consistent basis allows the qualitative researcher to have access to one's authentic "thoughts and feelings about [their] study that then become important data to consider and acknowledge when it comes time to interpret the data" (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Within qualitative research, the investigator's thoughts, feelings, and previous experiences with a studied phenomenon are appreciated and valued, which supports the notion of researcher subjectivity (Gough & Madill, 2012). Subjectivity refers to the researcher's internal perceptions and ideas about the phenomenon being explored through their study (Schneider, 1999). Gough and Madill (2012) shared that a psychosocial perspective regarding subjectivity in qualitative research specifically calls for investigators to engage with their personal stories and experiences with the studied phenomenon as deemed appropriate.

Holloway and Jefferson (2000) recount how Jefferson in particular believed that an interviewee's description of their childhood was overly positive based upon the researcher's memories about their own childhood that had parallel situations and conditions. In this example, the researcher's reflexivity and subjectivity provided them with clinical insight that the interviewee's recounted story of their childhood experiences was a defense mechanism (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000). Researcher subjectivity can then be utilized as a crucial part of the data collection and data analysis process since the researcher's previous experiences with a

studied phenomenon may contribute to more accurate interpretations of participant data through the researcher's personal insight (Gough & Madill, 2012). During her last participant interview, the primary investigator for this study found her interviewee's disclosures about sexually aggressive behavior that she has witnessed in members of her "brother" fraternity as minimalizing the impact of their behavior on the physical and emotional well-being of collegiate women. The primary investigator's reflexivity and subjectivity as an African American sorority member allowed her to recognize that the study participant's flippant description of her "brother" fraternity's sexually inappropriate behavior may have served as the participant's attempt to protect members of her "brother" fraternity, as fellow students of color and members of the Greek system.

Previous research suggests that while some study respondents who are being interviewed about sensitive topics such as trauma may report unexpected emotional distress during the research process, that "adverse reactions [to being interviewed] appear less common than previously anticipated" (Hlavaka et al., 2007, p. 898). Additionally, Campbell et al. (2010) performed a qualitative study about how participating in interviews affects trauma survivors and discovered that most study participants described the interview process as "helpful, supportive, and insightful" (p. 60). The primary investigator for this study experienced all of her study participants as forthright, authentic, and emotionally engaged during the entire research process. Qualitative researchers who elect to conduct a study about a subject such as sexual assault should ensure that they are not solely viewing their participants as victims requiring protection from harmful thoughts and feelings as this may only perpetuate their victimhood (Scerri et al., 2012). In prior qualitative work, participants in a study about sexual assault shared that they chose to participate in the study in order to "help other survivors, to help themselves, to support research

on rape/sexual assault, and to receive financial compensation" (Campbell & Adams, 2009). As a result, qualitative researchers who are broaching sensitive topics such as sexual violence should note that denying the altruistic nature and agency of one's study participants may disempower one's study participants (Scerri et al., 2012). The primary investigator's experiences with her study participants, specifically those participants who self-identified as sexual assault survivors, confirmed Scerri and company's (2012) assertion regarding the philanthropic spirit of study participants who voluntarily contribute accounts about their lived experiences as minoritized women.

Reflexive journaling can empower a qualitative researcher in that it allows the researcher a constructive avenue in which to explore and chronicle potential feelings of guilt and vulnerability (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007), emotional exhaustion (Dickson-Swift et al., 2006), and somatic issues such as insomnia and nightmares (Cowles, 1988) that could cause researcher burnout (Scerri et al., 2012). Vicarious traumatization (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995) refers to the "transformation in the inner experiences of the therapist that comes about as a result of empathic engagement with clients' trauma material." Qualitative researchers who are interviewing participants about a deleterious subject such as rape must remain conscious of the ways in which conducting these emotionally-laden interviews could lead to psychological distress that is created by vicarious traumatization (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). During the beginning of the data collection process, the primary investigator did experience mild insomnia resulting from her emotional distress connected to her identification with the shared trauma experiences of her study participants. However, the primary investigator found reflexive journaling and participating in peer debriefing meetings extremely helpful in helping her moderate her reactions

to the participants' data, which led to an improvement in her sleep habits for the remainder of the study.

Maximizing trustworthiness and building rapport (Rogers, 1961) with study participants is an essential part of the qualitative research process (Hays & Singh, 2012). The first practice implemented by the primary investigator to enhance her trustworthiness as a researcher was her utilization of a method referred to as prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1995). Prolonged engagement involves the researcher "staying in the field" (Hays & Singh, 2012) in order to gain knowledge about the environment of one's study participants, while establishing and maintaining genuine relationships with their study participants. The primary investigator for this study practiced prolonged engagement by actively supporting African American sorority members at UGA by attending Greek-affiliated step shows, sorority-sponsored psychoeducational events, and sorority-sponsored volunteering activities.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) emphasized a method known as member checking as the most important strategy for qualitative researchers to use in establishing trustworthiness. Member checking is also referred to as interpretative validity (Johnson, 1997), reciprocity (Fossey et al., 2002), and respondent validation (Mays & Pope, 2000). During the practice of member checking, researchers involve study participants throughout the entire research process in order to ensure that participant findings are being accurately portrayed as potential themes are being explored and identified by the researcher (Hays & Singh, 2012). For this research project, the investigator practiced member checking by asking follow-up probes during data collection in order to ensure that the researcher fully understood the meaning of a participant's statements during the interview process (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Additionally, the researcher also sought to maximize trustworthiness between herself and the study participants by asking all participants to review their interview transcripts for accuracy and to verify that their responses regarding the phenomenon explored in this study held true to their intended meaning (Hays & Singh, 2012). In their review of their interview transcripts, study participants were also encouraged to make any corrections to their interview transcript directly to the transcript (Hays & Singh, 2012). Study participants were also provided the opportunity to elaborate upon any portions of the responses that they gave during their original interview (Hays & Singh, 2012). Following her initial completion of the data analysis process, the primary investigator also practiced member checking by providing study participants with a comprehensive, descriptive list of themes that were identified within the data. The researcher also invited study participants to share their feedback regarding the proposed themes, which could include observations regarding missing or underdeveloped themes, as well as themes which they found especially accurate and validating to their lived experiences as African American sorority women attending a PWI.

Singh and McKleroy (2011) conducted a phenomenological inquiry into the resilience of transgender people of color who had survived various forms of trauma including intimate partner violence, childhood sexual abuse, and hate crimes. Through semi-structured interviews with 11 participants, Singh and McKleroy (2011) discovered six primary themes throughout the responses of the transgender people of color who shared their stories. These themes were the following—1) expressing pride in their ethnic/racial identity and gender, 2) acknowledging and conferring about one's experiences with gender-based and racially-based oppression, 3) navigating one's interpersonal relationships with family members, 4) access to financial resources and adequate healthcare, 5) proactive engagement in activism within a transgender

community of color, and 6) nurturing one's spirituality and sense of hope for the future (Singh & McKleroy, 2011). The researchers ensured that trustworthiness was maximized with this historically marginalized and oppressed community through the use of member checking during the entire research process. Specifically, Singh and McKleroy (2011) invited the transgender people of color to review their interview transcripts for accuracy. Additionally, study participants were asked to select a pseudonym to ensure their privacy and confidentiality as they expressed their unique voices during the interview process (Singh & McKleroy, 2011).

The primary investigator utilized the method of peer debriefing as an additional reflexive method to increase the trustworthiness of her data collection and data analysis methods. Morrow (2005, p. 254) stated that research team members who serve as peer debriefers to the primary investigator are to "serve as a mirror, reflecting the investigator's responses to the research process…serving as devil's advocates proposing alternative interpretations to those of the investigator." The implementation of peer debriefing during this research study assisted in strengthening the integrity of this project (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) while bringing the primary investigator's awareness to the influence of her subjectivity on her interpretation of the participant data (Hays & Singh, 2012). The primary investigator invited one research team member, who also aided with consensus coding, to serve as her peer debriefer. During our consensus coding and peer debriefing meetings, the primary investigator and her research team member debated participant themes as they were identified during data collection, discussed the researchers' biases, assumptions, and their impact on the research process, and processed any emotional distress and reactions that they both experienced during the data analysis process.

Simultaneous data collection and analysis (Hays & Singh, 2012) was also used by the primary investigator as a method of interweaving trustworthiness into this study. As a form of

qualitative inquiry, phenomenology exists as an emergent design (Maxwell, 2005) since its structure allows for the reformulation and reconceptualization of the investigator's research questions, methodology, and data sources throughout the entire research process (Hays & Singh, 2012). Hays and Singh (2012) emphasized that qualitative researchers should not wait until all of their data has been collected before starting data analysis. By doing so, the researcher may neglect to ask valuable questions that could have been discovered by analyzing data prior to completing data collection (Hays & Singh, 2012). Additionally, conducting simultaneous data collection and analysis allowed the primary investigator of this study to take advantage of potential opportunities to seek clarity from participants about the meanings surrounding their perceptions of sexual assault as African American sorority members at a predominantly white institution (Hays & Singh, 2012).

The primary investigator made additional efforts to maximize trustworthiness throughout her study by utilizing thick descriptions (Maxwell, 2005) when providing details about her data collection and analysis procedures. Geertz (1973) defined thick descriptions as the process by which researchers give a detailed explanation about the structure of a study, its methodology, and any researcher reflections that are composed as a result of data analysis. Hays and Singh (2012) share that thick descriptions go "beyond the basics of facts, feelings, observations, and occurrences to include inferences into the meaning of present data" (p. 213). As prescribed by Hays and Singh (2012), the primary investigator employed thick descriptions during her report of the research methodology she used, detailing the specific steps of her data analysis procedures, providing her researcher notes in the form of a reflexive journal (Morrow, 2005; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), using participant verbatim quotes to support themes, reporting culturally-aware

and ethical implications of her research findings, and employing myriad trustworthiness approaches.

Furthermore, the researcher maintained a substantive audit trail (Hays & Singh, 2012) that served as a "collection of evidence regarding the researcher's process for an auditor or any other consumer to review" (p. 214). As recommended by Hays and Singh (2012), the investigator's audit trail included recruitment flyers, telephone eligibility screening scripts, participant contact logs, informed consent forms, demographic surveys, interview protocols, peer debriefing meeting memos, consensus coding meeting memos, verbatim transcriptions of participant interviews, and audio recordings of participant interviews. The researcher's commitment to maintaining a proficient audit trail adhered to the need for auditability of qualitative research as initially proposed in the seminal work of Guba and Lincoln (1981) as a way to ensure trustworthiness in this type of qualitative research.

The primary investigator enforced another trustworthiness strategy referred to as triangulation of investigators, which involves "using multiple researchers or teams of researchers to collect and/or analyze data, write reports, and present findings" (Hays & Singh, 2102). In her triangulation of investigators, the primary investigator elected to involve other researchers during data collection and data analysis, by identifying herself as the sole investigator for data collection and the interview transcription process, while engaging one additional researcher during the data analysis process. Additionally, the primary investigator invited two additional research team members to serve as external auditors for her study upon completion of data analysis "to determine the extent to which the researcher completed a comprehensive and rigorous study" (Hays & Singh, 2012). The two research team members who served as external auditors did not experience any conflicts of interest by participating in this research process (Hays & Singh,

2012). The external auditors, who both had previous experience with conducting qualitative research, were provided access to all of the primary researcher's data collection and data analysis materials. The primary investigator requested that her external auditors provide constructive, objective feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this study, especially regarding any disconfirmations of the overall themes or present growth edges inherent in this study (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Once the primary investigator completed data collection with her study participants, the researcher and her additional coder initiated a phenomenological method known as horizontalization, by identifying large categories present amongst the participant data followed by identifying "nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements in the participants' transcripts" (Hays & Singh, 2012). The researcher created a list of the larger categories present within the participant data, which then lead to her condensing the data into smaller, significant statements (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher then combined the aforementioned statements into themes upon which textural and structural descriptions of the lived experiences of the interviewed African American sorority members were created (Moustakas, 1994).

Textural descriptions consist of what the participants experienced regarding a phenomenon, by exploring the "meaning and depth of the essence of the experience" discussed by participants (Moustakas, 1994; Hays & Singh, 2012), while structural descriptions are comprised of how the study participants experienced the phenomenon with regards to the conditions, context, and situations relevant to their lived experiences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, structural descriptions include the varying meanings that the study participants projected regarding the investigated phenomenon, which included an acknowledgment of any "opposites or tensions" between participants' interpretations of the

phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2012). Following the identification of structural and textural descriptions, the primary researcher constructed a composite description of the examined phenomenon that was then referred to as the "essential, invariant structure" or "essence" (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Team Members' Backgrounds, Biases, and Assumptions

The research team for this study consisted of four scholars, including the primary investigator, and each research team member possessed different sociocultural identities and varying personal experiences with the research topic. The primary investigator identified as an African American female sorority member and a sexual assault survivor. She belongs to an organization in the National Panhellenic Council, which includes historically African American sororities. She is a fourth-year Doctoral Candidate in the Counseling Psychology program at UGA. She bracketed her beliefs about African American sorority members and their perceptions of sexual assault that included assumptions that study participants would report unwanted sexual experiences with Greek-lettered men from historically African American fraternities, given that the primary investigator's sexual assault perpetrator was a member of a historically African American Greek-letter organization. As a self-identified sexual assault survivor, the primary investigator also bracketed her assumption that study participants who also identified as sexual assault survivors, would have experienced trauma responses and coping strategies similar to those of the primary investigator. As an African American female, the primary investigator bracketed her assumption that the study participants would disclose experiences with racial microaggressions at UGA, as minority women students attending a predominantly white institution.

The second research team member identified as an African American female sorority member. She belongs to an organization in the National Panhellenic Council, which includes

historically African American sororities. She was a second-year master's student in the Professional Counseling program at UGA. The second researcher bracketed her assumption that sorority members who attended more Greek social events may experience higher rates of unwanted sexual experiences, due to the researcher's personal knowledge of "the party atmosphere of African American undergraduate Greek life." The second research team member also bracketed her assumption that study participants who attended parties at certain fraternity's houses or apartments may be more likely to report an instance of sexual assault. This research team member reported that she made this assumption based solely on the generalized stereotypes of certain fraternity men, based upon their Greek affiliations and expected behavior around women. The second research team member also bracketed her assumption that study participants would report increased instances of sexual assault from White male fraternity members. This assumption of the researcher was based upon her beliefs regarding the eroticization of Black women by White men.

The third research team member identified as an African American female sorority member and a sexual assault survivor. She is a third-year Doctoral Candidate in the Counseling Psychology program at UGA. This research team member was a member of a sorority from the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC), which includes historically White sororities. As such, she bracketed her assumption that the majority of study participants would belong to sororities from the National Panhellenic Council (NPHC), which includes historically African American sororities, since the primary investigator identifies as a member of a historically African American sorority and she has student connections to the NPHC community at UGA. The third researcher also expressed her biases as a sexual assault survivor, disclosing that she "finds joy" in advocating for and connecting with women who have similar trauma experiences as her own.

The fourth research team member self-identified as a White male who is not a member of the Greek community. He is a third-year Doctoral Candidate in the Counseling Psychology program at UGA. The fourth researcher bracketed his biases about undergraduate students who are members of the historically White Interfraternity Conference and National Panhellenic Conference, as he reported that the majority of his experiences with the collegiate Greek community have been with members of these organizations. He bracketed his negative biases towards the White Greek community, given his perception that their behavior of heavy alcohol and drug use can create dangerous situations in which sexual assault can occur and their substance use can lead to damaging health conditions.

This research study was conducted using a phenomenological, qualitative approach; therefore the act of acknowledging and explaining the biases and assumptions of the entire research team was a critical piece of this project (Hays & Singh, 2012). The biases and assumptions of each research team member were bracketed throughout the processes of data collection and data analysis, in conjunction with the researcher's point of involvement in the study (Hays & Singh, 2012). The primary investigator was involved in each step of the research process, from participant recruitment to data analysis. The second researcher was wholly involved in consensus coding of the participants' interview transcripts and provided the researcher with critical feedback during their shared peer debriefing meetings. The third and fourth research team members served as external auditors for this study, following the completion of data collection and data analysis. The entire research team identified as graduate students and practicing clinicians in the field of psychology, which impacted their views of sexual assault as a form of trauma in varying ways.

Limitations

This research study achieved its purpose of exploring perceptions of sexual assault in African American collegiate women with membership in Greek-letter sororities at a PWI; however, a number of limitations are present in this study. Readers of this research should be careful not to generalize the results of this study to all African American college women with membership in Greek-letter sororities at a PWI. First, the study sample was highly homogenous regarding participants' religious backgrounds, relationship status, undergraduate classification, sexual orientation, and sorority membership.

The majority of the study participants identified as single, Christian, heterosexual fourth-year students at UGA. Additionally, 10 of the 12 study participants identified as members of sororities that belong to the National Pan-Hellenic Council, which includes historically African American sororities. Future researchers could intentionally seek study participants who represent greater diversity in religious and spiritual faiths, gender identities, and sexual orientation as African American sorority women who may identify as LGB and/or T or non-Christian may hold differing views regarding sexual assault. Furthermore, future research could focus more on the lived experiences of African American sorority members who joined Greek-letter organizations within the National Panhellenic Conference, which includes historically White sororities. Identifying as a minority sorority member in a predominantly-White organization may impact the views of African American sorority women regarding sexual assault in ways that did not become evident through this present research study.

This research study was conducted at a predominantly white institution located in the Southeastern United States, which is a region of the country known for its more conservative views regarding religion and sex. The perceptions of sexual assault shared by African American

sorority members attending colleges and universities in different regions of the United States may add fresh insight to this research area, considering the variance that exists in social mores and religious beliefs across the nation.

Lastly, the researcher attempted to obtain feedback from the eight study participants who provided consent to be contacted following the researcher's completion of data analysis, to review the resulting themes for accuracy. A total of four study participants responded to the researcher's final query for their feedback regarding the study results. As a result, only one-third of the study sample provided input regarding the concluding sexual assault themes. The results of this study would have been strengthened by additional feedback from a greater number of the research participants, given that their missing input may have altered the final phases of data analysis in ways that will remain unknown.

CHAPTER 4

Results

"I learned so much from listening to people. And all I knew was, the only thing I had was honesty and openness."

