FOLLOWING THE SORORITY GIRL ON TIKTOK: MAKING GENDER, RACE, AND

CLASS (MORE) VISIBLE IN DIGITAL FASHION MEDIA

by

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(Under the Direction of Maureen Flint and Laura McAndrews)

ABSTRACT

This inquiry explores the development of the sorority girl and influencer on RushTok, a TikTok community focused on sorority culture. "RushTok" refers to the hashtag used to organize this content on TikTok, which is a reference to sorority recruitment or "rush." I draw upon posthumanism and feminist new materialism in three manuscripts to consider how assemblages of style-fashion-dress, devices, algorithms, space and place, and other more-than-human agents intra-act to make certain subjectivities (in)visible and thereby influential on RushTok. The first manuscript follows the sorority girl around 97 RushTok outfit of the day (OOTD) videos collected during 2022 Primary Recruitment to consider how the style-fashion-dress and social media practices in this content intra-act to (re)produce the hegemonic ideal of the Southern sorority girl as White, wealthy, and cisfeminine. In the second manuscript, I follow the sorority girl around in two rounds of intraview data from 13 RushTok users, conducted from August-December 2022. I theorize RushTok style-fashion-dress as a uniform that (re)produces potential new members (PNMs) as uniform sorority girls, again following organizational lines of Whiteness, wealth, and cisfemininity. I (re)turn to the same intraview data in my third manuscript to follow the influencer around. This manuscript positions influence(rs) as an

arrangement of bodies, objects, and expressions that is always becoming and unstable depending on how it is "done." Becoming-influencer content on RushTok (re)produces an idealized image of the sorority girl, making it (im)possible for creators who do not fit this image to attain influencer status. Throughout the dissertation, I find that TikTok's algorithm privileges enactments of the sorority girl and influencer that conform to hegemonic ideals of race, class, and gender. The dissertation also includes a series of interludes to (un)fold the temporal, spatial, and topical relationships between each chapter and offer conceptual links to the overarching theoretical framework. Together, these studies argue that the RushTok sorority girl and influencer are produced by a series of agential cuts that efface some subjectivities while making others more visible, reflecting existing dynamics in fashion media and sorority culture.

INDEX WORDS: social media, sorority culture, posthumanism, algorithmic visibility, influencer

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DEDICATION

We are sisters, and our survival is mutual.

Audre Lorde (1986)

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

*Wait… so do sororities just train people to become MLM
Boss Babes now? Like why the product shout outs and
placements?*

TikTok user @thomassledesky, August 11, 2021

In August 2021, TikTok content related to sorority recruitment, also known as "rush," at

the University of Alabama (UA) went viral in the app and in US media. These videos

documented the recruitment activities of current and potential new members (PNMs) of National

Panhellenic Conference (NPC) sororities at UA and were disseminated via hashtags such as

"RushTok" and "BamaRush." Most were "outfit of the day" (OOTD) videos, in which PNMs

showed viewers what they were wearing to each rush event (Figure 1.1). While #BamaRush

videos were most widely publicized on TikTok and in mass media, PNMs at various universities

produced content using the #RushTok hashtag (Jennings, 2021b; Jones, 2021). "RushTok" soon

became the shorthand for this community and its content, and is therefore the name that I will

use throughout this project. These hashtags later included parody videos that mocked the sorority

hopefuls' fashion and self-mediation practices; as well as users who joined the community to

post videos that explained the recruitment process, broke down Alabama sorority culture, and

discussed the racist history of Alabama Panhellenic sororities (Lang, 2021). The TikTok

algorithm promoted these videos to users beyond the sorority community, resulting in a high

volume of media attention on the rush process and participants. This visibility also boosted sales

for brands named in the PNM videos (Krentcil, 2021). Several of these companies – such as

Kendra Scott, a jewelry company worn by many PNMs – partnered with popular RushTok users to promote their products and even created their own RushTok-inspired advertisements. In this dissertation, I analyze 2022 RushTok content to explore how members of this community intra-act with style-fashion-dress, and how this is shaped by hegemonic gender, racial, and class norms. Through this analysis I connect RushTok content to broader discourses of femininity, fashion, and social media.

Figure 1.1 Makayla Culpepper, a PNM at the University of Alabama in 2021, shows off her earrings for a rush event (TikTok)

TikTok was the most downloaded app in the United States as of 2022 (Ceci, 2023) and reaches over 1 billion users globally each month as of 2023 (Iqbal, 2023). The video-sharing app promotes itself as "a home to a vast array of subcultures" and interests, with many opportunities for brand and business development as well as social engagement (TikTok Business Accounts, n.d.). TikTok communities are organized around algorithms, hashtags, and music, and produce content related to their niche interests or experiences (Alexander, 2019). RushTok is but one example of these many communities. Previous research has focused on how TikTok perpetuates existing norms related to internet celebrity and gender (Abidin, 2020; Kennedy, 2020) and how the app can be used by traditional celebrities to extend self-branding (Su et al., 2020). However, none of these works have examined specific communities on TikTok, nor have they focused explicitly on how fashion is used in these contexts. TikTok has also been used to generate and promote a number of fashion trends, potentially increasing the speed of fashion cycles on and offline (Jennings, 2022). Although many of these trends remain confined to specific communities, occasionally the app's algorithmic promotion moves them into mass media. The RushTok phenomenon, which promoted Southern US sorority culture and fashion into mainstream consciousness, is a significant example. While researchers have used artificial intelligence as a method to forecast fashion trends on social media (e.g. Shi et al., 2021), there are no existing studies that consider the movement or visibility of those trends on social media, and how those may be linked to hegemonic gender and racial norms perpetuated by algorithmic logics (Benjamin, 2019). Despite their purported technological neutrality, algorithms (re)produce[1] stereotypical and hierarchical representations of marginalized communities

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[1] The parenthetical combination of "re" and "produce" indicates that as users intra-act with this content, they are *reproducing* material-discursive assemblages of race and gender to *produce* themselves as racialized and gendered subjects. I use this rhetorical strategy throughout the dissertation with various words to emphasize that these practices are entangled, and thereby disrupt traditional notions of cause and effect.

(Kennedy, 2020; Noble, 2013). While RushTok content eventually included critiques of the racial dynamics of sorority culture, most of the OOTD content that was most visible centered white PNMs and reproduced hegemonic femininity (Hamilton et al., 2019). This dissertation will therefore explore the role of algorithmic moderation in the development of gendered, classed, and racialized subjectivities as well as fashion trends on social media.