-Audre Lorde

Study participants felt empowered to disclose their personal experiences of sexual assault at UGA within the safe and nonjudgmental space of the semi-structured interview process. Additionally, study participants voiced their perceptions regarding how their intersecting sociocultural identities as African American women with membership in Greek-letter sororities impacted their risk of experiencing sexual assault at a PWI. A phenomenological analysis of the participant data resulted in the identification of eight sexual assault themes within the data:

1. African American female sorority members disclosed their sexual assault survivorship status, by sharing incidents of completed, alcohol-facilitated penetration, and unwanted sexual contact
2. African American female sorority members reported that gendered stereotypes related to male dominance and the eroticization of the female body increase their risk for sexual assault

3. African American female sorority members expressed that historical and modern-day traumas (i. e., the American Slave Trade, racial microaggressions, and negative racial stereotypes) increase their risk for sexual assault, while also promoting within-group protection and solidarity as minority students at a PWI
4. African American female sorority members discussed victim-blaming based upon sexual assault survivors' dress attire, perceived sexual history, relationship status, sorority membership, and substance use
5. African American female sorority members discussed how their risk of being sexually assaulted is impacted by cultural norms that control sexual expression across genders, as well as sexualized stereotypes reportedly accepted by fraternity men
6. African American female sorority members expressed conflicting feelings regarding acquaintance rape, hazing, and interpersonal and relationship violence, in reaction to sexual assault vignettes presented to them by the researcher
7. African American female sorority members defined sexual consent as individuals providing verbal and/or non-verbal consent, while not intoxicated via alcohol or drugs, and emphasized that open and honest communication about sexual expectations and physical boundaries is critical between all sexual and romantic partners
8. African American female sorority members reported Greek-specific risk factors for sexual assault, including substance use, peer pressure, and interactions between brother and sister Greek organizations, in addition to Greek-specific protective factors against sexual assault, including sorority-implemented program safeguards, interactions between brother and sister Greek organizations, and social support fostered amongst sorority members

African American female sorority members disclosed their sexual assault survivorship status, by sharing incidents of completed, alcohol-facilitated penetration, and unwanted sexual contact

Throughout data collection, four of the twelve study participants disclosed that they had survived varying forms of sexual assault during their undergraduate career at UGA. Two participants reported incidents of "completed, alcohol-facilitated penetration," which the CDC (2015) defines as "completed or attempted unwanted vaginal (for women), oral, or anal insertion when the victim was unable to consent because he or she was too intoxicated (e.g., incapacitation, lack of consciousness, or lack of awareness) through voluntary or involuntary use of alcohol or drugs." The other two participants revealed instances of "unwanted sexual contact" which includes "intentional touching, either directly or through the clothing, of the genitalia, anus, groin, breast, inner thigh, or buttocks of any person without his or her consent, or of a person who is unable to consent or refuse" (CDC, 2015). Three of the four sexual assault survivors were first-year students at the time of their trauma incident. None of the four sexual assault survivors have ever reported their incidents to law enforcement, mental health authorities, or any other university official.

Acts of completed, alcohol-facilitated penetration reported by study participants.

Jennifer, a 21-year-old Public Relations major, recounted her sexual assault in detail, providing information about the incident itself, as well as her emotional reactions towards her perpetrator following her assault. Jennifer's assailant was a close acquaintance of hers, as Jennifer and her perpetrator were from the same hometown and had attended the same high school. Below is an excerpt from her interview in which she disclosed about her trauma incident:

> It happened my first weekend of my freshman year, somebody that I knew very well from back home…My friends left me. They (historically Black fraternity at UGA) had had a house party at their house and my friends left me because, oh she's been drinking. We can't find her. And she knows him, so she'll be fine…It was a house party. And I just remember saying, I wanted to take a shower. I remember him getting in the shower with me. And I remember him trying, but I kind of pushed him off as best as I could. And then when we got out, he put me up on top of the toilet bowl. And that's when I started seeing the blood. You know. I'm intoxicated for one thing, so I'm still kind of like, OK. What's going on? And I remember explicitly. It was a mattress without a box spring. Literally, just the mattress and sheets. And I don't think I was able to get him off of me until his hand was on my throat. And then I just remember waking up and seeing the blood. And um, asking for some clothes to go home in. And doing that walk of shame.

Jennifer emphasized that one of the more challenging aspects of her pre-existing relationship with her perpetrator was his prominent status at UGA as a member of the Greek community, as well as his celebrated involvement with the university's efforts in recruiting future students. Jennifer described her feelings of hurt and betrayal, pertaining to her perpetrator, as his status as a publicly respected African American fraternity member at UGA deterred Jennifer from formally reporting her assault to university officials due to her fear that reporting her assault would negatively impact her perpetrator's social reputation:

> And this young man, I um…I'm…….I guess I'm gonna just be transparent. It hurts me to know that this is someone that was probably looked up to a lot by other people. Because I know that if he was involved with [UGA student recruitment program] then probably lots of people looked up to him. And so it makes me just think of….How much

> more hurtful it would have been [to report the assault]. Just shocked and surprised that it went that way.

Kiara, a 20 year old Computer Animation major, was sexually assaulted twice during the first year of her undergraduate career. In contrast to Jennifer's account, both of Kiara's perpetrators were reportedly strangers to Kiara at the time of her assaults. Kiara described the events of her first sexual assault, which occurred during her first semester at UGA:

> My group of friends, we went downtown. And we were at one of the bars hanging out. And it was like normal at first. You see somebody that you want to dance with. They approach you, and you dance with them all night. And um…that was fine. And then…I remember him….we were all hanging out, and he was buying us drinks, so I was really drunk at this point. There is a point where me and my friends and I, we got separated. We got separated at the bar, and it was just me and him. Nobody else was there. And I remember us drinking more and before I know it, like, I'm in a cab headed to a hotel. And I…I can't even think of what was going through my mind at the time. Uh…but like, we go up there, and we go into his room. And one of his friends was asleep, like right there.

Kiara revealed that she experienced profound feelings of confusion, apprehension, and immense fear as her perpetrator began to sexually assault her as an unknown male slept in the adjoining bed in their hotel room:

> I was just too drunk to make sense of the whole thing. Because after I had laid down for a little bit, I was like, I need to get out of here. I was like, I don't know what happened. I just want to go home. And that whole moment, I remember he was like, on the bed after everything was finished…he had his arm around me. And I just had to sneak out. I was

> running through the hallway, viciously calling my friends, trying to see if they can pick me up from this place. I didn't even know which hotel it was. But you know, of course it's late, and I can't blame my friends for not answering the phone, because they didn't know where I was. Or they didn't know what was happening. So I just went back into the room, and I laid there, and in the morning he woke up and was acting like everything was fine. And I just went along with it. I was like, "OK" because I didn't want to get attacked.

Kiara reported that her second sexual assault occurred during the summer following her first year at UGA, while she and several of her sorority sisters were attending an out of town fraternity party hosted by mutual friends. Kiara and her sorority sisters intended to spend the night at the fraternity house following the party, as they trusted their fraternity brothers with their safety. Kiara expressed that her perpetrator began making unwanted sexual advances towards Kiara early on during the party, and he was persistent in his efforts despite Kiara's expressed disinterest in him:

> There was this new guy there and he was not a [fraternity] brother. He was a friend of a brother. And he was like, I knew something was wrong in the way that he was thinking, because all of a sudden…I was trying to flirt with some other guys, and he became possessive. And I don't know what assumption he made, because we hardly even talked…that made him assume that…he had claimed me and like, he was like "why don't you come over here?" and I was like "I don't really want to." "No, just come over here." And I think I went over there just to, like, stand by him. I knew that…something was wrong with him. In the way that he thought and it just wasn't OK.

Kiara revealed that her perpetrator engaged in "major manipulation" by using guilt tactics to coerce Kiara, who was heavily intoxicated with alcohol at the time of her assault, and

therefore unable to fully consent to any sexual activity. Kiara recounted how she and one of her sorority sisters had secluded themselves in a bedroom, to fall asleep in adjoining bunk beds following the end of the fraternity party. Kiara disclosed that her sorority sister, who was also under the influence of alcohol, left Kiara alone in the bedroom. It was at that time that Kiara's perpetrator found Kiara alone in the bedroom and climbed onto the top bunk of the bed, where Kiara was laying:

> He came up and he's like in this personal area of mine. And I like….it was like, in my mind, I don't know what I can do. I don't know what to do. And he's like, "if we don't have sex, I can't show you how good I am" or something like that. And I'm just like, I don't know what's happening and I let it happen. And I just remember him saying very strange, creepy things. And he said "I love you" and it was very…so uncomfortable. Like, clearly someone that has weird mental things going on. And that was where I was super uncomfortable, fearful. And I did, in that moment, reiterate that I did not want it. But…I don't know, I should have….I wish I was more forceful about it. I just let it…It was another instance where I gave in, and I let it happen, and I went along with it.

Kiara's expressed feelings of guilt and shame related to her sexual assault, as she committed self-blaming statements such as she "let it happen." Similarly, Jennifer revealed self-blame for her sexual assault as well, noting that she "blames herself [for her assault] because she had been drinking." Although alcohol use incapacitated Kiara and Jennifer at the time of their assault, removing their abilities to fully consent to any sexual act, both women accepted the entirety of responsibility for their assault without holding their perpetrator accountable in any way. Victim-blaming, guilt, and shame are common reactions that sexual assault survivors

experience following their trauma incident, which may result from cultural, gendered, racialized, and/or familial messages that propagate victim-blaming.

Acts of unwanted sexual contact reported by study participants.

Sunny, a 21-year-old Digital and Broadcast Journalism major, disclosed about her sexual assault incident that occurred at a party hosted by a historically Black fraternity during her first year at UGA. Sunny shared details about her incident and her subsequent emotional reactions, following discussion between Sunny and the researcher regarding formal definitions of sexual assault:

> I feel like I was sexually assaulted. What occurred, I was with a friend [at a Black fraternity party]. And the next thing I know, I'm in the air, and this guy has his hand in my underwear and entered my body. And so, the way I got out of it, I started like, basically getting violent with him. Hitting him in the head. He put me down and then I walked away. I did not report it to the police. It was one of those like, charge it to the game. It'll never happen again to me…It didn't have a traumatic effect on me. Granted…it changed my party attire, that's for sure.

Sunny was a first-year student at the time of her reported incident and had not yet joined her sorority. Sunny has now been a member of a historically Black Greek-letter sorority at UGA for nearly a year. A noteworthy aspect of her sexual assault is that her assailant belonged to a historically Black fraternity at UGA, that Sunny now considers her "brother" fraternity.

Following this disclosure, Sunny and the researcher engaged in discussion regarding the frequency that sexual assault occurs at parties hosted by historically Black parties at UGA. The researcher experienced Sunny as fairly forthcoming in her comments pertaining to the normalization of sexual assault within the Black Greek community:

> That's something that people typically don't run around sharing. Like, oh my gosh, I was assaulted at a party! It happens so commonly, that people don't…they don't really think about it. It's just one of those, oh, this is a party foul. It's not an, oh my gosh, I was sexually assaulted! So that's how I can assume that it's certainly happened to other people in my sorority, but I don't have a story.

Camille, a 20-year-old Communication Studies major who is a member of the same historically Black sorority as Sunny, reported that she had also experienced similar forms of sexual assault at parties hosted by their brother fraternity since becoming Greek. Earlier in her interview, Camille had remarked that "if you go to a party [hosted by her brother fraternity], most likely you're gonna get picked up. Or they'll like, eat your booty, for lack of a better word. They'll bite it or whatever. Grab it and stuff like that."

Camille described these behaviors as "sexual assault in a way," but as her interview continued, the researcher experienced Camille as defensive and protective of her brother fraternity, in that Camille justified the sexually aggressive behavior of her brother fraternity as "sexy" and "funny." However, towards the end of her interview, Camille posed the question, "How do you consent to somebody biting your ass?" Camille then hesitantly stated, "So I guess I have been sexually assaulted. Dang it." Camille's seemingly dismissive response regarding sexual assault incidents that her sorority sisters, herself, and other college aged women at UGA have experienced at her brother fraternity's parties speaks to the behaviors of justification and normalization that occurs, with relation to some women's hesitancy to self-identify as sexual assault survivors.

Jennifer, Kiara, Sunny, and Camille each disclosed intimate accounts of sexual assault that have been committed against them during their undergraduate careers at UGA. Jennifer,

Kiara, and Sunny revealed details of assaults that occurred during the first semester of their first year. Jennifer provided her reflections of how the perceived naiveté of first-year female students, who are away from their hometowns often for the first time and new to the college experience, could place first-year women at risk for unwanted sexual experiences with Greek male peers:

> It's your first year. You fall into this like, Hollywood….Because UGA is a very movie-esque college. You fall into that, "oh my gosh! This is like that movie, Hollywood, college experience!" And they fall into the traps, and thirst after every Greek guy that'll pay them attention.

In recounting their sexual assault incidents, Jennifer and Kiara both emphasized their feelings of disbelief, hurt, and regret that they had become separated from their friend group at the social events where they met their perpetrators. Both survivors pondered whether or not they would have been sexually victimized had their friends not "left them alone" with their eventual perpetrators. This finding reveals the sense of protection and safety that may exist in female friends holding themselves accountable for the physical well-being of individuals in their friend group, particularly if certain individuals are incapacitated by alcohol and/or drugs and unaware of their surroundings.

African American female sorority members reported that gendered stereotypes related to male dominance and the eroticization of the female body increase their risk for sexual assault

Study participants endorsed beliefs that women are perceived as physically and emotionally weaker than men, and thus are at higher risk for sexual assault. Apple, a 20 year old Biological Science major, provided insight regarding societal stereotypes that perpetuate acts of

sexual assault against women. Pertaining to her perceived risk of victimization as a female, Apple stated the following:

> Sometimes just being small [as a female, puts her at risk for sexual victimization]. Or just seeming naïve. Or just kind of like, kind of being oblivious and just happy-go-lucky. Sometimes that can be seen as being weak because it makes you seem kind of child-like, in the sense that you don't know what you're doing or know what's going on. So then somebody could easily take advantage of you.

Apple mentioned how she views personally identifying as female, petite in stature, and presenting as youthful and "innocent" elevates her risk of being sexually assaulted.

Other study participants discussed how being perceived as the "weaker sex" has caused them and their loved ones to adopt hypervigilant behaviors to increase their personal safety as women. Danielle, a 22-year-old Digital and Broadcast Journalism major, relayed that her parents consistently express concern for Danielle's physical safety, provided her identity as a young adult female:

> Right, as a female. Always being on guard. And my parents have always told me to be aware of your surroundings, because you just never know what [may happen], you know. People are crazy, so you don't know. Especially at night. My mom's always like, "Did you get in? Did you lock the door?" You know? Just things like that, and so….You know, "Don't look down at your phone. You should be paying attention to what's around you."

Danielle conveyed her frustration that her parents iterate hypervigilant behaviors at a greater degree with her than with Danielle's younger brother, with Danielle noting that "they don't harp on him like they harp on me about it." Danielle and the researcher discussed how engaging in

hyper-vigilant behaviors diminish women's abilities to achieve optimal emotional, physical, and spiritual wellness due to this imposed need to constantly protect ourselves from violence.

The impact of gendered stereotypes as it relates to perceived dominance was a prominent point of discussion across participant interviews. Sunny remarked about the culturally accepted and upheld view that men must assume a dominant role within gendered interactions, particularly in the Southeastern United States:

> I mean it's still that dynamic of, especially in the South, men are supposed to be the dominant ones and in terms of college, from my experience and what I've seen, I hear more stories of females being sexually assaulted or just having those nights where they regret everything that happened. They've felt like, um, someone or a guy forced themselves on them. So I feel like, just being female, being in the South, I'm going to be at a higher risk.

As an African American woman born and raised in the South, Sunny acknowledged how the intersections of gender, race, and regional affiliation impacts cultural acceptance of gendered stereotypes. Considering that 11 of the 12 study participants self-identified as Christian, the researcher also speculates how gendered stereotypes of male dominance may be promulgated through Christianity and other religions, in turn increasing the incidence of sexual violence against women. The female body and its sexual organs were viewed by some study participants as a stand-alone risk factor for sexual assault. Camille stated that the eroticization of female bodies increases her risk of being sexually assaulted:

> Sometimes I feel like…I dress nice because I want to dress nice. But sometimes people might think your boob is out, as a form of, oh she's trying to fuck tonight...It's like you're

> calling for attention. People think you're calling for attention, because you're a female and the way that you dress.

Camille also acknowledges a highly prevalent form of victim-blaming based upon female dress attire. The concept of victim-blaming will be addressed in further detail by the researcher in a later portion of the results section.

Brielle, a 21 year old Public Relations and Sociology double major, addressed our society's hypocrisy regarding male and female expressions of sexuality. Brielle remarked, "Girls come out [expressing visible sexual behavior] and they're oversexualized. In most cases, they're taken as whores or sluts. The perception of them is altered. Meanwhile guys…guys are just being guys in a sense." Brielle's comments highlight how male privilege restricts sexual expression in women, as well as the destructive labels given to women who do not conform to the socially accepted image of women's sexuality as female submission and subservience towards the sexual needs of men. Apple, Danielle, Sunny, Camille, and Brielle brought attention to varying ways in which their identifying as female impacts their risk of sexual assault. Gendered stereotypes related to perceived power and dominance, practicing hypervigilance as a result of being female, the eroticization of female bodies, victim-blaming based upon dress attire, and double standards for expressed sexuality based on gender were all issues that arose in these participants' interviews.

African American female sorority members expressed that historical and modern-day traumas (i. e., the American Slave Trade, racial microaggressions, and negative racial stereotypes) increase their risk for sexual assault, while also promoting within-group protection and solidarity as minority students at a PWI

Study participants engaged in dynamic dialogue regarding the intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender and its role in the sexual victimization of African American women with membership in Greek-letter sororities at a predominantly white institution. Discussion topics that arose during participant interviews were the "Angry Black Woman" stereotype as a protective factor against sexual assault, racial microaggressions committed by White men against African American women at a PWI, perceiving the small nature of the African American student community as a protective factor against sexual assault within the African American community, and the implications of the American Slave Trade on the present-day sexual victimization of African American women. Many study participants endorsed the "Angry Black Woman" stereotype as a restrictive image where a Black woman's assertiveness is oftentimes distorted as anger, an undesirable and fear-provoking emotion, in order to maintain gendered and racialized privileges for the majority group. Apple shared her viewpoint that the Angry Black Woman stereotype may serve as a protective factor against sexual assault for African American women attending predominantly white institutions:

> African Americans have this stereotype of being kind of aggressive, and kind of angry, so honestly I feel like it makes it a little less likely, in certain situations, for somebody to do something crazy. Because they're like, oh, she's crazy. Don't mess with her. So I feel like that might happen sometimes. Because I just feel like in a community that's predominantly majority, you're going to be portrayed as a little crazy sometimes.

Apple and the researcher also discussed the complex nature of the Angry Black Woman stereotype, as we both acknowledged the deleterious impact of this image on the emotional health of African American women, but could not deny the shielding quality this stereotype can carry as it relates to protecting African American women from sexual assault.

The University of Georgia is a predominantly white institution, and as such, several study participants endorsed views that supported the small size of the African American community at UGA as a protective factor against sexual assault within the African American community. Kierra, a 21 year old Communication Studies major, revealed intriguing personal insight regarding the impact of the small size of the African American community at UGA on sexual relationships amongst this population:

> I would say, because the Black community at UGA is so small, for the most part, we do know everybody. You know everybody in your class. You know who's putting out and who's not putting out. And…..It's like, they kind of already know beforehand. The different girls, where all you have to do is say *this* and she's gonna have sex with you. Or the different girls where if you try something, nah that's not gonna happen. And again, that's just with the Black girls within the community. So if you want to have sex with a lot of people, that's your prerogative. If you don't then, they know who's not.

Kierra and the researcher processed about the role of gendered and racialized stereotypes in maintaining cultural norms within the African American community regarding individuals' sexual expression and sexual behaviors. Kierra personally felt protected from sexual assault within UGA's Black student population because she identifies as one of the Black women "where if you try something, nah that's not gonna happen." However, the researcher questions whether the Black women at UGA that Kierra grouped as "the different girls, where all you have to do is say *this* and she's gonna have sex with you" are at an elevated risk of sexual assault within the Black student body at UGA due to assumptions regarding readiness and perceived ease in engaging in sexual interactions with these women. In consideration of Kierra's additional comments "that people think that Black girls are just easier and give it up all the time," the

researcher finds herself further concerned for the physical safety of African American females who feel comfortable with exhibiting more open and visible ownership of their sexuality.

Kiara, a self-identified sexual assault survivor, expressed how her membership in a historically White sorority has involved her primarily interacting with White male peers at Greek parties and socials. Kiara relayed frustrations about the role that her race as played in her experiences of sexual victimization as an African American female with membership in a historically White sorority:

> You're just the odd one out. You know? And…I feel like there's more pressure because people see you, or when you go out, you stand out. You're easily seen. And I think it can definitely put you at risk [for sexual assault].

Kiara also shared about her personal experiences of being objectified and eroticized by White male peers as an African American female who is a member of a historically White sorority at UGA:

> Anytime I go downtown. They're like, you're the only Black girl I've been with. Or I've always wanted to be with a Black girl. I'm like, I don't care! I'm just trying to have a good time. I don't like hearing that. I don't care that I'm the only person that you've seen that has caramel-colored skin…But it just seems to be something that people in this area are just so fascinated with. "Let me get with a Beyoncé," ya know? "I've always heard that Black girls were good. Oh, they're so good at this. Oh, her skin"…You know, it's not stuff that you want to hear. Because sometimes they like stick around, or [say] "let me get that." Or, "I'm gonna go back now, I've had my fun."

Kiara revealed how her sexual experiences with her White male peers at UGA have occasionally been invalidating due to verbal microaggressions Kiara's White male partners have committed

against her following their sexual interactions. Kiara disclosed that "sometimes you feel like a little trophy" although "you don't like being this exotic thing for a night." Jennifer also remarked about her experiences with White male peers fetishizing Black female bodies, particularly when Jennifer has been socializing with her sorority sisters in bars or nightclubs located in Downtown Athens:

> Because when we're downtown, and they're drunk, they're like, "Oh my god! You're so beautiful! Do you have a boyfriend?!" But when we're on campus and they're sober, they're not speaking. So it's clearly like a…I would say a fantasy. "That's an attractive woman and she's not White. I wonder what it's like?" Um, and they're also very aggressive when they're drunk. Extremely aggressive.

Study participants also expressed concerns about the impact of negative racial stereotypes on the perceived credibility and trustworthiness of African American sexual assault survivors. Olivia, a 21 year old Public Relations major, conveyed her feelings that her ethnicity would be used to discredit or reject her trauma experience if she was sexually assaulted and chose to report the incident:

> I feel like it [race] would hurt my chances. That, especially if it [the assault] was by an athlete or something, that someone would say I'm just trying to retaliate, or I'm just trying to make money…or get attention or something. And I do think that my skin color would play a part in that…that I wouldn't be listened to as much, as say, a White person.

Sunny indicated that the hypersexualized portrayal of African American women on social media may increase this population's risk for sexual victimization and provide individuals with erroneous justifications to validate sexual assaults committed against African American women:

> OK, so on one hand, I would think it increases it [risk for sexual assault]. Because of the different stereotypes that being an African American woman entails. Especially like, how we look in the media. How we look on Instagram. Videos that I've seen…Just as an outsider, feeling like on Instagram, and World Star, and Vine, I would think that…it shouldn't be that hard to have sex with a Black woman.

The historical oppression and abuse of African American women during the American Slave Trade was interwoven amongst many participant interviews when discussing the various cultural stereotypes that have perpetuated the modern-day hyper-sexualization, as well as de-sexualization, of African American women in the United States. Sunshine, a 22 year old Digital and Broadcast Journalism major, expressed this sentiment during her interview:

> Sometimes my brain goes back to the slavery days. And how Black women were just kind of treated as meat sometimes. And also, really just for labor, to whip, [and] to work like a slave horse. Um…But….Especially the meat part. Sometimes the masters would have sex with them. Just to do it.

The historical enslavement, hyper-sexualization, de-sexualization, and objectification of African American women must be considered when exploring cultural movements to minimize or invalidate the sexual assault experiences of this population, particularly when naysayers are supporting the "she wanted it and/or asked for it" rape script centered in victim-blaming that is oftentimes attributed to sexual assault survivors.

Kiara revealed about her experiences with racial microaggressions from White male peers prior to and following sexual encounters. Another participant shared her response to racial microaggressions that she has experienced with White male peers in her social group. Leah, a 22

year old Economics major, revealed about an instance where she felt empowered to transform a racial microaggression that she experienced into a learning experience for the aggressor:

> I haven't really dated any White guys at any point at UGA. I have a few friends and that kind of thing. And I talk to them, and they'll be like, "Oh, you're pretty for a Black girl. Or they'll be like, "Oh I don't really date Black girls, but you're so cute!" And I'll be like….I don't try to do the deliberate confrontation. Like, "what does that mean?" type thing…Because people get real defensive when it seems like you're trying to attack, like, come back at them. So I may come back like, "Oh, you're cute for a White boy." They'll be like, "Oh, I don't get it." And I'll be like, "Exactly, I don't get it." I'll do that. And then it's still a teachable moment, while being less of a confrontation. And we can spin it into laughter and still teach them.

African American female sorority members discussed victim-blaming based upon sexual assault survivors' dress attire, perceived sexual history, relationship status, sorority membership, and substance use

The majority of study participants endorsed victim-blaming based upon a woman's dress attire as a prevalent aspect of rape culture within the college setting and society at large. Kiara shared that her sorority has implemented a national campaign against sexual assault within their membership. However, Kiara expressed dissatisfaction about her sorority's approach to sexual assault prevention due to what Kiara perceives as messages that support victim-blaming and body shaming of female sorority members:

> Sometimes they approach it in a weird way. They're like, "don't dress a certain way" or "don't act a certain way" and that's how they approach it. And I don't know necessarily if that's the right way to do it because they're just saying…If you wear anything

> revealing, then you're asking for it. And it's your fault. And sometimes I don't respect that…I would rather they provide help. And I think there probably are some avenues that they [the sorority] have provided where you can talk to people about it. I'm not certain or aware about it, but I know that I've heard just like, presenting yourself a certain way, or not putting stuff over social media is the only way…Or it's a way to protect yourself, and I disagree with that.

Kiara revealed feeling discontent and dissatisfied with her sorority's national programming regarding sexual assault awareness and prevention because of its focus on altering sorority women's attire and behavior in order to protect themselves against sexual assault. As a self-identified sexual assault survivor, Kiara emphasized that her sorority should aspire to provide emotional support to sorority members who come forth as survivors, and place responsibility for sexual assault on the perpetrators and not the survivors.

The theme of victim-blaming based upon dress attire was consistently discussed throughout the participants' interviews. Brielle stated that "people always say if you wear things that hug your curves or are not appropriate…then you're asking for it." Kierra initiated conversation regarding victim-blaming within the context of costume-themed parties hosted by historically Black fraternities both at UGA and across the nation. Kierra provided her insight about how a sexual assault survivor, whose incident may have occurred at a costume-themed Greek party, may be discredited or blamed for her assault:

> You know, the themed parties. People don't wear clothes to those themed parties! So even if you went to Pajama Jam, and you just had on a bra and panties….They'll be like yeah. You're just throwing it out there.

Sunshine echoed the sentiment that rape culture supports victim-blaming by falsely emphasizing the supposed role of a woman's dress attire and behavior in her sexual assault:

> Stereotypes of women asking for it, with the clothing that they wear. Your interactions with a boy. He may think you're flirting. And asking for it, yet again, when that may just be your personality.

Kiara, Brielle, and Sunshine each used the phrase "you're asking for it" when imparting their observations about victim-blaming that is based upon a sexual assault survivor's dress attire or behavior. The study participants' usage of the expression "you're asking for it," as a woman who chooses to dress or behave "a certain way," perpetuates the self-blaming messages that myriad sexual assault survivors have internalized to the detriment of their emotional and physical well-being.

Olivia discussed how the term "sororstitute," which combines the words "sorority" and "prostitute," espouses a demeaning stereotype intended to encompass the social behavior of sorority members. Olivia explained her views regarding how the "sororstitute" stereotype may impact rates of sexual assault against sorority members at UGA:

> Well, going back to the stereotypes, being called like a "sororstitute." I know a lot of, well some, men think that "oh she's in a sorority. She's just a party girl…She's probably having sex with anything and anyone. So why can't I take advantage of her? She's probably used to it."

Brielle also alluded to the "sororstitute" stereotype, stating that some individuals may invalidate a survivor's sexual assault due to her alcohol use as a Black sorority member. Brielle remarked that this label "opens up the conversations, the comments, to [people] being like, oh well I'm pretty sure she was drunk. That's how sorority girls are. That's how Black females are."

One of the study participants implicitly supported the silencing of sexual assault survivors, specifically within the context of interpersonal and relationship violence. The researcher queried study participant Apple as to what her hypothetical response would be if one of her sorority sisters were to disclose to Apple that she had been sexually assaulted by her male romantic partner. Apple stated the following:

> I guess my opinion is…Let's say it was a situation, like with a boyfriend. I just feel like certain types of sexual assault are more, I guess, not necessarily worse, but more important for somebody to be put away for, because like, if it's violent, then I feel like, it's a bigger…I guess it's more important to report that type of thing. But if it's not a violent situation, I feel like that's something that's just needing to be handled. That's when you just need to worry about repairing from it. Is it something…If someone's just snatching girls off the street, I feel like they should go to jail. But if it's somebody's boyfriend, and it was a one-time situation where he messed up, then that just needs to be fixed in a counseling type of way.

Apple delineated a hierarchical view regarding sexual assault and which types of incidents she deemed as necessitating a survivor speaking out against her perpetrator or reporting her assault. Apple appeared to view sexual assault that was committed by a stranger as more worthy of reporting than those crimes perpetrated by close acquaintances or romantic partners. This finding was supportive of an additional comment made by Apple, in which she shared that "the first thing [she] would think of as the rapist is the creeper in the shadows downtown or something like that…[because] you're not going to think of someone who you know by name." Sorority members who hold similar beliefs as Apple may inadvertently shame and silence members of their sorority who are sexually victimized by an intimate partner or otherwise close acquaintance.

This information is particularly alarming since research has shown that the majority of women who survive sexual assault were victimized by an individual known to the survivor.

Sexual assault survivors who were under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time of their assault self-blame and internalize feelings of guilt regarding their trauma at alarming rates. The immeasurable shame that these survivors experience deters many of them from ever disclosing or reporting their sexual assault. Rape culture removes the responsibility for sexual assault from the perpetrator, and instead holds the survivor wholly accountable for her traumatic incident. This culturally sustained message is especially adhered to when the survivor shares that she was using alcohol or drugs at the time of her assault. Kierra responded with the following when the researcher asked her how members of the Black Greek community at UGA may respond to a Black sorority member who disclosed about a sexual assault committed against her while she was intoxicated:

> Because they could be like, how could you allow yourself to get that drunk? Some people are probably like, did you know his history? Or did you know that he's done this, this, and this with how many other people? And you're dumb enough to fall into that too?

Sexual assault survivor Jennifer revealed that she continues to blame herself for her assault because of her alcohol use at the time of her incident:

> Um, part of me still kind of self-blames just because I was underage and I was drinking. And I should have been more cognizant of you know, you just got to school, but you don't know anyone that well…I will say I should've been more careful and made better decisions, but I do realize that just because you make a poor decision doesn't mean someone should take advantage of it.

Rape culture maintains the misguided notion that a survivor was "asking for it" if she was using alcohol or drugs at the time of her assault. Victim-blaming that is rooted in the survivors' substance use during her trauma has silenced countless sexual assault survivors, similar to Jennifer, and hindered them from reporting their assault or seeking help to advance their healing process.

African American female sorority members discussed how their risk of being sexually assaulted is impacted by cultural norms that control sexual expression across genders, as well as sexualized stereotypes reportedly accepted by fraternity men

College-aged men without Greek membership.

Several study participants described personal experiences where they were approached by a same-aged male peer expressing romantic or sexual interest in them. Myriad participants expressed irritation and frustration as a reaction to unwanted romantic or sexual advances from men, especially when a man continued their pursuit despite the participants' verbal or non-verbal cues of demonstrating disinterest or annoyance with the pursuant. Leah endorsed this sentiment while also sharing her opinion that men are indiscriminate in their romantic and sexual advances towards women:

> Men shoot at anything that moves, and if it moves nicely, it's worse. I feel as though...I'm a lot more easily noticed and more quickly noticed. And sometimes that makes me uncomfortable. Especially when I'm just out at the store, or walking to the movies. And someone's like "excuse me, can I talk to you? Can I talk to you?" No, you cannot talk to me. I'm clearly on a mission. I'm at the store. I'm here for eggs, not men. I'm here to watch a movie. But like I said, guys don't care. Guys will try, either way.

Jennifer echoed this sentiment, remarking that "guys will go as far as you let them."

Leah, Jennifer, and other study participants discussed their varying perceptions of men's respect for women's personal boundaries as it relates to romantic or sexual desire. While Leah supported the belief that some men will aggress against a woman's physical and emotional boundaries despite expressed disinterest on her part, Jennifer maintained that a man will honor a woman's expressed boundaries. The researcher noted that intoxication by alcohol and drugs removes a woman's ability to verbally express her personal boundaries or consent to any romantic and sexual advances from a man. Therefore, upholding that "guys will go as far as you let them" should be considered a moot point when a woman's ability to consent has been deteriorated by substance use.

Study participants discussed their views about the differing expectations and limitations for male and female sexual expression that are sustained through cultural norms. Brielle iterated her belief that her college male peers are permitted greater levels of sexual freedom than she and her college female colleagues. Brielle also expressed that college aged men possess the privilege to engage in behaviors, such as making public jokes about sex, without judgment or ridicule by way of derogatory, sex-related name-calling as women may be for engaging in similar acts:

> I think guys, especially in college, find it humorous, and sometimes in their nature, to make jokes about sex…especially to girls. And sometimes girls will react positively towards it or they're always open to talk about it. And sometimes girls will respond negatively to it. They're just like, "oh you're a prude [or] you're just kind of overthinking it," and things like that.

Brielle and the researcher also processed about the variance in accepted sexual behavior committed by men and women via social media, following Brielle's disclosure about a female peer being labeled as a "slut and a whore" due to posting a sexually explicit image on her

Instagram. Brielle expressed disgust and aggravation that one of her male acquaintances posted the same image onto his Instagram the same day as her female friend, but Brielle's male friend did not receive the same derogatory remarks.

Black men without membership in a Greek-letter fraternity.

As self-identified African American women, several of the study participants revealed their personal experiences with receiving romantic and sexual advances from African American men. Many participants voiced feeling as though African American men are more direct and forceful than White men in their sexual advances towards African American women. Participants such as Sunny attributed this perceived racial difference to African American men's comfort level in conversing and interacting with African American women due to their shared cultural backgrounds. Leah was especially vocal about her experiences with receiving romantic and sexual advances from her African American male counterparts:

> I feel like Black men are a lot more aggressive and more deliberate when it comes to their approach to women, so that dynamic kind of makes it uncomfortable and more tense. [It] makes me feel less secure as far as when I'm having those interactions. It can escalate very quickly if I don't say the right thing, the right way. If I say it the right way, it's over. If I say no, it's how I said no, and this and that. So I feel like it's a more delicate balance when you're interacting [with Black men].

Study participant Camille also described her experiences with African American males demonstrating greater audacity when expressing romantic or sexual interest in her as an African American female. With regards to her male counterparts, Camille stated that "they're more prone to talk to you if you walk by. 'Oh, baby. What's your number?' Grabbing your hand. Or, 'oh you got a fat ass.' Something like that. Sometimes they'll grab it as you're walking past."

Men with membership in a Greek-letter fraternity.

As self-identified African American sorority members, study participants shared their viewpoints regarding the sexual behavior of fraternity men and how their social interactions with fraternity men may place them at risk for sexual assault. Kiara reported about her experiences at UGA's fraternity houses and described the manipulative strategies she perceived fraternity men used in order to have sex with Kiara and her sorority members while visiting the fraternity houses. In Kiara's experiences with visiting fraternity houses, fraternity men may use a "divide and conquer" approach in selecting sorority members with whom they want to have sex:

> In my experience, the girls will come over. And then they'll [fraternity men] try to snuggle up to them and make them comfortable. Normally what happens is like…everyone's coupled up, and then they just sort of start touching and girls will disappear and whatnot…Then all of the sorority girls are kind of trapped there…and then they can be made to feel completely uncomfortable. Because they're alone and maybe there's another fraternity brother that this sorority girl was just getting *no* good vibes from but he's majorly hitting on her, and the other girls are occupied…It breaks up the sisterhood because the girls are occupied with different dudes. So they're not thinking about individual girls who are stuck there and feeling super awkward while everyone else is making out or disappearing. You're just like, "I just want to go home." But everyone's in the same car. You have to request, "oh can we leave?" And then you have the potential that your sorority sister doesn't want to leave. Or she just can be like, "well yeah, we can head out." I think that's how typically fraternity brothers would approach hooking up with sorority women. Breaking it up and then just being like, "well you're alone, and I'm alone, so let's make this happen." Even though you could be like "meh…maybe not."

Kiara brought attention to the unwanted romantic and sexual attention that some sorority members may face in situations similar to this one described by Kiara. The researcher found herself acknowledging that while some sorority members may genuinely enjoy "hooking up" with fraternity members in these orchestrated settings, social situations in which fraternity men facilitate separations among sorority members who are visiting their fraternity house removes a sense of agency from sorority members who do not wish to participate in romantic or sexual activities. The subset of sorority members who are unwillingly placed in romantic or sexual situations with fraternity members in this manner may feel socially pressured to consent to acts they would not otherwise engage in.