This notion of algorithmic agency and visibility also intra-acts with the theoretical and methodological position of this dissertation. Users are but one agent within the vibrant network of RushTok: analysis must also take into account the algorithms that often direct users, as well as the screens, videos, audio, text, and fashion that make up the RushTok community. These agents worked together to ensure the visibility of RushTok practices on- and offline. I therefore explore RushTok as an assemblage in this dissertation, that is, as a multiplicity that is constantly becoming, but is also the process of that becoming (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987). Assemblages are defined through translation of the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), who used the French term *agencement* (or "arrangement") to indicate a process as well as a concept by which entities come and work together. Assemblages are productive – they shape, arrange, or fit entities together – but the term can also refer to arrangements or "constellation" of bodies, objects, expressions, and passions (Livesey, 2010, p. 18). This process-oriented conceptualization of assemblage as an active doing is often lost in translation from French to English; the latter positions it as a grouping, while the former is oriented toward the always-already becoming of the grouping (Livesy, 2010). I use posthuman and new materialist theory, specifically Barad (2003, 2007), to follow (Ahmed, 2010, 2017) these assemblages around in order to explore the normative behaviors and identities that are (re)produced (with)in this social media network. I

map the relations with(in) and between the (non)human agents in the RushTok assemblage. Using this theory involves rethinking the notion that sorority members are distinct from this assemblage: rather, it is through their intra-action with RushTok, with the campus environments, and their clothing, through which they (re)produce themselves as becoming-sorority-member. RushTok OOTD videos offer an entry point to consider the (in)visibility of race, gender, and class in digital fashion media. I also reflect on the research itself as an assemblage, and therefore acknowledge my subjectivity and perspective as well as those of my participants as agents in the becoming-research process.

Becoming (sorority member, influencer) on RushTok

RushTok content takes many forms– critique and commentary, parody, dance videos, and more– but the OOTD is most closely associated with this sociality among participants and attracts the most viewers. I argue that this format is hypervisible on TikTok because it is easy to consume: it's a series of fun, short, eye-catching videos featuring mostly young women in brightly colored, expensive clothing and lavishly decorated interiors. Style-fashion-dress matters in RushTok users' navigation of this assemblage because of its branding potential.

As commenter @thomassledesky notes in the quote that opened this chapter, OOTD videos on RushTok have a distinctly commercial quality that rivals presenters on the Home Shopping Network. In their OOTD videos, Alabama PNMs rattled off the brands or retailers of the clothing they wore in lilting Southern drawls, pointing out their Kendra Scott jewelry, Lululemon shorts, and dresses from The Pants Store while determinedly maintaining eye contact with their front-facing camera. These blatantly branded videos show PNMs intra-acting with gendered, racialized, and classed assemblages via their use of style-fashion-dress. The term

"style-fashion-dress" is used throughout the dissertation to refer to the overlapping ontological relationships between sorority style narratives, the overarching fashion system, and users' individual dress practices, including clothes, grooming, and other body maintenance or modification (Tulloch, 2010; Kaiser & Green, 2021). RushTok videos emphasize hyper-cisfeminine but not over(t)ly sexualized style-fashion-dress, reflecting the antebellum Southern ideal of white, wealthy femininity (Freeman, 2020).

In addition to (re)producing a particular orientation to consumer culture, the OOTD format of RushTok also evokes editorial fashion content from traditional media such as the "straight-up" style of photography seen in late-20th century fashion magazines (Berry, 2012). Fashion bloggers used this mode of style documentation to build a fashionable persona in the early 2000s (Titton, 2015), while Instagram influencers use OOTD content to document their daily dressing and promote particular brands or products (Abidin, 2016). RushTok OOTD content serves a similar narrative function, as many PNMs post a series of these videos to document and share their rush experience. Though they may (not) become an influencer due to this proximity to sorority culture, RushTok PNMs' enactment of becoming-influencer (re)produces influencer modes of communication.

Sorority culture and style-fashion-dress mold the RushTok sorority girl[2] and shape her (in)ability to become-influencer. The community's viral popularity promoted a number of fashion brands, from niche local retailers to fast fashion behemoths such as Shein (Schwedel, 2021). These products were not initially gifted or sponsored, giving these retailers the rare and

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[2] While most National Panhellenic Conference materials use the term "sorority women," and fraternity materials often frame members as "fraternity men," I use the term "sorority girl" throughout this dissertation to reflect the language used by study participants and (informally) by chapters and Greek Life offices.

unexpected gift of unprompted, seemingly authentic advertising. Some companies sent gifts to some of the most popular PNMs who had featured their products after the first wave of content, and a number of these PNMs enthusiastically thanked the brands in their videos. The most prominent RushTok participants received sponsorship deals after rush: in other words, they leveraged their online visibility to become influencers. However, comments like @thomassledesky's suggest that PNMs were behaving like influencers even before they engaged in more formal partnerships. PNM videos follow similar entrepreneurial logics as influencer content, obscuring the economic and social capital, as well as the discipline and labor, that underpin a successful self-brand (Duffy & Hund, 2015). Their RushTok content also follows influencer patterns of engagement, such as the use of direct and intimate communication (Abidin, 2015) and the use of style-fashion-dress for (self) promotional purposes (de Perthuis & Findlay, 2019). This phenomenon is not exclusive to RushTok but reflects the pervasive influence of microcelebrity culture on social media (Abidin, 2015), which has become increasingly professionalized and commercialized as it moves from blogging to newer platforms (Pedroni, 2015). RushTok content is therefore an entry point to explore how style-fashion-dress intra-acts with gendered, classed, and racialized assemblages in online communities to (re)produce users as becoming-influencer. In the following paragraphs, building from these assumptions and entry points that this assemblage affords, I outline the purpose of the study.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze how style-fashion-dress intra-acts with hegemonic gender, racial, and media norms in the RushTok community, and how its users intra-act with these assemblages to (re)produce themselves as becoming-sorority-member and becoming-influencer. I trace RushTok content from 2021 to 2022, and across multiple US

universities to explore the style-fashion-dress and social media practices of sorority members in the RushTok community on TikTok. First, I analyze RushTok content produced by these content creators to consider how this media (re)produces hegemonic gender, class, and racial ideologies. I also use social media intraviews with RushTok users to follow their intra-actions with RushTok content and navigation of this community (Barad, 2007; Kuntz & Presnall, 2012). Finally, I contextualize this content within fashion media discourse to reflect on its (re)production of editorial and influencer modes of representation. Despite noticeable differences in platform logics and affordances, this dissertation analyzes how RushTok content remediates fashion content and practices from existing media forms (Rocamora, 2012). It also considers how such content and practices intra-act with TikTok to make certain subjectivities (in)visible.

Research questions

The overarching research question guiding this dissertation is:

1. How does style-fashion-dress come to matter[3] in the process of becoming-sorority-girl and becoming-influencer on RushTok?

This research question is followed by several subquestions, which are woven into the becoming-sorority-girl and becoming-influencer assemblages. I pull at different threads of these questions in each chapter to map the (non)human agents that become-with these assemblages. They include:

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[3] I use the phrase "coming to matter" deliberately to consider not only how style-fashion-dress emerges as a material, agential force of "iterative intra-activity" (Barad, 2003, p. 822), but also its importance in the process of becoming-sorority girl and influencer.

a. How do gender, race, and class come to matter in RushTok users' style-fashion-dress practices?

b. How do RushTok style-fashion-dress practices become-with TikTok?

c. How does the local (sorority chapter, region, university, year) context/culture matter in style-fashion-dress practices?

d. How do algorithmic logics come to matter in the visibility of gender, race, and class in RushTok?

e. How do traditional fashion media discourses map onto RushTok style-fashion-dress and content development practices?

Organization of the study

This dissertation includes six chapters. Chapter 1 offers the research background, purpose, and significance in order to introduce the reader to the RushTok phenomenon. Chapter 2 presents a review of related literature in fashion and media studies, including the theoretical framework, which includes theories from posthumanism and new materialism. Chapters 3-5 consist of three studies related to the RushTok phenomenon, explained further below. Though each study is written to stand alone, a series of interludes links each study together and offers additional insight into this conceptual assemblage. Each study is therefore written as an intra-active component to produce the body of the dissertation. In the following paragraphs I detail each of these "stand-alone" studies before turning to a discussion of the interludes.

Chapter 3, "#BamaRushTok: Fashioning Southern White Femininity On Social Media," analyzes OOTD videos produced during the first wave of RushTok content in August of 2021. The study analyzes the media and fashion practices in these videos using Ahmed (2010) to

follow the (re)production of hegemonic racial and gender norms. It also follows this video

format beyond the University of Alabama to consider how algorithmic logics (Benjamin, 2019)

influenced the perpetuation of sorority culture and fashion as white, wealthy, and hyperfeminine.

This chapter takes up the overarching research question of the study mapped above to ask:

- How do gender, race, and class come to matter in 2022 RushTok OOTD videos?
  - This research question maps back to question 1a, but focuses specifically on
    OOTD content.
- How does style-fashion-dress come to matter in these videos?
  - This question also maps back to question 1a to consider how style-fashion-dress
    appears in this content.
- How do RushTok videos, and the algorithms that promote them on TikTok, make race,
  class, and gender (in)visible? How does this map onto discourses of race, class, and
  gender in Greek Life and/or on social media?
  - This research question maps back to questions 1c and 1d, specifically asking
    about the intra-action of OOTD and sorority culture.

Chapter 4, "Becoming sorority girl: Following Southern fashion, femininity and sorority

culture on #Rushtok," maps the fashion practices and TikTok use of RushTok users during 2022

Rush Week. The study adapts Kuntz and Presnall's (2012) qualitative methodology of

"intraviews" to connect with 13 TikTok users who engaged with RushTok media during the

2022 Panhellenic sorority recruitment period. These intraviews are conducted in two rounds. The

first round consists of in-person and virtual intraviews, such as email or videoconferencing (e.g.

Zoom). The second round of intraviews consists of text message and direct message (DM)

conversations on TikTok, in which participants share meaningful content that they produced or

encountered on TikTok during rush. My analysis maps back to Ahmed (2010, 2017) to follow

the intra-action of style-fashion-dress, algorithmic logics, and the archetypal Southern sorority

girl on RushTok. I argue that these material-discursive formations (re)produce PNMs as

becoming-sorority-girl on RushTok. Research questions include:

- How does style-fashion-dress come to matter in the process of becoming-sorority-girl on
  RushTok? How does this vary across different institutional (chapters, universities,
  TikTok) and geographic (Southern), and temporal (2021-2022) locations?
  - This research question is drawn from question 1b and 1c by specifically asking
    about the role of the temporal shift (from 2021-2022). It also leaves open the idea
    that participants might be intra-acting with this media from different institutions
    and regions during multiple waves of content.
- How does race, gender, and class come to matter in RushTok style-fashion-dress? How
  does this matter in the visibility of RushTok users?
  - This research question extends 1 and 1a but specifically considers how this
    matters during the recruitment period in 2022.
- How does who these users follow matter in their intra-actions with RushTok and style-
  fashion-dress?
  - This question maps back to 1d by considering how users' intra-action with
    specific content on TikTok might influence how they encounter or engage with
    this community, due to the app's algorithmic moderation of their content.

Chapter 5, "Potential new (brand) members: Sorority OOTDs and becoming-influencer

on #Rushtok," considers how fashion influencer subjectivities come to matter in 2022 RushTok

content. It uses intraviews with RushTok users to explore their intra-action with style-fashion-

dress and aspirational labor (Duffy, 2016) in this online community. Two rounds of intraviews (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012) – one conducted in-person or virtually (e.g. Zoom or FaceTime) and one conducted via text messages and DMs on social media – with 13 RushTok users generate the data for this study. The study follows the figure of the fashion influencer around (Ahmed, 2010, 2017) this and other social media platforms, such as Instagram and blogs, as well as traditional fashion media, such as magazines, to analyze how RushTok content remediates established fashion media discourses (Rocamora, 2012). I argue that RushTok content creators use these practices to (re)produce themselves as fashion influencers. Research questions include:

- How does this content (re)produce 2022 RushTok users as becoming-influencer? How do algorithms matter in the production and mediation of this content?
  - This question specifically addresses the latter part of research question 1, as it reflects on influencer activity on RushTok. It also considers question 1c and 1d by asking how algorithmic and temporal logics matter in the production of this content.
- How does OOTD content on RushTok map onto traditional and digital fashion media?
  - This question refines question 1e by specifically asking about the OOTD.
- Who can become a (RushTok) influencer? How does becoming-influencer content (re)produce normative ideals of race, gender, and the body?
  - This research question maps back to questions 1a and 1d by specifically exploring how racialized, classed, and gendered assemblages come to matter in the production of influencer content in RushTok.

Significance of the study

The dissertation uses innovative qualitative research methodologies informed by new materialist and posthuman theory to follow the material-discursive (re)production of the 'sorority girl' on RushTok, with particular attention to her intra-action with gendered, racialized, and classed assemblages. It also explores how PNMs use style-fashion-dress practices to (re)produce themselves as becoming-sorority-girl and becoming-influencer. I use RushTok as a lens through which to explore how fashion and social media intra-act to enact these subjectivities. In the process, I highlight how nonhuman agents such as clothing, video posts, and phone cameras, as well as discourses of race, gender, and class, matter in the process of becoming-sorority-member and becoming-influencer. This relational approach to fashion and social media highlights the entanglement of these agents and their mutually constituting role in the development of the potential sorority member. Such an approach rethinks the relationship between fashion, social media, and the self as independent or fixed entities: rather, they are messy, entangled, shifting and always-already-becoming (Barad, 2007). The dissertation thus offers a new way to conceptualize and explore the movement of fashion cultures online.