Study participants who identified as members of historically Black sororities at UGA consistently shared concerns that hypersexualized stereotypes adopted by members of certain historically Black fraternities put them at risk for being sexually assaulted by these specific male peers. The historically Black fraternities that were most discussed by study participants were Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., whose members are commonly referred to as "Ques," and Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., whose members are typically called "Kappas." Sunshine described how several of her Black male friends transformed their personality and assumed many of the stereotypes attributed to their historically Black fraternity after becoming a member of their respective organizations:

> So Ques. Nasty dogs. Walking around campus, doing [flicks her tongue around]. Who are you?! That was *not* you last year! But the Kappas. You know, smooth, sexual, I guess. Sigmas and Alphas, they don't really have the sexual connotations to them…But I guess just being in Greek Life, they get that confidence as well, that they can get any girl and

> talk to them any kind of way. I have a best friend who crossed [joined a fraternity] and his whole mindset switched.

Sunshine expressed that while members of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. and Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. have been stereotypically identified as exhibiting more explicit sexual gestures and behaviors than other historically Black fraternities, that all of her Black male acquaintances who have joined a fraternity have assumed greater boldness in their sexual approach with their female peers.

Study participants consistently illustrated that members of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. and Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. are attributed hypersexualized stereotypes, with the "Ques" being depicted as overly aggressive and disrespectful of women's physical boundaries, and the "Kappas" being portrayed as seductive and suave in their sexual interactions with women. Apple expressed how Black fraternity members' assumptions of these hypersexualized stereotypes could increase their probability of perpetrating an act of sexual violence. Apple provided her views regarding the behavioral implications of the aforementioned stereotypes, with respect to members of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.:

> Fraternity "A" might feel like they're like the ladies' men…and think that all girls just really want to be with them. And that's not even necessarily the case. And women should just bow at their feet. That's the stereotype. The fairy tale idea. I feel like if they take that to heart…If they're throwing a party at their house…If they're really intoxicated, or high, or whatever they are…If they take that to heart, they could end up sexually assaulting somebody, without really necessarily meaning to.

Apple described how substance use by fraternity members at their hosted parties could lead to the possible sexual victimization of women attending their social events, due to the fraternity

members' acting upon the hypersexualized stereotypes that are associated with their organization.

Apple expressed similar concerns about the assumption of hypersexualized stereotypes, regarding members of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.:

> I guess that the brother fraternity of my sorority, in a sense, might have certain stereotypes. I do feel like if they embrace the stereotypes that are just out there in the world, they might feel more aggressive towards women. And they might do things, like I said, if they're intoxicated, or if they're just not in their right state of mind…They might not be seriously thinking that they're doing anything aggressive, but they actually might be doing some things that are aggressive and offensive to women…I do feel like that [sexual assault] could happen. I feel like it does happen. And I don't think that's OK. But I do feel like that's a commonplace thing that's not talked about or thought about. Because I don't think those stereotypes should be internalized. It should be something that people say, oh yeah, that's a stereotype. But this is not how it really is. I don't think it should ever actually be that way.

Camille, who is a member of the same sorority as Apple, expressed that she has "some amazing bruhs, but the stereotype that they have is…*they're nasty*. Like, they don't give a fuck about anything." The study participants reiterated that the hypersexualized stereotypes that have been attributed to the men of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. and Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. should not be generalized to imply that all members of these two fraternities exhibit sexually inappropriate behavior, nor do all members engage in acts that encompass sexual violence against women. It is also imperative to consider the impact of historical oppression, prejudice, and the culturally-normed hypersexualization of African American men in the United States on

Black fraternity members' assumptions of hypersexualized stereotypes. The researcher hypothesizes that throughout American history, African American men potentially learned that there was greater physical and emotional safety in asserting power and privilege within their sexual interactions with African American women, due to the oppression and cultural subjugation that they experienced in their work or educational pursuits as a result of institutionalized racism. The researcher questions the impact of slavery and modern-day racism on the ways in which African American males, including members of historically Black fraternities, seek power and privilege in consideration of explicit racism and racial microaggressions endured by this population as minority students at a predominantly white institution and as a members of society at large.

African American female sorority members expressed conflicting feelings regarding acquaintance rape, hazing, and interpersonal and relationship violence, in reaction to sexual assault vignettes presented to them by the researcher

The researcher created four brief vignettes that depicted different forms of sexual violence as defined by the CDC (2015). The characters and plots portrayed in the sexual assault vignettes were all fictional in nature and not based upon any personal or clinical encounters experienced by the researcher. The sexual assault vignettes were presented to study participants at the start of their interview, as a way to initiate dialogue regarding potential sexual assault situations that participants may encounter as African American women with Greek membership at a PWI. The vignettes illustrated the following types of sexual violence (CDC, 2015)—1) completed penetration of a victim, 2) attempted penetration of a victim, 3) unwanted sexual contact, and 4) noncontact unwanted sexual experiences. Study participants provided insight about the probability of certain sexual violence situations, while also expressing disbelief about

the inclusion of certain incidents within the definition of sexual violence. Sunny remarked about the normalization of sexual assault within the African American Greek community:

> Sexual assault is so broad, and there's so many different…things that could happen. There's so many different examples. I mean, I think that it happens so much that people…They don't even think about it anymore. They've watered it down…They're desensitized. And they've watered it down to, "oh, that's just fun and games," or something like that. And it's like, no, you're actually being inappropriate.

Myriad study participants echoed Sunny's sentiments, regarding the cultural acceptance of certain forms of sexual violence within the African American Greek community. The following sections will demonstrate the diverse range of participants' reactions to the sexual assault vignettes.

Rachel and Dante: Completed, forced penetration of a victim.

This particular sexual assault vignette sparked varying responses, including shock that Rachel was assaulted by a romantic interest and close acquaintance, to disgust for Dante's use of force in his maltreatment of Rachel. Danielle expressed feelings of sympathy for Rachel, with a special acknowledgment of the additional emotional distress that Rachel may endure following her assault, by having known her perpetrator:

> Yeah, I feel like it would kind of be like, a range of emotions. That's how I would imagine it to be. You don't know what to do. You're in a state of shock. It's just…I would imagine everything to be moving so quickly. That you wouldn't be able to react. Because you know it's always so easy to say, "If it was me, I would do *this*." But you know, until you actually get in the situation, you don't really know what you would do. So, I would imagine that she was feeling all kinds of emotions like shock, anger, sadness,

> confusion. Especially if that was someone that she liked. And especially, when you like someone, you hold them in higher regard than someone else.

Danielle validated that sexual assault survivors may experience an array of emotions simultaneously during their trauma incident and in the moments immediately following their assault. Danielle also expressed how survivors may feel physically and emotionally immobilized during their sexual assault, with consideration of the unexpected nature of being victimized by a trusted friend, acquaintance, or romantic interest.

Rachel and Dante's story evoked powerful discussion amongst study participants due to the projective nature of the sexual assault vignettes. Several study participants perceived that Rachel experienced a tremendous sense of disappointment and betrayal following her sexual assault because of Dante's disregard for Rachel's emotional and physical well-being, in the moments immediately following her assault. Brielle reiterated this response, while also identifying which specific aspects of Rachel and Dante's vignette qualified their story as one depicting sexual assault:

> And her nice kiss to Dante to, I guess, thank him and open it up for them to be in a relationship turned into her getting raped. And it's obviously rape. Because she says no, and at the end of it, he didn't even say anything. He got dressed and left. So for me, on my side, he knows what he did was wrong.

Sunshine also identified Rachel's victimization as rape, nothing that Dante "forced himself on her…she said no…it wasn't consensual at all…and he put himself inside of her."

Cara and Nick: Attempted, forced penetration of a victim.

This particular vignette illustrated sexual assault as a form of relationship violence, and as such, evoked an array of responses from study participants regarding sex and consent within

the confines of a committed, long-term relationship. Numerous study participants shared that they did not consider the incident depicted between Cara and Nick as a type of sexual assault, because the two were romantically dating. Camille was avidly opposed to calling the scene shown in this vignette as sexual assault, due to Cara and Nick identifying as romantic partners, and because Nick did not complete penetration:

> I don't really see how that's sexual assault, because he stopped…Of course it isn't rape. But at the same time, what does she have to consent to? That is her boyfriend. I mean, not saying that he can take advantage of her in any way, but….What's wrong with initiating it?

Camille's question regarding the necessity of sexual consent within romantic relationships generated discussion between her and the researcher regarding her viewpoint that sexual assault cannot happen between romantic partners. Camille was resistant to the notion that a male romantic partner must seek consent from his female partner prior to each shared sexual encounter. The researcher shared with Camille that upholding beliefs that deny sexual assault as an occurrence within romantic relationships perpetuates violence against women and invalidates the experiences of women who have survived this form of sexual assault. Camille continued to express an unwillingness in labeling the depicted incident between Cara and Nick as sexual assault, following the researcher's brief provision of psychoeducation regarding the importance of consent across all sexual encounters, including those encounters that occur within the context of committed, long-term romantic relationships.

Several study participants endorsed sharing religious beliefs in relation to sexual abstinence that were similar to those portrayed by Cara's character in this vignette. Study participants expressed that they would experience feelings of betrayal and fear, if placed in a

comparable situation in which they believed that their morals and physical bodies were being violated. Sunny described how she would respond if she were to experience an attempted sexual assault as shown through the story of Cara and Nick:

> I would instantly be fearful of him. Because it's like, we've discussed this. We've been dating for this long, and for you to try me like this. And then for you to force yourself on me, it's kind of like, whoa. Something in your mind is not clicking. And the next time this happens, I may not be so lucky. So it would be that instant fear. I have to stop messing with you. And I mean, granted, I know he'll probably try to come back. And I know people always think about the past…[but] if I were in this relationship, more than likely, I wouldn't go back…Instantly, I would just be so afraid of him, so that would kind of ruin the relationship. I don't know who you are anymore.

Sunny shared that having a romantic partner attempt a sexual act with her, with knowledge of her desire to sexually abstain, would serve as an unpardonable breach of trust. Camille's implicit acceptance of nonconsensual sex between romantic partners serves as a contrast against Sunny's expressed condemnation for a romantic partner who would defy her established physical and emotional boundaries.

Jasmine and Larissa: Unwanted sexual contact.

The story of Jasmine and Larissa fueled dialogue across study participants regarding the implementation of physical hazing within historically African American Greek-letter sororities. Amongst the four sexual assault vignettes created by the researcher, this specific vignette provoked the greatest amount of discussion across study participants. Jasmine and Larissa's story also induced the widest range of responses from study participants, with participants' endorsing beliefs that stretched across the spectrum of acceptance and intolerance, with respect to physical

hazing within the context of African American Greek-letter sororities. Jennifer expressed her disapproval of physical hazing in sorority life, with particular disdain for the sexual nature of the hazing incident depicted in Jasmine and Larissa's vignette:

> There are other ways to foster sisterhood than beating somebody's tail with a piece of wood…I'm a heterosexual woman, so for me to be touched in a sexual way by another female, that's gross. Like, eww. And for her to have to strip naked. That's not necessary.

Jennifer shared that as a self-identified heterosexual woman, enduring unwanted sexual contact from an individual of the same gender would cause her to experience additional emotional distress following an incident of this nature. Jennifer's remarks caused the researcher to question whether self-identified African American, heterosexual women may normalize or accept unwanted sexual contact from individuals they may visibly identify as male with greater frequency, than they would if their assailant was visibly of the same gender.

Several study participants reported that one's desire to join a historically African American Greek-letter sorority may cause a woman to loosen or completely dissolve her physical boundaries in order to gain acceptance into the sorority. In the following excerpt, Camille articulated her perception of the reasons that African American women may extend their boundaries in an attempt to join their beloved sorority:

> When you've wanted something for so long, your limits change. Like, if you really want it that bad, you would do everything…Certain things you allow to fly…For me, I would do a lot to be in my sorority. Because it's just love, right?

While the researcher experienced dissonance about Camille's description of physical hazing as a demonstration of "love" within the African American Greek community, she acknowledged that the generational glorification of physical hazing as a normalized aspect of a sorority's

membership intake process impacts the views of women such as Camille, despite the fact that all historically African American Greek-letter sororities uphold anti-hazing national policies.

Sunshine also brought attention to the power dynamics that are evoked during hazing between current sorority members and those interested in joining sororities, sharing that "when you are in that situation, it's intimidating. Even speaking out…is scary. You don't want to go against authority." The implementation of fear and forced respect within the confines of hazing in African American Greek sororities may cause some African American women to consent to certain physical or sexual acts, which they may not consent to otherwise. In addition, the power differentials that are sometimes present between sorority members and prospective members may deter African American women who survive forms of hazing and sexual assault within Greek Life from reporting incidents to authorities. Apple hypothesized that a cultural acceptance of corporal punishment within the African American community may impact the tolerance of physical hazing within the Greek community:

> I guess in a logical way you can kind of understand the whole paddling thing, if you grew up in an African American home and had butt whoopings. I guess you could kind of parallel it, in a way, to make it sort of seem right-ish in your head.

Bethany and Marcus: Noncontact unwanted sexual experience.

Study participants repeatedly referred to Marcus's behavior of showing filmed pornography to his sorority sisters as a joke, while also acknowledging feelings of disrespect had they themselves been placed in a situation similar to Bethany's. Kierra expressed that "even though it was a joke, it was a crude joke. A horrible joke…and it's not funny if everybody doesn't enjoy it." Many study participants endorsed that if placed in a similar situation to Bethany, where Bethany and her sorority sisters were exposed to filmed pornography without

their consent, that they would have immediately left Marcus's home just as Bethany did. Leah shared that she would have not only removed herself and her sorority sisters from Marcus's home, but she would have also verbally addressed Marcus's violation of her physical boundaries through an in-person conversation:

> I would have probably said something the next day. I feel like in that moment, I would want to just leave because it would be uncomfortable for me and my sisters. So I would leave and just talk about it with him the next day. Say I really didn't appreciate that. I feel really disrespected.

Although most study participants expressed disgust or disbelief that a member of a brother fraternity would show filmed pornography in her presence, and without her consent, myriad study participants communicated surprise and a hesitancy to label the incident depicted in Bethany and Marcus's vignette as a form of sexual assault. Many study participants echoed Camille's declaration that "you don't think of TV or showing of a video as sexual assault."

Use of force.

Participant discussion pertaining to the sexual assault vignettes uncovered participants' beliefs regarding what constitutes sexual assault, that also demonstrated the restrictive nature of participants' internalized rape scripts. Two-thirds of the study participants clearly labeled Rachel and Dante's vignette as a sexual assault, reportedly due to the presence of physical force in the sexual act depicted within that particular narrative. Sunny remarked that "the whole forcefulness in the beginning, and Rachel's immediate denial of him [Dante], and him proceeding after that. That for me, was the whole rape scenario." Kiara mirrored Sunny's sentiments regarding the use of force in Dante's illustrated assault of Rachel, with Kiara stating that "the way that the boyfriend approached [Rachel] at the end in forcing himself onto her was definitely not OK." In

reaction to Rachel and Dante's vignette, Danielle also emphasized that "someone forcing themselves onto you, and that's something you don't want to be a part of, isn't OK."

Acquaintance rape.

Dialogue regarding Cara and Nick's vignette highlighted study participants' uniform hesitancy to label the incident illustrated in this story as sexual assault. Study participants consistently expressed that Cara and Nick's status as romantic partners in a committed, long-term relationship created difficulty in their willingness to describe the unwanted sexual experience that occurred between Cara and Nick as a sexual assault. In addition, study participants disputed the validity of labeling Cara and Nick's situation as a form of sexual assault because Nick did not complete sexual penetration of Cara in the vignette. None of the 12 study participants categorized the incident depicted between Cara and Nick as sexual assault.

Following her reading of Cara and Nick's story, Apple shared that one of her sorority sisters was reportedly sexually assaulted by an ex-boyfriend. Apple disclosed that her challenge with initially labeling Cara and Nick's situation as sexual assault, was informed by her experience as a confidante for her sorority sister who was victimized in a similar way:

> Because it was her ex-boyfriend, who at one point, she was consensually sexually involved with. After they weren't together [anymore], a situation came up…Long story short, he probably raped her. It's just hard for her…Like, she never felt comfortable to report it…This was probably about a year ago. And I still don't think that she's reported it. And I don't think she's going to. Just because, the fact that it's somebody that she knew really, really well. It's somebody that she dated. And I remember her saying that she didn't think that anybody would believe her because it was her ex-boyfriend. So…I

> feel like he could…If they were to make a case about it, I could see him saying things like, "well, it was consensual. Well, we had sex before."

After Apple explained the parallels between her response to Cara and Nick's story, and her sorority sister's experience of acquaintance rape, Apple divulged that she doubted the validity of her sorority sister's claim that she was sexually assaulted by her ex-boyfriend when Apple's sorority sister first disclosed to her about the incident. Apple and the researcher processed her feelings of guilt and shame in questioning her sorority's sister report of sexual assault. Apple and the researcher also engaged in dialogue regarding how victim-blaming and invalidating survivors of acquaintance rape similar to Apple's sorority sister can lead to deleterious emotional consequences for the survivor.

Hazing.

The sexual assault vignette that featured Jasmine and Larissa induced polarized views regarding the acceptance of physical hazing in Greek-letter sororities. In addition, this particular vignette also evoked conversation about the impact of perceived power differentials between current sorority members and prospective sorority members in the perpetuation of physical hazing within various Greek-letter sororities. Several study participants also endorsed that if they endured an unwanted sexual experience similar to Jasmine's, that they would not have labeled the incident as sexual assault. Rather, these study participants expressed that they would have excused Larissa's boundary violation as a one-time incident, and not report it, with hopes that they would not be subjected to this form of sexual assault again. Danielle revealed her views regarding the reasons that some survivors of unwanted sexual contact, such as physical and sexual hazing in sorority life, may minimalize the emotional and physical harm associated with their trauma experience:

> I could imagine her [Jasmine] probably being uncomfortable, but also nervous or unsure if she could say something. Considering like, people always hear what they think a [sorority membership intake] process is. So maybe she was like, well maybe this is just part of it, so it'll just be once, or something like that. And so, of course you never know what to expect. So maybe she just thought, that's just what it is…Because you don't know. So I'm trying to think back to the first day. I don't think that I would have been able to be like, I don't like that. Because you're already feeling so many other emotions, that it's just like, OK. It's just only once.

Danielle's disclosure about her implicit acceptance of inappropriate sexual contact within the context of physical hazing potentially mirrors the lived experiences of some African American sorority women who have rationalized the legitimacy of being subjected to unwanted sexual contact during their sorority membership intake process.