Following RushTok also enables a closer look at what content is made visible on TikTok, and how this is largely contingent upon the maintenance and perpetuation of hegemonic racial and gender norms (Hamilton et al., 2019; Kennedy, 2020). TikTok's algorithm promotes particular people and content, partially based on the user's demographic and interests; this can lead to filter bubbles that increasingly isolate the user from more diverse creators and content (Strapagiel, 2020). This contributes to the suppression of Black, Indigenous, queer, and other marginalized people on the app, which prevents these creators from attaining (let alone monetizing) visibility. This dissertation maps the agents involved in this TikTok assemblage to

make these inequities visible. It also enables a closer look into the movement and development of fashion via digital media, and how similar structural inequities have informed these discourses. While the OOTD genre has its roots in traditional fashion media and, more recently, in fashion blogger and influencer content, RushTok (re)mediates it as an informal, stream of consciousness, narrative experience (Rocamora, 2012). This study presents a partial genealogy of the fashion influencer to explore how this subjectivity comes to matter in RushTok media. It provides new insight into the development of this industry and its systematic fascination, idealization, and commodification of white femininity, and how this has disproportionately rewarded certain online and offline subjectivities.

Subjectivity statement

Because I engage with this content in my "real (online) life" as well as my "research life," I engage with this research as a participant-researcher. I feel that these personal ties often enhance the quality of my work, making my writing more engaging and deepening my study. As a feminist researcher it is also important to acknowledge how I am entangled with my research: how my situated knowledge shapes my research practices (Haraway, 1988), and even my practice of reflexivity. My positionality– (meta)physical, intersectional– also shapes the algorithm that filters research data for this project by structuring what appears in my TikTok feed and how I perceive it. This has important implications for my research context, particularly my data collection and analysis.

My socioeconomic status, race, sexuality, gender and national identity heavily influence what and whom I study, and also create uneven power dynamics between myself and research participants. As a white, cisgender, middle-class, queer woman who is not from the South, and

has very little familiarity with sorority culture, my embodied knowledge is an agentic force that influences how this research happens, moves, and marks events and becomings (Nordstrom, 2018). It sometimes grants me privileges within particular spaces, altering my relation or movement among spaces and participants (Ahmed, 2017; Collins, 2002). For example, I am a queer femme but pass as straight, which combined with my whiteness may inspire greater trust among some participants; at the same time, my queerness gives me unique insights into the dynamics of deeply cisgendered, heterosexual systems. While my middle-class background affords me the economic and social capital to circulate comfortably in university spaces, my lack of sorority knowledge makes me an outsider of this culture which sometimes makes it difficult to connect with potential participants. I am therefore a body without organs, full of "sedimentations… foldings and recoilings," embedded within "the system" (academia, capitalism, white supremacy, the patriarchy…) at the same time as I am constantly becoming/disrupting that system (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 159, quoted in Nordstrom, 2019). I use memos throughout the data collection and analysis process as a reflexive practice to address my subjectivity and its role in my research design and practice. My interludes are an additional reflexive space, and provide additional engagement with these themes in the body of the dissertation.

My methodology requires additional consideration of the impact of my subjectivity and its intra-action with that of my potential participants, platforms, and practices. The formation and structuring of my intraview questions, as well as my status as researcher, confer power and will thus influence the affects and responses of my participants. As I am interested in further exploring how PNMs navigate their subjectivity in their social media and fashion practices, it is very important for me to acknowledge my entanglement with(in) this material-discursive

formation (Barad, 2007). Following Springgay and Truman (2018, p. 206), I attempt to work from the "speculative middle" of my research, and try to "emphasize doing rather than meaning making." I therefore attempted to develop more intra-active patterns of communication in data generation and analysis that are commensurate with my theoretical framework: for example, in my intraviews, I will follow the linguistic rhythms and behaviors endemic to each space and participant, and use emojis and "likes" in my intraview messages to "activate thought" (Springgay & Truman, 2018, p. 206). My analysis will focus on "reading *diffractively* for patterns of differences that make a difference," rather than reading *reflexively,* which implies a search framed by reflections of my own thoughts or experiences (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, my emphasis). I must also attend for the slippage of subjectivity, narratives, and meanings – my own as well as that of research participants (Childers, 2012). I therefore seek to witness and become-with the subjectivities of the participants in this study, rather than "dictate static identities, fixed patterns, and seamless narratives to validate inquiry" (Childers, 2012). In other words, I will remain response-able to each intraview context and the complex entanglements that they produce (Barad, 2010). My memos will also help make these practices (more) visible by sharing inconsistencies, anxieties, and omissions in my analysis (Clarke, 2005).

Finally, I should note that in keeping with my posthuman framework, I use the term subjectivity rather than identity throughout this dissertation. While the latter indicates a fixed and ontologically prior position, the former is always becoming "in deep relationality to its fellow nonhuman species and entities" (van der Zaag, 2013, p. 333). My subjectivity, that of my participants, and even those of the RushTok PNMs under consideration in this study are similarly fluid and entangled, even as they are "firmly located somewhere" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 51).

Though these subject position are not stable, they are nevertheless a "site for [our] political and ethical accountability…collective imaginaries and shared aspirations" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 102).

Interludes

The dissertation chapters are linked by a series of interludes, including reflections, artful explorations, poems, and personal vignettes. These interludes are designed to (un)fold the temporal, spatial, and topical relationships between each chapter, as well as to offer conceptual links to overarching posthuman and new materialist theories (Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2019). The inclusion of personal memos and reflections also makes my reflexive practice more visible. The first interlude links chapters one and two, and reflects upon some of the Greek life terminology used frequently in this dissertation. I use this interlude to reflect on my journey learning to "speak Greek," and thereby reflect on the "distances that matter" between my subjectivity and values, and those of Panhellenic sorority culture (Dophijn & van der Tuin, 2012).

Interlude two, which bridges the second and third chapter, reflects on the unprecedented visibility of RushTok and its impact not only on the sorority recruitment process, but also on participant recruitment for my study. I also consider how Panhellenic regulations, social media algorithms, and gossip intra-act as disciplinary forces during recruitment.

The third interlude, between the third and fourth chapter, consists of a collage created from the memos that I wrote during data generation for these respective studies, printed stills of TikTok videos, intraview quotes, and text from sorority websites at UA and UGA. The collage incorporates the aforementioned elements in a "relation-of-nonrelation" and is accompanied by a brief reflection in which I consider how the material-discursive intra-action of these elements makes posthuman concepts of agency and power, feminine subjectivities, and their relationship

to place and space more visible (Hanawalt, 2019). The collage was also used to develop the garment in the fourth interlude.

The fourth interlude links chapters four and five, and focuses on style-fashion-dress on RushTok. Following Wilson (2018), I construct a dress for sorority recruitment by marking, pinning, measuring, and stitching the hegemonic subjectivities and style-fashion-dress practices of the RushTok community. I used participant intraviews to design the dress: the silhouette was created based on descriptions of RushTok fashion, and the fabric pattern incorporates intraview quotes. This design is still in progress but I present the work in progress as a photo essay.

A fifth and final interlude considers a path not taken in this dissertation study: how non-sorority affiliates create content and participate in RushTok. I analyze four OOTD parodies collected during 2022 recruitment alongside the data used in Chapter 3. These humorous subversions of the RushTok OOTD format enable consideration of how this content becomes-with TikTok users and, through its entanglement with their enactment of the sorority girl, makes the normative style-fashion-dress practices and subjectivities of RushTok more visible.

INTERLUDE 1

LEARNING TO SPEAK GREEK

Panhellenic organizations are built on a lexicon of Greek and Latin terms, which can be confusing for people who are not familiar with fraternities or sororities – in other words, people like me. Researching this topic has therefore been a constant crash-course in Greek Life lingo. Not all of this language is in actual Greek or Latin: terms like "continuous open bidding" (COB), which describes a phase of the recruitment process, have the formal, bland feel of corporate jargon. While this dissertation focuses on style-fashion-dress, not linguistics, it's important to note how the language of Greek life contributes to the perpetuation of exclusivity (Alvesson, 2011) and values (Cohen et al., 2017) of these organizations, which are themselves deeply imbued with hegemonic race, class, and gender norms (Hughey, 2010; Freeman, 2020). The spoken and sartorial language of sororities is therefore a significant means by which (potential new) members think through what "sisterhood" means, as well as who can be a sister in the first place. Knowing what to say and how to say it, as well as what to wear and how to wear it, helps you feel like you belong (Krueger, 2013).

***

After watching hundreds of RushTok videos I felt reasonably confident that I knew all of the recruitment procedures, but when I began to conduct intraviews I found that UGA has a different schedule than UA, which is highlighted in RushTok content. They also have some different terminology: for example, the disaffiliated active members who serve as student

counselors and coordinators during recruitment are called Rho Chis at UA, but Gamma Chis at UGA. I quickly learned that space and place matter in the language of Greek Life. In the below excerpts, study participants patiently explain, over and over and over again, how recruitment works at UGA. Their quotes also offer a glimpse into the rigorous structure and terminology of this process.

*

"So round one was a video so I turned that in online. Round 2 is called Philanthropy. Round three is called Sisterhood. Four, Preference Round, and then five is Bid Day" (Patricia, August 22, 2022).

**

Maureen: Okay. I– I was looking at that when I went to go to these recruitment events because like, well, I guess I'll dress to kind of, like, blend in a little bit. And I noticed that– so the Pointer said I believe for– was it, Sisterhood? Whatever the last round is where everyone was in black…

Emma: Preference. Pref Round (September 22, 2022).

***

Maureen: I went to recruitment, two days, I went on, I don't know, whatever the Wednesday before classes was, I don't– I've lost track of the different names of the rounds and stuff, I can't even begin to tell you. And then Saturday before Bid Day, when everyone was wearing black…

Hailey: Black– Pref, yeah (September 19, 2022).

***

Mia: So many people had the dress that I had. It was crazy, but most people wore it day one, cause Round Two was two days, so day one…

Maureen: Right? And that's the t shirt and the–

Mia: So round 3 is the t-shirt.

Maureen: See? I don't know, they're all– I get all confused now because of all the different schools.

Mia: Yeah, it blends together. We-- yeah. No Round Two was two days and that's where you wear your two dresses, in sisterhood.

MB: Okay, yeah.

Mia: Sisterhood is two days, and then Philanthropy... hm. I could actually be wrong. I could totally be mixing those up.

Maureen: I think you're right.

Mia: Maybe– yeah.

Maureen: You're right, cause round one is virtual.

Mia: Round 1 is virtual, it's just the video, and then we have our orientation and then you rank right before round 2, and then round 2 is when... Yeah. I think that might be the Sisterhood Round. It's two days and then, um– Philanthropy is one day and that's also house tours, like--

MB: Yes. And that's when you wear–

Mia: And that's when you wear the T shirts, and then whatever bottoms, and then pref. And then Bid. Yeah, so... I'm trying to think (September 30, 2022).

****

Patricia: Preference day when we're on black. We're not allowed to talk.

Maureen: Okay…

Patricia: Um, I'm pretty sure that's a general rule. But... since I have a pseudonym... I guess it doesn't really matter if it's something that I'm not supposed to.... I don't think that would be something I wouldn't be allowed to say. But– so we're not allowed to talk on the bus. It's because we're supposed to be contemplative and they don't want– and we also narrow our houses down quite a bit. And they don't want people to be like, well, I'm going to this house and you're not... we're not allowed to talk about schedules at all (August 22, 2022).

***

I have translated some of the most common words and phrases used in Panhellenic sorority culture during this part of the membership process so that you can learn to speak Greek like I did ("Panhellenic Pointer," 2021, 2022; Greek Chic, 2022; "Terminology," n.d.). This crash course will hopefully assist the reader in navigating this dissertation. I do not use all of these terms in the dissertation, but I present them here to illustrate the complexity of these organizations' structure and procedures.

- Active: Current sorority member who has been formally initiated into a sorority chapter. The majority of the participants in this study are active members.

- Alumna: An initiated sorority member who is no longer in college. You can still be an alumna of the sorority even if you did not graduate from the college in which the chapter is based.

- Bid: A formal invitation to join a sorority, which is extended by the Panhellenic Council or the individual chapter. You go through recruitment in hopes of "getting a bid" from the sorority of your choice.

- Bid Day: The final day of fall recruitment, when PNMs receive their bids to join a sorority. At UGA new members are required to wear white for bid day, which makes it uncomfortably similar to a wedding ceremony.

- Big: Shortened version of "big sister," or mentor for new members; usually a more senior member of the same sorority.

- Chapter: A local affiliate of the national sorority organization, designated by a Greek letter name.

- Continuous Open Bidding (COB): A process that allows chapters to add members outside of the formal recruitment period. The acronym is pronounced "cawb."