African American female sorority members defined sexual consent as individuals providing verbal and/or non-verbal consent, while not intoxicated via alcohol or drugs, and emphasized that open and honest communication about sexual expectations and physical boundaries is critical between all sexual and romantic partners

The researcher requested that each study participant share an operationalized definition of consent as it relates to their sexual encounters. The general consensus across study participants' definitions of sexual consent was that an individual cannot provide consent to any sexual act if they are using alcohol or drugs when someone is attempting to initiate sex with them. Through providing her definition of consent, Sunny emphasized the importance of a person being verbally and mentally coherent prior to giving their consent to any sexual act:

> If the person's not in their right mind. If they can't give you the yes, without stumbling, without slurring. You can see it in their eyes. And you know, [there's] so many songs about drunk texting or whatever. It may seem like it's more fun, but you never want to end up in that whole regretting situation, because your mind was altered by substances and things like that. So….Sober. To be safe, no drinks, no drugs.

Sunny also recognized that the music industry has supported the release of songs that disseminate messages that reinforce the acceptance of actions such as texting while using alcohol. African American women who are texting romantic and sexual partners while they are intoxicated may agree to engage in sexual acts or provide their partner with sexually explicit pictures, when they may not have done so had they been sober.

Jennifer also introduced the notion that an individual must be "mentally capable in that [they] don't have any serious [intellectual] disabilities" in order to consent to a sexual encounter. Jennifer and the researcher briefly discussed the potential implications of a definition of consent that essentially excluded individuals with cognitive disabilities from participating in consensual sex. Jennifer and the researcher did not arrive at a conclusion regarding the nuances involved in establishing sexual consent with individuals with cognitive disabilities. However, both were in agreement that safeguards should be established to ensure that this population is protected from sexual assault as individuals with cognitive disabilities may be viewed as vulnerable targets by sexual assault perpetrators.

Several study participants also discussed consent within the framework of long-term romantic and sexual relationships. Kiara revealed that she has engaged in sex with her long-term male romantic partner without providing full consent due to her desire to fulfill her partner's

sexual desires. Kiara remarked about the necessity of romantic partners providing and soliciting consent between one another prior to engaging in any sexual acts:

> This [consent] even applies to people who are in relationships. For instance, maybe yeah you guys were having sex and stuff, but one day you just don't want to. But your significant other does, and you're just like, ugh, well, I'll just lay down here and just figure out. And he'll have fun, but you're not really into it.

Kiara's experience of not fully consenting prior to each sexual encounter with her romantic partner may mirror the sexual experiences of myriad other African American women whose fear of disappointing their partner, and potentially creating tension within their romantic relationship, encourages them to engage in sex with their partner despite their lack of interest in sex.

Leah also expressed that partners who are sexually involved should consent to any new sexual acts that a partner may want to incorporate into their sexual interactions. Leah remarked that the partner who wishes to introduce the use of new sex toys, attempt a previously prohibited sexual position, or any other sexual act that is novel to the relationship should initiate conversation with their partner about their willingness to engage in the aforementioned acts:

> Some people are happy doing the same thing, every day, for the rest of their lives. But if you or your partner, or your partners, feel as though you want to try something different, or you want to try something new, I think it's important to have that conversation before you try it. Before you try to sneak it in, that kind of thing.

Leah emphasized that a romantic partner who attempts to "sneak in" a new behavior during a sexual encounter with their partner is violating their partner's physical boundaries while also risking the integrity and trustworthiness of their relationship.

An additional trend amongst participant interviews was dialogue about whether or not consent to a sexual encounter could be provided by non-verbal gestures and non-verbal cues. Laila, a 23 year old Middle Grades Education major, acknowledged her opinion that sexual partners oftentimes do not verbally express that they are agreeable to engaging in sex with their partners:

> But I think, in my opinion, that gestures can be a type of consent. Because I know [that] people have sex and they don't always say, "I want to have sex." They'll do certain things that would be consent. I don't know if that's legal or whatever, but in my opinion, I think there are gestures…that would be a type of consent.

Sunny expressed her viewpoint that sexual partners who are "getting closer, and closer, and closer, physically…and the other person taking off their own clothes" are examples of partners providing non-verbal consent to a new sexual encounter. Sunny also shared that consent between sexual partners entails that "they want to do it at that date and time, right now, right then." The researcher agreed with the assertions of Sunny and other study participants that consent must be received prior to each sexual encounter, but felt conflicted about the acceptance of non-verbal gestures and non-verbal cues as demonstrations of consent. The researcher encouraged study participants to consider the efficacy of explicit, verbal consent in their future sexual encounters, to increase the certainty that any sexual act is completed with the permission of all involved partners.

Study participants' discussions regarding consent generated further dialogue about the importance of consistent communication between romantic partners, as it pertains to their sexual interactions. Apple shared that communicating about one's sexual expectations, desires, and

needs should be a standard aspect of any romantic relationship, given the intimate nature of a sexual encounter:

> I think that a conversation is important. And I think it should be a casual type of thing. I don't think it has to be a big speech, or some long, planned out anything. But I just feel like, if you're going to do something, then why can't you talk about it too. It doesn't get a whole lot more personal than doing it.

Brielle echoed Apple's sentiments that communication regarding the sexual expectations of partners should be a consistent and normal part of a healthy relationship:

> It [sex] should be addressed until you both feel comfortable about it. It's just a regular conversation that you have all the time. Because if it becomes this awkward conversation that you're kind of afraid to have, then that's where wires are going to get crossed. Things are going to get mistaken. Perceptions are mistaken and…actions in themselves are going to be perceived wrong…Where one day, one partner is going to think one person wants it, and the other partner's going to say no.

Apple, Brielle, and other study participants expressed similar beliefs about the utility of consistent communication between sexual partners in maintaining openness, trust, and respect for each partner's sexual needs and desires.

Many study participants acknowledged their personal discomfort and hesitancy to initiate conversations with their sexual partners regarding their sexual history. Danielle shared her opinion that individuals who are engaging in casual sex, rather than sex within the context of a committed, monogamous relationship, may be more reluctant to engage a casual sex partner in conversation about their sexual history:

> If it's just a mutual understanding of casual sex, then I guess that's cool, if that's what you both want. But I feel like it's always weird having the conversation. Like, um, well how many people have you had sex with? Have you had an STD and STI check? And especially if you're just trying to do, like, a onetime thing then you're just like, eh.

African American women who engage in casual sex must feel empowered to take the lead on conversations with their partners about one's sexual history, in addition to their sexual needs and desires, even if they intend to share only one sexual encounter with their partner. The removal of caution and fear from discussions about sex allows space for critical conversations to occur between sexual partners to ensure the emotional and physical safety of all involved parties.

African American female sorority members reported Greek-specific risk factors for sexual assault, including substance use, peer pressure, and interactions between brother and sister Greek organizations, in addition to Greek-specific protective factors against sexual assault, including sorority-implemented program safeguards, interactions between brother and sister Greek organizations, and social support fostered amongst sorority members

Greek-specific risk factors for sexual assault.

Substance use in Greek Life.

Myriad study participants endorsed the prevalence of substance use amongst African American men and women with membership in Greek-letter sororities and fraternities. Study participants demonstrated a fair amount of readiness to discuss how the use of alcohol, illicit drugs, and prescription drugs impacts their risk for sexual assault as a member of the Greek community. Jennifer described how the high frequency of parties within Greek life increases the risk of sexual victimization amongst African American sorority members:

> You're put into a lot of party situations. Whether it be before the party. You know, you're pre-drinking. Or whether it's after the party, and all the Greeks are hanging out. You're just put in a lot of, not dangerous, but you're just put in a lot of, "oh we're having fun, substances are out" situations which could make it more likely that it [sexual assault] might happen.

Substance use at Greek parties impedes African American sorority women attending these social events from providing appropriate consent to sexual activity. In addition, African American sorority women who engage in substance use at Greek parties may also experience substance-related disinhibition that encourages them to engage in sexual behavior that they would not fully consent to while sober.

Other study participants expressed beliefs that their exposure to fraternity men who engage in substance abuse impacts their risk for being subjected to unwanted sexual experiences within Greek Life. Kiara recounted a personal experience in which she protected one of her sorority sisters from an unwanted sexual experience during a visit at a UGA fraternity house:

> I was studying at my boyfriend's fraternity house, and she [Kiara's sorority sister] had come over. She did not want to be there at all, but she had found herself paired off with one of the brothers and he was really drunk. And he was trying to make moves on her. And she was just like, "I really want to go home." And immediately, I was like "yes, I will take you home! You do not have to stay here trying to fool around with this guy you don't like." And clearly, he was super drunk. He was like "you know me…you should…why are you trying to like, not let me have this?" "Because she's my sister and she doesn't want to go with you. It's very clear." And I ended up taking her home.

Kiara's sorority sister was fortunate to have an observant and trusted friend in Kiara who was capable of providing her with a safe refuge from the intoxicated fraternity member who was making sexual advances towards her. However, the researcher is reminded that Kiara herself experienced the trauma of being sexually assaulted by an intoxicated fraternity member, after she was abandoned at a Greek party by a sorority member who was also under the influence of alcohol. The researcher has contemplated whether Kiara's sexual assault experience informed Kiara's willingness to promptly yield to her sorority sister's request to leave the fraternity house and escape the unwanted sexual advances perpetrated by their fraternity brother.

Study participants also revealed personal experiences with being involuntarily drugged via alcoholic beverages at fraternity parties at UGA. Olivia shared that she and several of her friends unknowingly ingested what Olivia presumed to be an unidentified stimulant while attending a Greek social event:

> I know this has happened to me personally. It's happened to friends that I have in other sororities, who've been drugged at frat parties…It was definitely freshman year…I feel like it was maybe Adderall mixed in a drink, or something that just increased our energy, and that reacted poorly with the alcohol.

Olivia noted that she and her friends were able to leave the fraternity party unharmed and safely returned to their dormitories. The researcher expressed concern regarding the elevated risk for sexual victimization and additional forms of physical violence that other party attendees may have experienced as a result of their nonconsensual exposure to the unnamed substance mixed into the alcoholic beverages at this fraternity party.

Several study participants who were members of historically African American sororities conveyed great worry and apprehension regarding the possibility of sexual assaults occurring

within the context of Greek social events referred to as "Date Nights." The study participants who were members of historically African American sororities endorsed that Date Nights primarily exist between Greek members of historically White fraternities and sororities. Provided that Kiara and Olivia both identified themselves as members of historically White sororities, the researcher determined that it was critical to include the following disclosure provided by another study participant, Kierra, who is a member of a historically African American sorority:

> I have friends that are part of these things [Date Nights]. And they just tell me that you basically go there and you get drunk. And then you have a date that you come with. So it's kind of like, you have the date that you come with. You guys both get drunk and then it's kind of like, whatever happens, it's what happens…It shouldn't happen regardless. Rape shouldn't happen. If you say no, then no means no. Or if you wake up the next day, and you're like, OK. Wait a second. That shouldn't have happened last night because you weren't in your right mind. But for me, it [Date Night] kind of like, sets the scene for it. Because…You're already gone with this person that you say is your date, and then you guys include alcohol.

As a fellow member of the Greek community who joined her historically African American sorority as an undergraduate student, the researcher relied on her personal experiences to attest that Date Nights are a more common occurrence amongst historically White sororities and fraternities, than historically Black sororities and fraternities. It is also the researcher's experience that Date Nights occur as an overnight experience at an off-campus, and frequently out-of-town, location such as a hotel resort or vacation cabin. The researcher postulates that college women who attend these Date Nights are placed at greater risk for sexual assault due to binge drinking and drug use that may occur at Greek social events of this nature. In addition,

college women who are accompanying fraternity members for a Date Night may feel socially pressured to partake in sex with their respective male dates, as being asked to attend a Date Night with a distinguished fraternity member could be viewed as a celebrated privilege—a privilege that many women may feel pressured to uphold despite the potential risk for an unwanted sexual experience with their male date or his fellow fraternity members.

Peer pressure.

Study participants revealed their experiences with social pressure to attend Greek functions and interact with fraternity men as African American women with membership in Greek-letter sororities. Olivia disclosed about the pressure that some college women, especially first-year students, may feel when they are approached by fraternity men while attending a party at a fraternity house:

> When you're going to have a good time, and you're like dancing with a guy, and he's like "let's go upstairs." You're gonna be like, "No, I don't want to do that." And then he might throw a temper tantrum and storm off, or be persistent. I think that a lot of girls, if they are young, like say you're a freshman. And you want to make friends, and you don't want to seem like a tease or something, or you don't want to offend the fraternity member at his house…You don't want a bad reputation…there's that pressure to go hang upstairs, not realizing that that stuff could put you in a really bad situation.

Olivia's account highlights the role that peer pressure and the desire for social acceptance can play in the potential sexual victimization of college women, especially first-year students, who attend fraternity parties. Olivia's disclosure speaks to the distinct manner in which the perceived naiveté of first-year undergraduate women may be taken advantage of by fraternity men. Jennifer, who was sexually assaulted by a close acquaintance and fraternity member during her

first week as a UGA student, recounted her trauma incident which precisely mirrored Olivia's observations of other first-year college women attending fraternity parties for the first time. These specific stories shared by study participants reiterate the critical need for all universities to implement proficient sexual assault awareness and prevention measures, with a focus on first-year college women.

The social pressure to initiate romantic or sexual advances towards one's fraternity brothers was identified by multiple study participants as a possible risk for sexual assault amongst African American sorority women. Kiara discussed the conflict that some sorority women may experience in balancing their fondness for socializing with fraternity members, with the sexual assumptions and expectations that fraternity members may assert about a sorority woman, based upon her flirtatious behavior:

> I mean, I love mixers just with the fraternity guys and stuff. But I guess there can be pressure, or you feel pressure, to hang out with all these guys, and you have to act…or the guys are there, and you're like, let me try to seduce or talk to them. And sometimes, being in that situation, guys can assume too much. Or going to different fraternity parties, you're supposed to go…It's more pressure…That definitely is a factor in [your likelihood] of being sexually assaulted. Or even doing stuff to feel cool in your sorority. Like "I get all the guys," or you feel free or something.

Kiara emphasizes the perception that some African American sorority members may hold, of feeling that they must garner sexual attention from more fraternity brothers than their fellow sorority sisters. Kiara also brings attention to the ways in which male privilege and gendered sexual expectations encourage some fraternity members to assume that a female sorority member's flirtatious behavior unquestionably signifies her desire to have sex with him.

Intra-Greek relationships.

The concept of brother and sister organizations continues to be fostered and accepted at a universal level amongst historically African American sororities and fraternities. Familial bonds between several historically African American sororities and fraternities were established and perpetuated because of romantic relationships that existed between founding members of these Greek-letter organizations at the time of their formation in the early 1900s. While the fraternal connections between some historically African American sororities and fraternities are a result of the aforementioned romantic ties between organizations' founders, some of the sibling-like relationships between these organizations were established through formal constitutional decrees between said sororities and fraternities. Multiple study participants endorsed situations in which these assumed connections amongst historically African American sororities and fraternities could impact an African American Greek woman's risk for sexual assault at a predominantly white institution.

Sunshine described her experiences with members of her "brother" fraternity who imposed romantic and sexual expectations upon Sunshine and her sorority sisters, due to their presumed, familial connection:

> They [members of Sunshine's brother fraternity] just feel like they can talk to you any kind of way. And I guess they feel like it should be on a more friendly level because y'all are in the Greek world together…But they still have that confidence like…"You're not gonna go out with me? What?!" No, I wasn't gonna go out with you. I wouldn't go [out with you] when I wasn't Greek, so why would I do it now? They try to force that bond sometimes when they want to have it, in addition to like, having relations with you. But yeah, it's weird. They….it's really the confidence. They just feel like they're invincible.

Sunshine portrayed the members of her brother fraternity as men who occasionally rely upon their shared bond as a means to pursue romantic or sexual relationships with members of their sister organization. Sunshine also indicated that some fraternity members assume a cloak of invincibility that enables them to test, and sometimes disrespect, the physical and emotional boundaries of the African American women that they refer to as their Greek sisters.

Leah revealed how the sisterly bond that is fostered amongst African American members of the same sorority may evoke victim-blaming and deter reporting of a sexual assault if a sorority member was assaulted by a fraternity member that one of her sisters had previously been sexually involved with:

> If something were to happen, you're less likely to tell if you're worried about being judged or causing drama. That sort of thing. Or making yourself look bad, because maybe you made that choice that wasn't quite the right one. It happens. You chose the wrong Kappa…And then you find out the whole team [your sorority sisters] slept with him. And then you're just like, dang. Now I can't tell anybody that he raped me. Or I can't tell anybody that he did this, or that I was involved in this, because of this or that. Or because you're ashamed or because you don't want to start an issue. Or you don't want to be *that* girl. So I feel like it can make things more complicated when you're trying to do these sneaky…not sneaky, but secret things to circumvent social rules.

Leah brought attention to how some sorority members may feel pressured to conceal a current sexual relationship with a fraternity member who was previously involved with one of their sorority sisters. Leah also expressed how this aspect of relationships between African American Greek women and men can disempower female sexual assault survivors amongst this population, decreasing their likelihood of reporting their assault, due to the feelings of shame and guilt that

they may experience from having "betrayed" their sorority sister by having sex with her sorority sister's former sexual partner.

Greek-specific protective factors against sexual assault.

Protection and support in Greek Life.

Study participants were emphatic in their views pertaining to the ways in which membership in a Greek-letter sorority protects them from sexual assault as African American women attending a predominantly white institution. Study participants gave voice to the emotional support and safeguards they experience within their Greek sisterhood and the security they feel in the presence of members of their brother fraternities, with the same level of transparency that was provided in their narratives regarding how certain aspects of Greek Life increases their risk for sexual assault. Olivia expressed that her sorority has established safety measures in place at each hosted social event to increase the protection of their sorority members. Olivia described the safeguards that her sorority enforces to increase its accountability for the physical well-being of sorority women attending Greek parties or socials at UGA:

> Well my sorority is really good about, if we have a social or anything, you have to check in. You have to check out. There's cabs to get you from A to B. At least during the designated event, nothing's going to happen to you. But then after that, when the people on the Honor Board of Standards aren't there to protect you…They're not there. But I think sororities are pretty good about keeping their members safe during events.

Olivia identified as a member of a historically White sorority in the Panhellenic Conference. The researcher applauded the efforts of Olivia's sorority in assuming responsibility for the safety of its members at sorority-hosted social events. None of the study participants who identified as members of historically African American sororities reported that their sorority

implements these types of safeguards for the protection of its members at hosted social functions. The researcher cannot generalize the absence of protective procedures at social events, amongst the narratives of study participants who were members of historically African American sororities, as demonstrating that these sororities do not enforce any safeguards at social events to protect the physical safety of its members.

However, the researcher was struck by Olivia's disclosure regarding these protective procedures, in contrast to the lack of mention of similar safeguards in the shared experiences of members of historically African American sororities. Apple remarked that sexual assault "is not something we talk about within the African American community." Apple also expressed her belief that African American women who survive sexual assault do not disclose about their trauma due to cultural stigma regarding sexual violence within our community, which substantiates her additional observations that "when [she] hears about situations like this [sexual assault], it's never within [her] community." Cultural stigma regarding sexual violence silences the voices of African American female survivors by discouraging them from reporting their trauma, which in turn fuels the erroneous perception that sexual assault does not occur within our community. As a result, women with membership in historically African American sororities may inaccurately assume that sexual assault does not happen in their community, decreasing their awareness of any sexual assault prevention measures that their sororities may be implementing at a local, regional, or national level.

Study participants with membership in historically African American sororities were candid in their disclosures about how presumed "brother and sister" relationships between sororities and fraternities impacts their risk for sexual assault at UGA. Nevertheless, many participants were similarly inclined to discuss their views regarding the protective nature of their

shared bond with members of their brother organizations. Apple expressed that she feels safe and protected from the unwanted sexual attention of non-Greek men when she is in the company of her brother fraternity:

> I do feel like, in a lot of situations, the whole family, brotherhood, sisterhood aspect is real in a sense. I can think about situations where I've been at parties with my brother fraternity and they've kind of shoo'ed off other guys who were there who may or not have been of any harm…There's a sense of protection that comes with the family unit. So I feel like that's a positive aspect. In certain situations, I feel safe because they're there, you know? And I can feel safe walking to my car downtown [with members of her brother fraternity]. Whereas, you know, some random man on the street, I'm not going to walk to my car with.

Apple's views about her brother organization demonstrates the shared belief amongst other study participants that, as African American sorority members, they are protected from sexual assault in particular social situations due to this united familial relationship.

The majority of the study participants emphasized that as African American women, they perceive the sisterhood aspect of their sororities as a key protective factor against sexual assault at a PWI. Sorority members reported feeling that there is power and protection in numbers, while also supporting the notion that their mutual admiration and care for one another facilitates a collective desire to protect one's sisters from physical and emotional harm. Brielle shared her thoughts about the sense of protection she experiences as a member of her sorority:

> We have that pack mentality in a sense. Also with me going to parties, you're not alone. You're going with your sisters. You're all together and y'all stay together…When I was partying earlier in life [before joining her sorority], and I was with my friends, the idea of

> like, one of my friends going and dancing with a guy, and not being with us for an hour…It was fine. Like, it was OK. It was normal. Because normally, hopefully, we'd find her or she'd come back to us. And now, if your [sorority] sister's dancing with a guy, you think that they need to stay within eyesight. And I don't know why that changed, in a sense, but you're near them. Because if anything bad happens to them, you just can't imagine it.

Brielle attested to a common belief held by study participants regarding the sense of protection that is fostered through their respective sisterhoods. Brielle exhibited transparency in identifying that she feels greater responsibility for her sorority sisters' safety than she did for non-Greek female acquaintances prior to joining her sorority. Through the researcher's vantage point as an African American sorority member, she postulates that sorority members' expressed propensity to ensure their sorority sisters' safety may result from their acceptance that "you are your sister's keeper," which is an adage that is commonly upheld through the principal tenets of one's sisterhood.

Several study participants endorsed a sense of trust and comfort with expressing emotional vulnerability with their sorority sisters. Kiara described her experiences with feeling emotionally safe within her sorority, and how this security encouraged her to disclose about her sexual assault to an older member of her sorority:

> I know that they love me. Even if I'm like on the defense for a moment, they'd do anything for me, especially my big sister. She's been through it [sexual assault] too and I've talked to her about it. They just make me feel extraordinarily safe and I know that I could tell them anything about it.

The researcher also asked study participants how they would respond to a sorority member disclosing about a sexual assault to them as a trusted confidante. The overwhelming response was that study participants would compassionately listen to the survivor, make the survivor knowledgeable of sexual assault resources on campus and in the community, and support the survivor's wishes regarding her next steps. Sunshine corroborated this sentiment in her own words:

> But even the resources that I told you about. Definitely lead her to those, and whatever choice that she'd want to make, I would be behind her. And then, going back to not letting the [Greek] letters stop her from doing what she needs to do. So whether that's me going to the police station [with her] to talk about it, or [her wanting me] to accompany her to one of the resource centers, then I'd be willing to do that, of course.

The researcher appreciated Sunshine's statement that a Greek female sexual assault survivor should disregard any feelings of guilt or shame that may be attached to her status as a sorority member, in order to report her assault and pursue the supportive resources available to her as a survivor.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions, and Implications

"When we create out of our experiences, as feminists of color, women of color, we have to develop those structures that will present and circulate our culture."

-Audre Lorde

Summary

The purpose of this psychological study was to explore the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions that self-identified African American women with membership in Greek-letter sororities at a predominantly white institution (PWI) possessed regarding sexual assault. The researcher sought to investigate African American sorority members' observations and levels of awareness pertaining to nonconsensual sexual acts, defining consent, and knowledge of the university and community resources available to sexual assault survivors. This study also intended to examine the roles of study participants' intersecting identities—specifically gender, race and ethnicity, and sorority membership—on their perceived risk for sexual assault at a PWI.

Conversely, this study also sought to identify potential protective factors against sexual assault that African American sorority women may experience as undergraduate students at a PWI. Further understanding about the lived experiences and perceptions of African American sorority women, as it relates to sexual assault, can inform the development of culturally-competent sexual assault prevention and outreach programs at PWIs. Additionally, gaining greater knowledge about the distinctive risk factors for sexual assault that challenge African American sorority members can empower mental health clinicians, medical health practitioners,

and student affairs professionals at PWIs to support sexual assault survivors within this population in a way that validates their lived experiences as minority students.

Empowerment Feminist Therapy and Black Feminist Theory served as the theoretical foundation of the researcher's exploration of the lived experiences of African American sorority women attending PWIs and their perceptions of sexual assault. Through her integration of Empowerment Feminist Therapy, the researcher trusted and valued the lived experiences of African American women while fostering exploration of how the intersecting sociocultural identities of her study participants impacted their views of the research topic. In accordance with the tenets of Empowerment Feminist Theory, the researcher also employed an egalitarian approach to her research interactions with the study participants, to eliminate the presence of power or privilege between researcher and participant as best as possible.

Black Feminist Theory informed the researcher's development of her data collection materials, particularly the sexual assault vignettes and the semi-structured interview protocol, as these instruments were created through a cultural lens that acknowledged the historical contexts of African American female sexuality. Furthermore, the interview process fostered dialogue amongst study participants about the impact of controlling images such as the Jezebel stereotype on the lived experiences of African American sorority members and their views about sexual assault. In support of Black Feminist Theory, the researcher fostered further understanding regarding the lived experiences of African American women that included an exploration of the sexual politics of Black womanhood, as well as Black women's love and relationships. The researcher employed her reflexive journal as an investigative instrument to advance her personal understanding of the participants' shared stories, while also acknowledging her concurrent challenges and triumphs with love and trauma as an African American woman.

The qualitative methodology known as transcendental phenomenology informed the researcher's development of all data collection materials and data management instruments, which included the recruitment flyer, telephone eligibility screen, informed consent, demographic survey, sexual assault vignettes, semi-structured interview protocol, sexual assault referral list, and the researcher's reflexive journal. The researcher also integrated supplemental sources of information into her understanding of the participant data, including feedback from an additional research team member who was involved in the interview coding process, as well as constructive comments regarding the entirety of the research process that was provided by two external auditors once data analysis had been completed.

The study participants included a total of 12 self-identified African American women with membership in Greek-letter sororities at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. Ten of the study participants belonged to Greek organizations in the National Pan-Hellenic Council, which includes historically African American sororities and fraternities. The remaining two study participants belonged to Greek organizations in the National Panhellenic Conference, which includes historically White sororities. The participant sample was fairly homogenous in nature, with the majority of participants identifying as single, heterosexual, and Christian individuals who were not first-generation college students. Four study participants reported personal experiences of sexual assault, with two participants recounting instances of completed, alcohol-facilitated penetration by male perpetrators, and two participants disclosing about unwanted sexual contact by male perpetrators.

Once data collection was complete, each participant interview was transcribed verbatim. One additional research team member assisted the primary investigator with carefully reading and coding each participant interview. The researcher and the additional coding member met for

a total of five consensus coding meetings to discuss similarities, differences, and tensions that existed amongst the participant data. The consensus coding meetings also involved the coding dyad's discussion about significant statements produced by the study participants, in addition to the identification of central themes across the participant data. The contextual and descriptive meanings regarding African American sorority members' perceptions of sexual assault were detailed via thick descriptions within the written results section, in an effort to present the essence of participants' lived experiences regarding the research topic. This study was guided by the primary investigator's exploration of the following two research questions:

1. How accurately will African American collegiate women with active membership in Greek-letter sororities label incidents of sexual assault—as defined by the CDC (2015)—when presented with brief vignettes that illustrate varying levels of nonconsensual sexual activity?
2. How does the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, gender, and sorority membership impact the perceptions of sexual assault in African American collegiate women with active membership in Greek-letter sororities?

In the subsequent sections, the researcher outlines a discussion of the primary findings that were identified through the thorough analysis of the participants' data. Additionally, the researcher offers conclusions inferred from this research study. Finally, the researcher will review the implications of the study findings and provide recommendations for future research as it relates to historically marginalized populations and their experiences of sexual assault.

Conclusions

Prior to initiating data collection, the researcher proposed two hypotheses to evaluate during the research process. Below are those hypotheses:

1. African American collegiate women with active membership in Greek-letter sororities will be able to clearly identify a depicted scene of completed, forced penetration (illustrated via a vignette) as sexual assault.
2. African American collegiate women with active membership in Greek-letter sororities will not be able to clearly identify depicted scenes of 1) attempted, forced penetration, 2) unwanted sexual contact, and 3) a noncontact, unwanted sexual experience as sexual assault.

Both of the researcher's hypotheses were validated and confirmed during data collection. Each study participant labeled the vignette depicting an act of completed, forced penetration with a female victim as sexual assault. In this vignette, a female sorority member was sexually assaulted at her home by a male fraternity member following a Greek social event they had both attended. The study participants expressed greater aptitude in labeling this particular vignette as illustrating sexual assault due to the perpetrator's use of physical force and the survivors' verbalized "no" against the aggressor's sexual advances. Study participants expressed feelings of frustration, shock, and hurt in response to the depicted survivor being assaulted, while she was intoxicated, by a fraternity member with whom she shared a romantic interest.

Study participants were disproportionately challenged in labeling the vignettes depicting other forms of sexual assault—1) attempted, forced penetration, 2) unwanted sexual contact, and 3) noncontact, unwanted sexual experiences—as sexual assault, with none of the 12 study participants categorizing any of these depicted incidents as sexual assault. The vignette illustrating an act of attempted and forced penetration was not labeled by study participants as showing sexual assault due to the perpetrator not completing penetration of the survivor and because the assault occurred within the context of a committed, long-term relationship. While

study participants empathized with the survivor's expressed religious views regarding sexual abstinence and her partner's disregard for her physical boundaries, study participants declined to label the incident illustrated between these romantic partners as sexual assault. Rather, most study participants described the perpetrator's behavior as a betrayal of his romantic partner's trust and a reason for the survivor to experience feelings of fear in future sexual interactions with her partner. This particular finding demonstrates the dangerous silencing of sexual assault survivors' voices that may occur if their assault happened as a form of interpersonal or relationship violence.

The vignette illustrating unwanted sexual contact included a physical hazing scene that occurred between an active sorority member and a woman with expressed interest in joining the same sorority. Study participants varied in their acceptance and comfort level with the implementation of physical hazing in one's sorority membership intake process. For those participants who condoned physical hazing, the sexual contact included in this vignette was viewed as "crossing the line," although they expressed acceptance of physical hazing as a customary aspect of a sorority's membership intake process. Study participants also discussed the inherent power dynamics that are at play during hazing, between current sorority members and women interested in joining the sorority. Several study participants expressed that one's physical and emotional boundaries may be extended or completely removed, in their efforts to join the sorority of their choice. In general, this vignette was not viewed as depicting a form of sexual assault.

The vignette depicting the noncontact, unwanted sexual experience of several sorority members garnered responses of disgust and annoyance from study participants, but did not lead participants to label this scene as a demonstration of sexual assault. In this particular vignette,

sorority members were subjected to viewing filmed pornography without members of their brother fraternity asking for their consent. Study participants commonly described the perpetrators' behavior as a "joke," but not a form of sexual assault. Additionally, study participants stated they would have removed themselves and their sorority sisters from the perpetrators' home following the noncontact, unwanted sexual experience, in similar fashion as the fictional sorority sisters depicted in this vignette.

Study participants felt empowered to disclose their personal experiences of sexual assault at UGA within the safe and nonjudgmental space of the interview process. Additionally, study participants voiced their perceptions regarding how their intersecting sociocultural identities as African American women with membership in Greek-letter sororities impacted their risk of experiencing sexual assault at a PWI. A phenomenological analysis of the participant data resulted in the identification of eight sexual assault themes from the data:

1. African American female sorority members disclosed their sexual assault survivorship status, by sharing incidents of completed, alcohol-facilitated penetration, and unwanted sexual contact
2. African American female sorority members reported that gendered stereotypes related to male dominance and the eroticization of the female body increase their risk for sexual assault
3. African American female sorority members expressed that historical and modern-day traumas (i. e., the American Slave Trade, racial microaggressions, and negative racial stereotypes) increase their risk for sexual assault, while also promoting within-group protection and solidarity as minority students at a PWI

4. African American female sorority members discussed victim-blaming based upon sexual assault survivors' dress attire, perceived sexual history, relationship status, sorority membership, and substance use
5. African American female sorority members discussed how their risk of being sexually assaulted is impacted by cultural norms that control sexual expression across genders, as well as sexualized stereotypes reportedly accepted by fraternity men
6. African American female sorority members expressed conflicting feelings regarding acquaintance rape, hazing, and interpersonal and relationship violence, in reaction to sexual assault vignettes presented to them by the researcher
7. African American female sorority members defined sexual consent as individuals providing verbal and/or non-verbal consent, while not intoxicated via alcohol or drugs, and emphasized that open and honest communication about sexual expectations and physical boundaries is critical between all sexual and romantic partners
8. African American female sorority members reported Greek-specific risk factors for sexual assault, including substance use, peer pressure, and interactions between brother and sister Greek organizations, in addition to Greek-specific protective factors against sexual assault, including sorority-implemented program safeguards, interactions between brother and sister Greek organizations, and social support fostered amongst sorority members

The identification of these eight participant themes fulfilled the researcher's quest to seek knowledge regarding the lived experiences of African American collegiate women with membership in Greek-letter sororities and the impact of their intersecting sociocultural identities on their perceptions of sexual assault. The researcher's examination of participants' interviews

also demonstrated African American female sorority members' ability to more easily label an act of completed, forced penetration as sexual assault, given that incidents of this nature correspond with the culturally accepted rape script that involves use of force and a verbalized "no" being provided by the survivor. Evaluation of the study participants' interviews also revealed their expressed challenges in labeling any unwanted sexual experiences, which were committed without force and by a close acquaintance, as acts of sexual assault.

Theme 1: African American female sorority members disclosed their sexual assault survivorship status, by sharing incidents of completed, alcohol-facilitated penetration, and unwanted sexual contact.

Two study participants identified as survivors of completed, alcohol-facilitated penetration that occurred during their first year as undergraduate students at UGA. In their narrative about their trauma incidents, both sexual assault survivors emphasized the emotional distress they experienced by having been separated from their friend group at Greek social functions prior to their assaults. Two additional study participants endorsed experiencing unwanted sexual contact while attending parties hosted by fraternities. These courageous narratives provided by study participants highlights the need for sexual assault awareness and prevention efforts that target first-year college women, as they are at an especially high risk for sexual victimization on college campuses. Additionally, these shared accounts reveal the importance of employing bystander intervention techniques within the sexual assault prevention and outreach programs that are implemented at universities nationwide.

Theme 2: African American female sorority members reported that gendered stereotypes related to male dominance and the eroticization of the female body increase their risk for sexual assault.

Study participants expressed the belief that women are viewed as physically inferior or emotionally weaker than men. Study participants also endorsed social norms that instruct women to be more hypervigilant than men regarding their personal safety. As this study was conducted in the Southeastern United States, study participants acknowledged culturally accepted stereotypes regarding Southern men being viewed as the dominant party in heterosexual, romantic relationships. Myriad interviews included discussion implying that simply possessing the female body and female sexual organs were risk factors for sexual assault. Furthermore, study participants addressed society's double standards regarding the acceptability of certain sexual behavior in women versus men.

Theme 3: African American female sorority members expressed that historical and modern-day traumas (i. e., the American Slave Trade, racial microaggressions, and negative racial stereotypes) increase their risk for sexual assault, while also promoting within-group protection and solidarity as minority students at a PWI.

At the surprise of the researcher, study participants introduced the notion that the "Angry Black Woman" stereotype protects African American sorority women from sexual assault as minority students attending a PWI. Also, study participants expressed comfort in feeling that the small number of African American students at UGA creates a tight-knit and safe social community, and is viewed as a protective factor against sexual assault. Participants overwhelmingly endorsed having experienced racial microaggressions by their same-aged White males as the perpetrators, either on campus or while attending social events in Downtown Athens. Some study participants endorsed feeling more at risk for sexual assault in Greek social situations where they were the racial minority. Study participants discussed the sexual politics of Black womanhood, stating that identifying as an African American woman may cause others to

discredit or minimize their report of sexual assault. The cultural impact of historical oppression, particularly the American Slave Trade, on the hypersexualization and/or desexualization of African American women in the United States was a consistent discussion topic amongst participant interviews.

Theme 4: African American female sorority members discussed victim-blaming based upon sexual assault survivors' dress attire, perceived sexual history, relationship status, sorority membership, and substance use.

Victim-blaming based upon a woman's dress attire emerged as a theme across the majority of participant interviews. The cultural perpetuation of the "she was asking for it" message, regarding sexual assault, also persisted amongst the participants' narratives. Several study participants either directly addressed or alluded to the "sororstitute" stereotype, which perpetuates a globalized image of sorority women as individuals who engage in excessive alcohol use and sexual promiscuity. The identification of this particular stereotype highlights how an African American sorority member's alcohol use or sexual history may be exploited as a means to blame her for her sexual assault. Examination of participant interviews also displayed their universal acceptance of the "stranger" rape narrative, and the minimization of sexual assault that is committed within the context of a current romantic relationship, or between partners who had a previous history of sexual encounters.

Theme 5: African American female sorority members discussed how their risk of being sexually assaulted is impacted by cultural norms that control sexual expression across genders, as well as sexualized stereotypes reportedly accepted by fraternity men.

Study participants engaged in vibrant and fervent dialogue in which they detailed their lived experiences with observing and being subjected to the sexual behaviors and sexual expectations of college-aged men, regardless of their fraternity membership status. In discussing the sexual behaviors and expectations of college men who did not belong to a fraternity, study participants expressed the belief that their same-age male peers will make unwanted romantic or sexual advances towards any woman, even if she shows disinterest. Study participants also shared instances of their male peers imparting sexually explicit jokes or distributing sexually explicit Internet memes without social repercussions, whereas a woman would be labeled as a "slut" or a "whore" for committing similar acts.