- Cut/Drop: A mutual elimination process that occurs in several rounds during recruitment. A sorority makes cuts or drops PNMs based on their ranking of that person, but these are also dependent on how the PNM has ranked the sorority. One might also drop out after receiving a bid. Participants were unsurprised that Grant, an Alabama PNM who identified as non-binary during recruitment, was dropped by all sororities after several rounds.

- Fraternity: Frequently used to refer to an organization for male-identifying people, but also used as a general term to refer to any Greek life organization.

- Gamma Chi: Used at UGA to denote a sorority member who is disaffiliated from their chapter to maintain impartiality during the recruitment period. This includes moving out of their residence and into a hotel. They assist potential new members during recruitment. (These figures are called "Rho Chis" at UA.)

- Greek: Any member of a sorority or fraternity (i.e. "a Greek").

- Initiation: Formal ceremony to grant full membership to the organization. Very secretive process.

- Legacy: A potential new member whose immediate family members are active members or alumni of a Greek letter organization. "Being a legacy" is not as important as it used to be– one participant in this study was dropped from her mother's chapter during recruitment.

- Little: Short for "little sister." A new member who is mentored by a "big sister" in the sorority. Revealing who your "big" or "little" is has become a popular type of video content on RushTok.

- New member: A person who has been accepted into a sorority but has not been initiated. Formerly referred to as a "pledge."

- National Panhellenic Conference (NPC): The national umbrella organization for all 26 Panhellenic (historically white) sororities. I did not ask for participants to reveal their chapter, but I did ask them if they were in a NPC sorority.

- National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC): The national umbrella organization for all 9 historically Black sororities. Sometimes called the "Divine 9" or "D9" as a shorthand. D9 sororities have a much different recruitment process: most importantly, it is more

secretive, takes longer, and occurs later in the academic year, which is part of the reason why their content is less visible on RushTok.

- Pin/Badge: Worn by members of a Greek organization that is unique and represents that organization; part of a formal initiation process in which you "get pinned."

- Potential New Member (PNM): A person who is participating in the sorority recruitment process. Recruitment is designed to give PNMs many opportunities to visit different chapters to find their future "home."

- Preference (Pref, Pref Night): The final event in fall recruitment before Bid Day. It is very formal and usually includes a ritual. Afterwards, PNMs are expected to list their preferred sororities in order, which will help determine which sorority they match with.

- Quota: The number of people that a sorority chapter can pledge during recruitment. This varies from year to year depending on how many people are going through recruitment; it also depends on the number of chapters on campus.

- Recruitment: The formal period through which potential new members meet with active members, learn about Greek organizations, and join an organization. Previously called "rush," but the name was changed to avoid association with negative stereotypes about Greek Life. "Rush" is still used informally and interchangeably with recruitment.

- Sister/Soror: Fellow sorority member. Soror is used more often among D9 members, while NPC sororities tend to use sister. (Fraternity members are called "brothers," and many chapters have residential advisors that are called house "moms" or "dads." The familial analogy runs very deep.)

- Snap bidding: A procedure used after bid matching to help chapters fill their quota. This is one of several methods to fill quotas and maintain maximum membership.

- Suicide bidding: Rather problematic name for when a PNM decides to declare preference for only one sorority in the final round of recruitment. This is a huge gamble because you might not receive a bid from that sorority, and then you don't have any backup options. It is generally discouraged by most campus Panhellenic organizations (but one of my participants successfully joined a sorority this way).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides the theoretical framework and key literature used throughout this dissertation, which explores how RushTok users intra-act with style-fashion-dress to (re)produce hegemonic subjectivities. First, I present the theoretical framework for the dissertation, this includes the onto-ethico-epistemology of posthuman and feminist new materialist research, and Ahmed's (2010, 2017) concept of following, which is used as a theory and method in this dissertation. I then move to a review of the literature to reflect on the relationship between fashion social media, including the shift from traditional to digital fashion media and the concurrent rise of fashion influencers. This maps back to my research question related to the cultivation of influencer subjectivities on RushTok. I consider the discursive (re)production of race and gender on social media, and how this has (not) shifted on TikTok, returning to my research questions about the intra-action of After describing the development of this new social media platform, I reflect on continuing issues of algorithmic (in)visibility, specifically related to representations of race and gender. The literature review concludes with an exploration of research related to Southern sorority culture and its intra-action with fashion, race, and gender.

Theoretical Framework

Posthumanism and feminist new materialism

This study emphasizes materiality and affect, reflecting an onto-ethico-epistemological framework drawn from posthumanist and new materialist paradigms. It presumes that "language

and reality exist on the surface," troubling the representational logic of humanist qualitative ontology (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 649). While humanist qualitative approaches are interested in finding or identifying meaning, my study "works with processes, refusing to reduce the processual event to some static object or thing" (Kuntz, 2021, p. 217). In this section I articulate this framework and its implications for the dissertation focus and methodology.

As new discursive and theoretical paradigms proliferate, they continually rethink and revisit the traditions that came before. Many of these paradigms take up the phrasing of the "post" or "new" to indicate their relationship with what has come before (Kuntz, 2021). Lather (2006, p. 36) points out that while many conceptualize these "post" paradigms as "pure breaks," they are in fact slippery and "unstable compositions" that belie the multiplicity and "shifting forces" in qualitative theory and research. Thus the posthuman and feminist new materialist traditions, rather than a radical break with earlier paradigms, incorporate and react to the ontology and epistemology of deconstructionism, as well as earlier formations (Lather, 2006). However, posthumanism and feminist new materialism reflect a distinct twining of ethics, ontology, and episteomology, sometimes written as "ethico-onto-epistemology" reflecting the "intertwining of ethics, knowing, and being" (Barad, 2007, p. 185). Ontology, or the nature of reality and being, is framed as relational, immanent, and therefore unknowable in these traditions (Braidotti, 2019; Lather, 2006). Postuman and new materialist theories are also driven by a "collective praxis of affirmative politics" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 19) that recognizes how "the becoming of the world is an ethical matter," involving complex material-discursive relations among (non)human agents (Barad, 2007, p. 185).

It is important to note the differences between posthumanism and new materialism. Each map back to different traditions: posthumanism to European humanism, and new materialism to

materialist philosophies (van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2010). Posthumanism challenges the legacy

of the humanities, which is imbued with Western civilizational values such as anthropocentrism,

representationalism, and universalism (Braidotti, 2019). Meanwhile, new materialism signals a

(re)turn to matter as a dynamic and determining factor in the production of objects, entities, and

phenomena, thereby mapping back to materialist philosophies. Feminist new materialism maps

back to (new) materialist and feminist theory to "acknowledge the manifold recursive

interactions through which nature and culture develop and evolve" and thereby "engage and

criticize essentialism" (Frost, 2011, p. 80). These philosophical traditions frame materiality as

the determining factor in history and social relations, informing theoretical frameworks such as

structuralism and feminism (Hollin et al., 2017). While new materialism shares a

poststructuralist focus on the ways in which material beings are embedded in social relations of

power, the former rejects the hegemony of language and cultural representation by focusing on

the inherent vitality of matter (Barad, 2007; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012). New materialism

thereby draws from the "new" vitalism of Deleuze (1988), which resists the reduction of the

world to merely matter and the dualistic notion that "matter needs to be granted meaning by

thought" or language (Colebrook, 2008); rather, matter is dynamic and generative, "always

already an ongoing historicity" (Barad, 2007, p. 151). There is some overlap here with

Indigenous ethico-onto-epistemologies, which recognize the vitality of (non) humans and

prioritize an ethics of care and responsibility when working with(in) these research populations,

mapping back to decolonial frameworks (Kimmerer, 2013; TallBear, 2014). For the purpose of

this dissertation, I align with and use the term posthumanism because it shares my "keen eye for

issues of social and political justice and a commitment to affirmative ethics" (Braidotti, 2019).

Posthumanism also frames subjectivity as a complex assemblage of (im)material relations, which

guides my analysis of RushTok. However, there remain some slippages with the other terms. When applicable I will note these terms and will contextualize them within the distinctive traditions of their theoretical framework. In what follows I dig more deeply into the assumptions of posthuman traditions and the scholars I draw on in this work.

Approaching a critical posthuman onto-ethico-epistemology

A posthuman ontological framework therefore revises traditional humanist notions of agency, subjectivity, time, and space. Matter is no longer static or passive: it is doing, a "congealing of agency," a conceptualization that recognizes that agency itself is an enactment rather than an attribute of a particular entity (Barad, 2003, pp. 821-827). Posthumanism thinks beyond anthropocentrism to acknowledge the subjectivity of nonhuman agents; it also rethinks the "unity of the human being" (Braidotti, 2006). Rather than an an individual, stable Cartesian subject, posthuman subjectivity approaches bodies (human, nonhuman, more than human) as "radically immanent [and] intensive…an assemblage of forces, or flows, intensities and passions that solidify in space, and consolidate in time, within a singular configuration" (Braidotti, 2006, p. 201). These bodies are always shifting, always becoming-with(in) intra-action, through which temporality and spatiality emerge (Barad, 2003). Time and space are therefore disjointed, nonlinear, unstable: they fold in upon themselves, "iteratively differentiating and entangling" (Barad, 2010, p. 244). Barad's concept of *spacetimematter* underscores that these too are always-already entangled, intra-actively produced with(in) phenomena: they are not "determinate givens outside of phenomena" (2007, p. 383). Because these figures, systems and objects – RushTok users, RushTokfollowers, TikTok, fashion, phones, and so on – are entangled, intra-active and always becoming (Barad, 2007), this study reflects an epistemological framework that considers the relational nature of these components. It assumes that knowledge is situated and socially

constructed through these relational intra-actions (Barad, 2003, 2007). Whereas the concept of *interactions* presumes that entities are independent prior to a particular phenomenon, *intra-action* reflects a posthuman ontology of indeterminacy and immanency, in which entities are constantly intertwined and becoming (Barad, 2003). These phenomena intra-act to enact the boundaries between "humans" and "nonhumans," "male" and "female," "nature" and "culture" (Barad 2003; Braidotti, 2006). This onto-ethico-epistemological framework produces "fluid subjects, ambivalent and polyvalent, open to change, continually being made, unmade and remade" (Barad, 2007; Lather, 2006, p. 43). Causality is not linear, but fractal, with each action producing a swarm of vitalities (Bennett, 2010). I primarily use the work of Braidotti (2006, 2019) and Barad (2003, 2007) in this dissertation. Braidotti (2019, p. 79) provides a critical posthumanist perspective to help me "take in the intensity of the world and take on its objectionable aspects" via the "relational capacity" of myself and my research assemblage. Meanwhile, Barad (2007) offers detailed insights into the dynamism of space, time, and matter, and their intra-active production of the world. I use this framework to consider how gender, race, and class are always-already (un)done in RushTok content via more-than-human intra-actions.

I also draw upon Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) process-oriented framework of becoming in this dissertation to explore how the sorority girl and influencer are enacted-with RushTok. These enactments are not static beings but rather "potential[s] or power[s] to create divergent potentials" (Colebrook, 2010, p. 4). Becoming is not a starting or end point, or even the phase between those states, but an immanent, eternal process that "produces nothing other than itself" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 238). One becomes-sorority-girl by bringing the particles of their body into relation with the Sorority Girl assemblage: by speaking, dressing, *doing* sorority girl "with enough feeling, with enough necessity and composition" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.

275). The relations of movement, speed, parts, and intensities are a "productive threshold of forces" (Stagoll, 2010, p. 27) that produce becoming-sorority-girl or becoming-influencer in wholly immanent events. Thus the terms "sorority girl" or "influencer" may be proper nouns, but they are always-already indefinite and indeterminable: "it is by virtue of the event that they are in themselves and in the assemblages" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 264). I analyze RushTok content as assemblages of more-than-human agents that carry PNMs in shared proximity with the Sorority Girl and Influencer. In Chapter 4, I consider how style-fashion-dress becomes-uniform on RushTok, and how this (re)produces the Sorority Girl as uniformly White, wealthy, and cisfeminine. In Chapter 5, I explore how the potentiality of influence unfolds on RushTok depending on the proximity of PNMs to Sorority Girl and Influencer assemblages. In both studies, I contend that these lines of becoming are also shaped by the affordances of WGLOs and algorithmic logics; in particular, I focus on race, class, and gender discourses with(in) these systems. This theorization of subjectivity as "embedded and embodied [with] relational and affective powers" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 42) or "beings in their differential becoming" (Barad, 2003, p. 818) is also taken up in posthumanism and new materialism. I think with these theorists to conceptualize RushTok as a "relation of movement and rest, speed and slowness grouping together an infinity of parts," with corresponding "intensities that affect it, augmenting or diminishing its power to act" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 256). My study of style-fashion-dress in this sociality also draws upon previous research related to posthumanism and fashion studies, which I discuss in the following section.

Posthumanism and new materialism in fashion studies

Recent fashion studies scholarship has incorporated posthuman and new materialist onto-epistemologies, which I briefly review to consider connections and entry points for my work.