As self-identified African American women, study participants described conflicting feelings of protection towards African American men, while also expressing that they perceive African American men to be more "aggressive" in their romantic or sexual pursuits of women. The researcher felt honored to hear the voices of her study participants as they remarked upon the sexual behaviors and expectations of fraternity men, as these women were open and transparent about this topic in an unexpected way. Study participants shared their experiences with observing fraternity men manipulate social situations in their fraternity houses, to increase their chances of having sex with women visiting their home. Furthermore, historically African American fraternities, namely Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. and Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., were identified by study participants as Greek-letter organizations that widely perpetuate hypersexualized stereotypes amongst their members, which places African American sorority members at greater risk for sexual assault.

Theme 6: African American female sorority members expressed conflicting feelings regarding acquaintance rape, hazing, and interpersonal and relationship violence, in reaction to sexual assault vignettes presented to them by the researcher.

Each study participant labeled the vignette depicting an act of completed, forced penetration with a female victim as sexual assault. The study participants expressed greater aptitude in labeling this particular vignette as illustrating sexual assault due to the perpetrator's use of physical force and the survivors' verbalized "no" against the aggressor's sexual advances. Study participants were disproportionately challenged in labeling the vignettes depicting other forms of sexual assault—1) attempted, forced penetration, 2) unwanted sexual contact, and 3) noncontact, unwanted sexual experiences—as sexual assault.

Theme 7: African American female sorority members defined sexual consent as individuals providing verbal and/or non-verbal consent, while not intoxicated via alcohol or drugs, and emphasized that open and honest communication about sexual expectations and physical boundaries is critical between all sexual and romantic partners.

Study participants expressed that consent can only be given when all involved parties are sober and not under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol. Study participants reported that consent should be received prior to each sexual encounter, and across the spectrum of sexual relationships, from casual sex partners, to partners in committed, monogamous relationships. The definition of consent was extended by study participants to include that consent should always be received when a partner wishes to introduce a new action, toy, or previously "disapproved" sexual position into their sexual interactions with their partners. Interestingly, discussion regarding consent created a debate across several study participant interviews as to

whether or not consent could be provided via non-verbal gestures, such as kissing, touching, or taking off one's clothes.

Communication was emphasized by study participants with special regard for the importance of romantic and sexual partners voicing their wants, needs, and personal boundaries to one another, as it relates to sex. Study participants also shared that constant communication about sex between partners increases trustworthiness within their sexual relationship. This form of open and honest communication helps partners align onto "the same page" about their sexual expectations and needs. As African American women, study participants also expressed concern for their sexual health, in consideration of their knowledge that minority women are historically infected with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) at disproportionately higher rates than majority women. As such, study participants stressed that African American women should advocate for their physical health and safety, by initiating conversations with their sexual partners about their sexual histories and STD/HIV screenings.

Theme 8: African American female sorority members reported Greek-specific risk factors for sexual assault, including substance use, peer pressure, and interactions between brother and sister Greek organizations, in addition to Greek-specific protective factors against sexual assault, including sorority-implemented program safeguards, interactions between brother and sister Greek organizations, and social support fostered amongst sorority members.

Study participants discussed the prevalence of alcohol and drug use in Greek Life, while also noting that alcohol use may increase instances of aggressive sexual behavior in fraternity men. African American sorority women at UGA disclosed incidents of having their alcoholic beverages "spiked" with unknown substances or drugs at fraternity parties. Study participants

who identified as members of historically African American sorority members conveyed that substance use within the context of "Date Night," an event typically hosted by historically White sororities and fraternities, should be viewed as a risk factor for sexual assault amongst collegiate women.

Another common thread across many participant interviews was peer pressure that is reportedly experienced by first-year collegiate women, to engage in sexual behavior with fraternity men, when visiting fraternity houses. As African American sorority members, several study participants endorsed feeling pressured to "be social" and flirt with fraternity men at Greek social events. Lastly, the "family" or "brother and sister" bonds upheld amongst some fraternities and sororities, was viewed as a potential risk factor for sexual assault, particularly if a fraternity views their sisters as "belonging to them."

The "family" or "brother and sister" bonds upheld amongst some fraternities and sororities, were also viewed as a protective factor against sexual assault, specifically when study participants felt safe and cared for by their brother fraternity. Some study participants described formal safeguard procedures that are implemented by their sorority at social events that they host, to ensure the physical safety of sorority members. The notion that "I am my sister's keeper," which involves accepting responsibility for the physical and emotional well-being of one's sorority sisters, was reiterated across all participant interviews.

Study participants expressed feeling comfortable with showing emotional vulnerability with their sorority sisters, noting that they would feel more at ease disclosing about a sexual assault incident to their sorority sister than a university official. Study participants also remarked that they would compassionately listen to a sorority sister who disclosed a sexual assault to them,

and would assist their sorority sister in attaining the resources she needed to start her healing process following her assault.

Implications

The conduction of this research study expands upon the existing literature pertaining to sexual assault and its impact on African American sorority members attending PWIs. By trusting and valuing the lived experiences of African American sorority members attending PWIs, this study led to increased knowledge regarding how the study participants' intersecting sociocultural identities impacted their views regarding sexual assault. Through safe and nonjudgmental dialogue, study participants felt empowered to disclose their personal experiences with sexual assault, as well as the impact of gendered and racialized stereotypes on their emotional and physical well-being and risk for sexual assault. Additionally, study participants provided insight regarding rape culture and victim-blaming, through a multicultural lens. This study encouraged rich and transparent discussion across participant interviews regarding their perceptions of the sexual behaviors and sexual expectations of their same-aged male peers, including those belonging to Greek fraternities.

Defining consent within the context of any sexual encounter garnered varying responses amongst study participants. Furthermore, interviewees disclosed their beliefs about the protective aspects, as well as risk factors, for sexual assault that they experience within Greek Life. The voices of the African American sorority members who participated in this study can serve to greatly enrich existing sexual assault resources that are currently implemented at PWIs, as institutions of higher learning should value the lived experiences and unique needs of its women of color. The aforementioned research findings hold several implications for university officials who serve African American sorority members on their campuses.

First-year college women at increased risk for sexual assault.

Three of the four study participants who endorsed personal experiences with sexual assault reported that their trauma incidents occurred during their first few weeks as undergraduate students at UGA. Previous research supports the lived experiences of the sexual assault survivors who participated in this particular study. First-year college women are at a greatly elevated risk for sexual assault, during a time period that starts in August upon their arrival on campus and ends near the Thanksgiving Holiday in November (Kimble, Neacsui, Flack, & Horner, 2008; Cranney, 2015). This period of time during which first-year college women are at an increased risk for sexual assault has been referred to as the "Red Zone" (Kimble, Neacsui, Flack, & Horner, 2008; Cranney, 2015).

The University of North Carolina-Wilmington (UNCW) has developed an initiative called "The Red Zone: UNCW Freshmen Safety Education Program" in an effort to educate its student population and university officials about the specific dangers of sexual victimization that face first year college students (UNCW, 2015). UNCW (2016) notes that "inexperience, distraction, exposure to a new environment, and an unfamiliarity of potential risks are all contributing factors to danger." UNCW (2016) explicitly warns first year undergraduates about their increased risk for sexual victimization as students who are new to the college experience. On their program's website, UNCW's (2016) also details specific recommendations to first year students about ways to protect the physical safety of themselves and their peers.

The University of Oregon (UO), which received high acclaim for their "It's On Us" campaign against sexual assault on its campus several years ago, has also created a "Red Zone" campaign that is housed within the institution's Division of Student Life (UO, 2016). UO's Women's Center and Office of Sexual Violence Prevention and Education collaborate annually

to implement a Red Zone campaign on their campus to educate its student population and university officials regarding the increased risk for sexual assault that is incurred by their first year students. UO's Red Zone campaign has included guest speakers, social media awareness efforts, poetry nights, art exhibits, and poster campaigns.

The University of Georgia currently does not engage its students, faculty, and staff through a Red Zone campaign. At this time, UGA does require all of its incoming first-year students and transfer students to complete an educational online course called "Haven" which provides students with information regarding risks for sexual assault on a college campus and recommendations to ensure students' safety. The researcher recommends that UGA's student body would benefit from a more interactive method of promoting sexual assault awareness and prevention efforts, similar to the Red Zone campaigns conducted at UNCW and UO. Additionally, UGA's first-year students would gain from consistent and frequent exposure to sexual assault awareness programming, in comparison to the one-time online course that UGA currently has in place.

Sexual assault awareness prevention programming is important in Greek Life.

As African American collegiate women with membership in Greek-letter sororities at UGA, study participants expressed immense concern regarding the elevated rates of sexual assault that occur within Greek Life. Each study participant, including the four self-identified sexual assault survivors in this study, discussed the role of substance use, hazing, gendered and racialized stereotypes, and the perpetuation of hypersexualized fraternity stereotypes on their risk of sexual assault as members of the Greek community. Several study participants, such as Brielle, supported the need for Greek-specific sexual assault programming and outreach efforts for sorority and fraternity members on college campuses:

> I'd make it mandatory for everyone in Greek Life, especially because Greek Life is where a lot of these instances happen on a lot of campuses. The fact that we're not addressing it, it's silly on our part. Because if you really think about it, we could prevent a lot of these issues and a lot of major media that comes with that, if you just had these conversations…And then maybe having the sororities and the fraternities put on their own programs to disseminate the information that they have received.

Brielle's voice, along with those of every African American sorority member involved with this research study, reverberates through the following implications for university officials to address sexual assault through an inclusive, multicultural lens at UGA and other PWIs across the nation.

Inclusive sexual assault programming for Greek-letter sororities and fraternities.

Several universities in the United States have spearheaded collaborative efforts with its Greek Life membership to address sexual violence on their campuses. Emory University (2016) established the "Greek Sexual Assault Prevention Initiative" as a collective endeavor between its Office of Health Promotion's Respect Program, Office of Sorority and Fraternity Life, Interfraternity Council, Inter-Sorority Council, National Pan-Hellenic Council, and Multicultural Greek Council to combat sexual assault. Emory University's Greek Sexual Assault Prevention Initiative sought to increase the number of fraternity men and sorority women who were trained in bystander intervention and education regarding sexual consent, and in turn, empower their students who belong to fraternities and sororities to train incoming Greek members in sexual assault prevention and awareness techniques (Emory University, 2016).

Furthermore, the University of Connecticut (UCONN) organized a similar program named "Greeks Against Sexual Assault." Greeks Against Sexual Assault is a student organization, in alliance with UCONN's Women's Center, that welcomes Greek-affiliated

students to attend collective forums regarding their perceptions of sexual violence at their campus (UCONN, 2016). UCONN students who participate in the Greeks Against Sexual Assault program incorporate dialogue about issues of intersectionality, historical oppression, and privilege into their discussions regarding sexual assault in Greek Life. The inclusive nature of this program, with its expressed value and respect for the diverse voices of members of the university's Greek community, encourages critical dialogue about sexual assault through a multicultural lens.

The University of Georgia does not currently host an inclusive sexual assault prevention initiative for its Greek fraternity and sorority members. Due to the grave number of reported sexual assault incidents that occur at Greek parties and Greek housing each year, UGA's student body would greatly benefit from its Greek membership taking the lead on this public health issue in a forthright and visible manner.

Inclusive sexual assault programming specifically for Greek-letter sororities.

A number of PWIs in the United States serve as the home of sexual assault prevention efforts initiated by Greek-letter sorority members. Many of these crucial campus initiatives were founded by the university's Panhellenic Council, which includes historically White sororities. Regrettably, these same sexual assault prevention programs have been perpetuated to solely engage student members of the historically White Panhellenic Council. For example, the Panhellenic Association at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) proposed the establishment of an organization now known as the "Delta Advocates."

The Delta Advocates currently includes representatives from the 11 Panhellenic sororities at UNC-CH and provides members with training related to bystander intervention, strategies to support survivors within their sororities, and psychoeducation about sexual trauma responses in

women (UNC-CH, 2016). Two years following its induction, the Delta Advocates intend to expand its membership to include representatives from the National Pan-Hellenic Council and Greek Alliance Council at UNC-CH, whose Greek-letter sororities historically include minority women of diverse backgrounds (UNC-CH, 2016). Indiana University at Bloomington (IU) hosts a sexual assault prevention group, similar to the Delta Advocates at UNC-CH, called "Safe Sisters." Safe Sisters is a collaborative partnership between the IU Health Center's Sexual Assault Crisis Service and IU's Panhellenic Association (IU, 2016). Sorority members from IU's Panhellenic Association undergo training with the IU Health Center's Sexual Assault Crisis Service regarding empathic listening, sexual assault resources, and supporting sorority members who identify as sexual assault survivors in their choices of healing following an assault.

As demonstrated here, women of color sorority members often receive a delayed invitation to participate in sexual assault prevention efforts that are geared towards sororities, or they never receive the invitation at all. It is with a sense of urgency that predominantly white institutions nationwide should ensure that their sorority-focused sexual assault prevention and outreach efforts incorporate the voices of its ethnic minority female members, as this population is included in the at-risk population for sexual assault within Greek Life. The inclusion of the lived experiences of ethnic minority sorority members within university-wide sexual assault prevention will also provide significant space for Greek members to acknowledge and process the present-day impact of racialized stereotypes on this population's risk for sexual assault at PWIs. The University of Georgia's student population would greatly gain from the establishment of a sorority-centered, culturally competent, sexual assault prevention organization that was supported by the University's administration.

Inclusive sexual assault programming specifically for Greek-letter fraternities.

Myriad institutions of higher learning have established progressive approaches to educating and empowering its male fraternity members to take the lead in combating instances of sexual assault within Greek Life. The Dean of Students Office at California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly) established an educational training program called "Greeks Against Sexual Assault" specifically for its male students who identify as fraternity members at Cal Poly (Cal Poly, 2016). Cal Poly's Greeks Against Sexual Assault training involves four weeks of workshops, with each session lasting two hours (Cal Poly, 2016). Training workshops address "gender-based violence, gender norms that contribute to sexual assault, relationships, and positive masculinity" (Cal Poly, 2016).

The University of Wisconsin at Madison (UW-Madison) took a distinctive, didactic approach to increasing sexual assault awareness and prevention efforts within its students with membership in Greek-letter fraternities. UW-Madison's School of Social Work offers a two-credit course entitled "Greek Men for Violence Prevention" (GMVP) that meets once a week and is taught by violence prevention professionals from UW-Madison's University Health Services (UW-Madison, 2016). GMVP has been perpetuated through a positive partnership between UW-Madison's School of Social Work, University Health Services, Domestic Abuse Intervention Services, and its Interfraternity Council, which includes historically White fraternities. GMVP class discussion centers upon fraternity members' reflection on their masculine identity development, fraternity life's preservation of rape culture, bystander intervention, and the impact of normed heterosexism on violence against women.

The researcher applauds the efforts of these known universities, and those that are unnamed, to empower their male students who belong fraternities to play an active role in the

reduction of sexual assault within Greek Life and on the college campus. Through her review of fraternity-focused sexual assault prevention efforts at PWIs, the researcher implores university leadership to visibly and explicitly offer minority fraternity members a seat at the proverbial table to aid with planning these types of initiatives. This act of inclusion by universities would help ensure that the lived experiences of men of color fraternity members were incorporated within group discussions and student interventions regarding sexual assault within Greek Life. In honor of this study's participants, fraternity-focused sexual assault prevention programs would benefit from transparent dialogue pertaining to the impact of hypersexualized stereotypes that have become associated with certain fraternities with historically African American male membership. Furthermore, the researcher recommends that Greek-letter fraternities at UGA take a visible stance against sexual assault within Greek Life, in a genuine effort to facilitate a safe and protective environment for their same-aged female peers.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of African American women with membership in Greek-letter sororities attending a PWI regarding sexual assault. Through their review of sexual assault vignettes created by the researcher, study participants revealed varying difficulties with labeling scenes depicting violence against women that did not follow the culturally-perpetuated "stranger" rape script as sexual assault. Future research could involve the norming and standardization of the researcher's sexual assault vignettes as an instrument to assess minority women's knowledge and beliefs about the numerous forms of sexual assault. This information can be used to develop a tailored and culturally-contextualized approach to sexual assault prevention interventions in Greek-letter sororities and fraternities.

The present research revealed African American sorority members' views regarding hypersexualized stereotypes that are reportedly embraced by a number of historically African American fraternity members. Future research could investigate this phenomenon through the conduction of interviews with African American fraternity members, in an effort to ascertain their views about the impact of their intersecting identities of both privilege and oppression in their adoption of hypersexualized personas as African American fraternity men. Jenkins (2012) explored the impact of African American fraternities on the development of African American masculinity and sexuality. Ray (2012) assessed the role of fraternity membership on African American college men's utilization of varying verbal strategies to pursue romantic or sexual encounters with women. Future research could build upon the work of Ray (2012) and Jenkins (2012) by exploring sociocultural factors that impact African American fraternity members' acceptance and embodiment of hypersexualized stereotypes.

Participants for this research project endorsed varying levels of comfort with seeking mental health services as a form of healing following a sexual assault. The four African American female participants who self-identified as sexual assault survivors expressed that they never considered therapy as a resource after their trauma incidents. Other study participants remarked about the impact of cultural stigma surrounding mental health and their willingness to access therapy. Future research could further explore African American sorority members' perceived barriers to engaging in help-seeking behaviors, especially mental health services at university counseling centers, following a sexual assault.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Recruitment Flyer

Recruiting Participants for a Research Study on

Perceptions of Sexual Assault in African American Collegiate Women with Membership in Greek-Letter Sororities at a Predominantly White Institution

This study seeks to understand how African American college-aged women with active membership in Greek-letter sororities view sexual assault as an undergraduate student at a predominantly White institution.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR STUDY PARTICIPATION:

1. Must identify as born female
2. Must be at least 18 years old
3. Must self-identify as African American
4. Must be currently enrolled as an undergraduate student at the University of Georgia
5. Must hold active membership in a Greek-letter sorority that belongs to the National Panhellenic Conference or the National Pan-Hellenic Council

STUDY PROCEDURES:

Study participation is entirely voluntary and involves the following activities:

1. Completing a brief telephone screening to confirm your eligibility for this study
2. Providing informed consent to participate in this study and understanding confidentiality

3. Completing a brief demographic survey (you will choose a pseudonym to be used to identify your information throughout your participation)
4. Participating in a semi-structured interview about your perceptions of sexual assault
5. Each study participant will receive a $10 RaceTrac gift card

This study is conducted with IRB approval (Protocol #:00001693) through the University of Georgia. The Primary Investigator for this study is Dr. Bernadette Heckman (bheckman@uga.edu). Dr. Heckman is an Associate Professor in the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services and the Director of Clinical Training for the Counseling Psychology PhD Program at the University of Georgia. **If you are interested in participating in this study, please email Ciera Scott (cvscott@uga.edu), Study Co-Investigator, for more information.** Ciera Scott is a third-year PhD Candidate in the Counseling Psychology program at the University of Georgia.

Appendix B

Telephone Eligibility Screening Consent Script

Thank you for calling to receive more information about our research study. My name is Ciera Scott and I am a third-year PhD student in the Counseling Psychology program within the Department of Counseling and Human Development Services at the University of Georgia.

The purpose of this research study is to understand how factors related to Greek Life impacts African American sorority members' risk of being sexually assaulted during their undergraduate career at a predominantly white institution (PWI). I am also interested in how identifying as a female and an ethnic minority impacts your perceptions of sexual assault. I hope that the results of this study will provide me with information to help improve collegiate professionals' understanding of the impact of sexual assault on African American sorority members at a PWI. I also hope that results of this study can be used to improve outreach efforts within Greek Life and Student Affairs regarding prevention, education, and treatment of sexual assault with African American sorority members at a PWI. Do you think you might be interested in participating in this study?

{If No}: Thank you very much for your time.

{If Yes}: Before enrolling you into this study, I need to ask you some questions to determine if you are eligible for my study. What I would like to do now is ask you a few questions about your gender, age, racial identity, educational background, and membership in a Greek-letter sorority. This should only take about five minutes of your time. If you become uncomfortable or distressed during these questions, please let me know. Also, please remember that you do not have to answer any of these questions if you do not want to. As some of the questions may be sensitive and I want to minimize any potential discomfort, I am going to ask

that you do not respond aloud until I finish asking you all of the questions. After I ask the questions, I will ask if you responded no to any of the questions, therefore you will not have to disclose any specific sensitive information.

All information that I receive from you during this phone screening, including your name and any other information that can possibly identify you, will be strictly confidential and will be kept under lock and key. Remember, your participation is voluntary—you can refuse to answer any questions, or stop this phone screening, at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. At the end of this phone screening, you will be given an opportunity to choose a pseudonym that will be used on any written documentation that requires your name to maintain anonymity.

At the end of this telephone screening, I will tell you whether or not you qualify to participate in this study. If you do not qualify to participate in this study, all of the information that you gave me will be immediately destroyed.

Do I have your permission to ask you these questions?

Please remember not to respond aloud until I finish asking you all of these questions. After I ask all of the questions, I will ask if you responded no to any of the questions. Are you ready for the questions?

1) Were you assigned as a female at birth?

2) Are you currently 18 years of age or older?

3) Do you identify as African American?

4) Are you currently enrolled as an undergraduate student at the University of Georgia?

5) Are you an active member of a Greek-letter sorority that belongs to the National Panhellenic Conference or the National Panhellenic Council?

Thank you for your time. Please feel free to call me at 678.983.8436 or email me at cvscott@uga.edu if you have any questions about this research study. My faculty advisor and the Primary Investigator for this study, Dr. Bernadette Heckman, may also be reached by phone at 706.542.4792 or by email at bheckman@uga.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board; Address: 609 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone: 706.542.3199; Email Address: irb@uga.edu.

Appendix C

Informed Consent

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

CONSENT FORM

"Exploring Perceptions of Sexual Assault in African American Collegiate Women with Membership in Greek-Letter Sororities at a Predominantly White Institution"

Researcher's Statement

I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator:

Bernadette Heckman, PhD

The University of Georgia

Associate Professor, Department of Counseling and Human Development Services

Director of Training, Counseling Psychology Program

bheckman@uga.edu; 706.542.4792

Co-Investigator (Your Main Contact):

Ciera V. Scott, MS

Department of Counseling and Human Development Services

Doctoral Candidate, Counseling Psychology Program

cvscott@uga.edu; 678.983.8436

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the perceptions of sexual assault in African American collegiate women with active membership in Greek-letter sororities at a predominantly white institution. You are being asked to participate in this study because you fit the following inclusion criteria for this study: 1) you identify as female, 2) you are at least 18 years old, 3) you identify as Black/African American, 4) you are enrolled as an undergraduate student at the University of Georgia, and 5) you hold active membership in a Greek-letter sorority that belongs to the National Panhellenic Conference or the National Pan-Hellenic Council.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

1) Complete a brief telephone screening to confirm your eligibility for this study (5-10 minutes). You will be asked if you fit the aforementioned inclusion criteria for this study as mentioned in the purpose section of this informed consent.
2) Provide formal consent of participation and understanding of confidentiality by signing this form (5-10 minutes).
3) Complete a brief demographic form where you will provide background information about your educational background and membership in a Greek-letter sorority (5-10 minutes).

4) Review four brief vignettes and answer questions regarding your attitudes and perceptions regarding each depicted scenario (15-20 minutes). Your responses to the brief vignettes will be audio-recorded.
5) Participate in an interview during which you will be asked specific and in-depth questions about your perceptions of sexual assault as an African American collegiate woman with membership in a Greek-letter sorority at a predominantly white institution (45-60 minutes). Your responses to the interview will be audio-recorded.
6) Review a copy of your interview transcript (a word-for-word written version of your interview) for accuracy (15-20 minutes).

Risks and Discomforts

A notable risk of this study is related to the possibility that you may experience significant levels of psychological discomfort or distress when asked to discuss sexual assault. These risks will be held to a minimum because a referral list of university and local community resources for individuals who identify as sexual assault survivors or who may know someone who was sexually assaulted will be provided to any study participants who may have an adverse reaction during the study and wish to seek out additional counseling services. In addition, the researcher conducting the interviews has both academic training and clinical experience in individual counseling and is equipped to help alleviate any emotional distress that the participant may experience during their interview for this study.

Benefits

Study participants may feel empowered because the feedback that they provide during their interviews could lead to the development of more effective treatments and interventions for

African American collegiate women who may experience sexual assault as a member of a Greek-letter sorority at a predominately White institution.

Incentives for Participation

Each study participant will receive a $10 RaceTrac gift card. The gift card will be given to you immediately following your completion of the audio-recorded interview.

Audio/Video Recording

Your responses will be confidential. The audiotape recordings will be safely stored away and interview transcripts will be electronically secured with password protection. Both the audiotape recordings and interview transcripts will be destroyed within 12 months after the interview has been conducted.

I would like to use portions of your responses during your interview to be included in future publications or presentations in which I share my research findings with professional peers. For example, I may include a part of your interview transcript that describes a particular research finding within a journal manuscript that I submit for publication. The pseudonym that you select will be used in connection to the excerpts from your interview transcript. No personally-identifying information such as your real name or the sorority to which you belong will be included in these publications or presentations.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have portions of your interview transcripts used in the development of research-based publications or presentations. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

_____I do **not** want to have parts of my interview transcript used in research publications or presentations.

_____I am willing to have parts of my interview transcript used in research publications or presentations.

Privacy/Confidentiality

If you agree to participate in this study, you will choose a pseudonym (new name that is not your own) prior to your in-depth interview and review of brief vignettes, which will be used in place of your real name throughout the remainder of the study on any documentation (written documentation or the audiotaped interview transcript) that requires a name. Therefore, identifying information will not be used that could potentially match your identity with the content of your interview. This informed consent form is the only document in which your real name will be used throughout the study. Please note that you can ask the researcher to skip any questions during the interview that you do not wish to answer.

The audiotape recordings will be safely stored away and all other participant data will be electronically stored and secured with password protection. The investigator will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

The researcher is required to report to appropriate authorities if you share thoughts of self-harm or thoughts of harming others during your participation in this study. If you are assessed to have suicidal thoughts or thoughts to hurt someone else, then the researcher will have to contact the appropriate law enforcement agency or local mental health provider to report these concerns to minimize risk of danger to yourself or the general public.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision about participation in this study will have no bearing on your grades or class standing. You can refuse

to participate or stop taking part in this study before the study begins, and discontinue at any time, with no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request via email to the primary investigator (Ciera V. Scott, MS) to remove, return, or destroy the information.

How to Voice Your Questions or Concerns

The main researcher conducting this study is Ciera V. Scott, MS, a Doctoral Candidate in the Counseling Psychology program at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have at this time. If you have any questions later, you may contact Ciera V. Scott, MS at cvscott@uga.edu or 678.983.8436. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

_____	_____	_____
Printed Name of Participant	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Printed Name of Researcher	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Appendix D

Demographic Survey

Pseudonym _____ Age _____ Gender _____

Race/Ethnicity _____
(If multi-racial, please list all of your ethnic identities)

Classification_____ First-Generation College Student (Yes/No)_____
(Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior)

Major_____ Minor_____
(If applicable)

Current Relationship Status _____
(i. e., Single, In a relationship, Married, Other-If other, please describe)

Sexual Orientation_____
(i. e., Heterosexual, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Questioning, Asexual, Other-If other, please describe)

Mother's Highest Level of Education_____
(GED, High School Degree, Associate's Degree, Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, PhD, MD, Other-If other, please describe)

Father's Highest Level of Education_____
(GED, High School Degree, Associate's Degree, Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, PhD, MD, Other-If other, please describe)

Religious Affiliation/Spiritual Orientation_____
(i. e., Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindi, Buddhist, Spiritual, Non-Religious, Agnostic, Atheist, Other-If Other, please describe)

Sorority Membership_____
(Please provide the full name of your sorority)

Join Date for Sorority_____ Number of Months in Sorority_____
(i. e., Spring 2014, Fall, 2013, etc.)

Appendix E

Sexual Assault Vignettes

Vignette one.

Hair (laid). Makeup (flawless). Curve-hugging, red and black cocktail dress (stunning). Rachel was extremely excited to be joining her long-time crush and fraternity brother, Dante, as his date for his fraternity's annual "Greek Love" ball. Rachel had been looking forward to sharing a fun evening with Dante at the ball. She was hopeful that an enjoyable night of dancing, drinking, and laughter would lead to Dante asking her out for dinner and a movie sometime soon. Throughout the "Greek Love" ball, Rachel and her sorority sisters strolled so much that Rachel was no longer wearing her five-inch stiletto heels by the end of the night.

Upon their departure from the ball that night, Rachel was relieved to remember that Dante was driving her home since she and her sorority sisters had somewhat overdone the tequila shots at the fraternity's open bar. Rachel knew that Dante and his fraternity brothers had also been doing shots at the ball, but Dante swore to her that he was sober enough to drive her home. Thankfully, Rachel and Dante arrived safely to Rachel's one-bedroom apartment without incident.

As Rachel and Dante walked towards her apartment's front door, Rachel was thinking that she would send Dante off with a slow goodbye kiss and head to bed alone for a night of peaceful sleep. Rachel went in for the kiss, but her kiss was greeted by Dante forcefully pushing her past her apartment door entrance and onto her living room floor. Dante began kissing Rachel hard on her mouth as he ripped off her new lace underwear. Rachel shouted, "No Dante! Please don't do this!" Rachel's desperate plea fell on deaf ears as Dante forced himself inside of her

until he experienced orgasm. Dante immediately dressed himself and without another word left Rachel, who was in shock and in immense pain, lying on her living room floor.

Vignette two.

Cara and Nick had been dating since their freshman year of college after having met in their Intro to Biology class. Cara adored Nick for his pre-med dreams and passion for poetry, while Nick was enamored by Cara's stunning eyes and her inner determination to attend pharmacy school upon graduation. During their sophomore year, Nick joined the same fraternity as his father and proudly wore his fraternity's letters and colors nearly every day. It was with great enthusiasm that Cara joined Nick's sister sorority during her junior year. Within Greek Life, Cara and Nick were known by all of their friends as the "the Perfect Greek Couple" and by their senior year each had both received the esteemed "Star Greek Student" award from their respective organizations.

Having grown up in a small, rural town in Southwest Georgia, Cara hailed from a conservative Christian family that valued sexual abstinence before marriage. Cara was a virgin when she first met Nick and she shared her religious commitment regarding her chastity with Nick when they initially started dating. Nick stated that he respected her religious beliefs and together Cara and Nick mutually decided they would abstain from sex until marriage. They did agree that it was acceptable for them to kiss and they would often engage in "heavy petting" during their make-out sessions.

One morning Cara visited Nick at his fraternity house so that they could study together before their Advanced Organic Chemistry test that was to take place later that day. Nick led Cara to his private bedroom so that they could enjoy a quiet and peaceful study environment. Upon

closing his bedroom door, Nick and Cara sat down on his bed and he kissed Cara as he normally would upon first seeing Cara.

Their delicate kisses morphed into heavier ones, with them undressing each other down to their underwear. Cara and Nick would usually stop there because of their mutual decision to not engage in sex before marriage. To Cara's surprise, Nick forcefully turned Cara onto her stomach and began to take off her panties. Cara could hear Nick sliding out of his boxers when she distressingly whispered to him, "I wanted to wait for this, Nick." Slowly, Nick lifted himself off of Cara and sat back down beside her on his bed. As Cara's startled breathing began to slow, she rested in the realization that her relationship with Nick was now changed.

Vignette three.

"Rise and shine, little piglets. Meet your Big Sisters at THE house in 20 minutes." Jasmine was awakened at 3:00am by her illuminated phone loudly vibrating on her nightstand with this text message from Larissa, a Senior English major who was a seasoned member of the sorority that Jasmine was interested in joining this semester. Jasmine had attended the open house interest meeting for Larissa's sorority last Monday and had provided Larissa with her personal contact information. Jasmine was a Junior Finance major who shared dreams of one day owning her own accounting firm and wearing the same Greek letters as Larissa.

Jasmine quickly brushed her teeth, hurriedly dressed in her favorite jeans and college T-shirt, hopped into her car, and sped over to Larissa's sorority house. "You're two minutes late, piglet," Larissa shouted at Jasmine as she rushed through the front door at the sorority house. Larissa yelled for Jasmine to get in line with eight other women that she remembered meeting at the sorority open house interest meeting last week. Jasmine even recognized two of the women standing in line against the walls of the front hallway as classmates from her Marketing class.

"Do you know what happens when you're late, piglet?," Larissa fired off in Jasmine's direction. Larissa asked Jasmine to remain in line while also taking off her jeans and her underwear. Mortified with embarrassment, but desperate to demonstrate her commitment to joining Larissa's sorority, Jasmine did as she was told. Larissa slowly walked up to Jasmine and unexpectedly wrapped a black tie across Jasmine's mouth, tying it tight across Jasmine's lips. Larissa began to stroke Jasmine's thighs and buttocks with her left hand while firmly gripping a heavy wooden paddle in her right hand. Inside of her mind Jasmine cried, "I can't believe this is happening!"

Vignette four.

Popcorn. Soda. Brownies. Candy bars. Bethany and her sorority sisters were standing in the check-out line at the grocery store with their hands full of delicious treats for their joint movie night with their fraternity brothers. In celebration of Halloween, Bethany's favorite fraternity brother, Marcus, had suggested a movie night featuring their favorite junk food and scary thrillers filled with blood and gore. A few weeks had passed since her sorority had spent an enjoyable evening with her fraternity brothers, so Bethany was excited to share a night of screams and laughter with her most loved group of Greek friends.

Bethany and her sorority sisters arrived at Marcus's apartment, just a brief drive from the grocery store, to a rousing and warm welcome from their fraternity brothers. After setting up their food and drinks in the kitchen, everyone moved to Marcus's living room where he had "Killers in Cancun" cued on his prized 48-inch flat-screen TV. Two hours later, as the credits for the disappointingly, hilarious "scary" movie rolled across the TV, Bethany wondered what movie Marcus had in mind next for their viewing pleasure. "I've got a surprise for y'all!," Marcus exclaimed.

A few seconds after Marcus placed a new movie into his DVD player, images of nude women and men engaging in oral sex flashed across Marcus's TV screen. Bethany and her sorority sisters were completely caught off guard by the pornographic scenes that Marcus was subjecting the group to during their scary thriller movie night. Bethany had driven her sorority sisters to Marcus's apartment in her car. Fueled by anger at Marcus's behavior, Bethany exclaimed, "We're leaving ladies!" as she reached for her car keys. Bethany and her sorority sister rounded up their food and drinks as loud moans and shouted expletives exploded through Marcus's stereo system.

Appendix F

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

1. Is there anything that you need from me as an interviewer before we proceed with these questions about your perceptions of sexual assault as an African American college student with membership in a Greek-letter sorority?
2. What were your thoughts about the sexual assault vignettes? Which vignettes stood out to you, if any?
3. What is your definition of consent with regards to sex?
4. What resources are you aware of for sexual assault survivors at UGA and in the local Athens-Clarke community?
5. How do you feel your gender affects your risk of being sexually assaulted as a sorority member at UGA?
6. How do you feel your race/ethnicity affects your risk of being sexually assaulted as an African American sorority member at UGA?
7. What are unique attributes specific to Greek Life that you feel protect you from being sexually assaulted as an African American sorority member?
8. What are unique attributes specific to Greek Life that you feel make you vulnerable to sexual assault as an African American female in a sorority?
9. How do you feel the intersection of your identities both African American and female affects your risk of being sexually assaulted as a sorority member at UGA?
10. Have you been sexually assaulted during your undergraduate career? (If the answer is "yes," the interviewer will ask the study participant appropriate follow-up questions regarding the date of assault, known details of the assailant, location of the assault, self-

disclosure of assault to law enforcement, loved ones, or close friends, decision to seek mental health services as a coping mechanism, and maladaptive coping mechanisms)

11. Do you know someone in your sorority who has been sexually assaulted? (If the answer is "yes," the interviewer will ask the study participant the same follow-up questions denoted in Question #12)
12. How do you feel identifying as an African American female college student with membership in a Greek-letter sorority would impact or has impacted your decision to report sexual assault to law enforcement?
13. How do you feel identifying as an African American female college student with membership in a Greek-letter sorority would impact or has impacted your decision to seek mental health services to alleviate psychological symptoms following a sexual assault?
14. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me regarding your perceptions of sexual assault as an African American female college student with membership in a Greek-letter sorority?

Appendix G

Sexual Assault Referral List

Relationship & Sexual Violence Prevention (RSVP)
University of Georgia
University Health Center
55 Carlton Street, Athens, GA 30602
706-542-SAFE (7233)

Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS)
University of Georgia
University Health Center
55 Carlton Street, Athens, GA 30602
Daytime: 706-542-2273
After Hour Mental Health Crisis: 706-542-2200 (UGA Police—Ask for clinician on-call)

Center for Counseling & Personal Evaluation (CCPE)
University of Georgia
424 Aderhold Hall
110 Carlton Street, Athens, GA 30602
706-542-8508

The Cottage: Sexual Assault Center & Children's Advocacy Center
3019 Lexington Road, Athens, GA 30605
Daytime Office Phone: 706-546-1133
24 Hours Crisis Hotline
Local: 706-353-1912
Toll Free: 877-363-1912

In the event of an emergency, always call 911