Granata (2017) analyzes experimental fashion designers such as Martin Margiela and Rei Kawakubo who challenge "normative discourse" to present clothing that "problematizes demarcations between bodily boundaries and questions the integrity of the subject" (p. 7). Even though she does not engage new materialist theory, Granata's examination of experimental fashion offers an intriguing example of material-discursive intra-actions of fashion and the body. She continuously writes of both fashion and the body as matter that are constituted in the world, always becoming and shaping (whilst also irrevocably shaped by) the discursive practices of art, design, culture and politics. Smelik (2020) uses posthuman theory to analyze the work of the fashion designer Iris van Herpen, whose 3D printed designs celebrate the "in-betweenness" of the human body and its entanglement with nonhuman forms. While her argument relies rather strongly on a representational analysis of van Herpen's work, Smelik's consideration of the affective and transformational potential of fashion is relevant to this project. I will similarly use posthuman theory to follow the affective intensities of style-fashion-dress and TikTok, and how the material intra-ventions of these agents transform the bodies of RushTok users. Ruggerone (2018) offers another perspective on the potential application of posthuman theory in fashion studies. She frames embodiment as "extra-cognitive, [and] in the flesh" that is "therefore not reproducible in a strictly analytical form or vocabulary" (p. 578). She considers fashion and the body as assemblages – that is, as multiplicities that are constantly becoming, but are also the process of that becoming (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987). Assemblages can be further defined as configurations in which "the parts that are fitted together are not uniform either in nature or in origin…the assemblage actively links these parts together by establishing relations between them" (De Landa, 2016, p. 2). This project approaches RushTok users, style-fashion-dress, and content as assemblages that are constantly becoming by tracing how they intra-act on TikTok. It

therefore follows Vänskä, (2018) in using style-fashion-dress as a "conceptual and practical tool for posthumanist critique" (p. 28).

Following concepts around

Ahmed's (2010, 2017) approach of *following concepts around* reflects a posthumanist ethico-onto-epistemology but also draws from deconstructionist and phenomenological traditions. This approach can be considered a theory as well as a method, as it describes the relational production of particular concepts and the way in which Ahmed explores their generation and effects. I use this process theory of *following* to tune into the phenomena of RushTok: attending not to "what it is," but what it does, and the affective relations that it produces (Ahmed, 2010, p. 2).

Ahmed puts this concept to work throughout several projects, including *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) and *Living a Feminist Life* (2017). In the former, she follows happiness around to consider "what histories are evoked by the mobility of this word"; she "goes where it goes," and in the process notices "what it is up to, where it goes, [and] who or what it gets associated with" (p. 14). She acknowledges the subjectivity of this approach, which shapes a particular "horizon" of happiness based on her method as well as positionality (p. 14). Happiness is considered as a material-discursive phenomena, which has a history and is constructed relationally. Ahmed notes that we are "affirmed," shaped, and even *influenced* by happiness: we seek out happy objects (these are not always literal, material objects, but also institutions, ways of being, subjectivities) in order to follow the promise of happiness (pp. 28-30). More importantly, she argues that happiness is not fixed within particular times, places, or people; it is not objective, and it is not produced in a causal relationship. By following the word happiness as

it relates to families, feminism, sexuality, and nationality, Ahmed deconstructs the origins and effects of happiness and its (re)production of particular power dynamics, knowledge, subjectivity and truth.

Ahmed uses a similar theoretical and methodological framework in *Living a Feminist Life* (2017) to explore feminism as a sweaty and sensational concept. She follows feminism throughout personal and professional contexts, from queer and family relationships to diversity work in institutions. The book considers how one might become feminist, and how this might shape their navigation of their social world. Ahmed's concept of following therefore upholds a posthuman onto-epistemology of relationality, immanence, and multiplicity. Both projects explore these concepts through the deconstruction of media, literature, and experience, reflecting the influence of poststructuralist and phenomenological inquiry as well as a disruption of the nature/culture binary. Ahmed's work also interrogates the production of these concepts (happiness, feminism) *by* and *through* everyday habits as well as philosophy: in other words, by following them around, she is able to articulate how these concepts "involve ways of thinking about the world that shape how the world coheres" (2010, p. 15). Ahmed also explores what follows these concepts, which notably includes oppositional subjectivities: the unhappy queer (2010), the feminist killjoy (2017). Like Ahmed (2010), I follow the sorority girl and influencer explore how these subjectivities might produce and even justify oppression, particularly among queer and non-White people, but also offer opportunities for resistance. I also consider how moments of "snap" or breakage from normative orientations make the norms that structure those orientations more visible (Ahmed, 2017).

Ahmed (2010, pp. 14-16) describes her methodology as guided by a desire to offer an "alternative history of happiness," which she produces through the method of "follow[ing] the

word happiness around." She notes that this is a highly subjective production, in which she "had

to find [happy] objects, make choices, include some things and exclude others" (p. 18), and

therefore avoids claims of generalizability or objectivity. Rather, her project finds value in

reflexivity, transparency, and thick description of happiness (Tracy, 2010). Jackson and Mazzei's

(2013) method of thinking through theory likewise resists "sweeping generalizations" of the

macro to reject the oversimplified, representational logic of humanist inquiry (St. Pierre, 2013).

This method of "plugging in" one text to another asks "not only how things are connected but

also what territory is claimed in that connection" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 262). Considered

a "process rather than a concept," plugging one text into another attends not only to an

assemblage's production of particular material-discursive relations and phenomena, but also their

(re)production of particular "fields of subjectivity" among the researcher(s) (pp. 262-63). This

also affirms a posthuman ethics of affirmative, situated, and relational knowledge production

(Braidotti, 2019, p. 12). Ahmed's (2010, 2017) work is similar in its reflexivity and focus on

issues of becoming: rather than production of a particular "end or commodity," it produces an

"assemblage in formation" that is also continuously becoming and (re)shaped by further

material-discursive encounters (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013). Data collection is therefore not meant

to be exhaustive or even quantifiable, as the data itself is not meant to be representative of (or

generalizable to) particular phenomena. Further, both thinking through theory and the concept of

following propose that the researcher (re)work data continuously to "diffract, rather than

foreclose, thought" (p. 264). When reporting this data, Ahmed (2010, 2017) as well as Jackson

and Mazzei (2013) model "intimacy with both the data and theory" that is attentive to the

researcher's subjectivity. Analysis is focused on folding theory into the data rather than

producing singular, linear, or objective results. My roles as researcher and social media user are

inseparable and inform my intimacy with the data, which are in turn constantly intra-acting with my embodied and embedded subjectivity. My project likewise recognizes the role of my subjectivity in the research assemblage, and how this informs my subjective analytical perspective of the RushTok phenomenon. Thus, in my project, "goodness" might be considered through my engagement with ethical questions of how I become-with my research (Kuntz, 2021; Tracy, 2010).

Berlant's (2011) *Cruel Optimism* offers another intriguing example of deconstruction using new materialist epistemologies. Like Ahmed (2010), Berlant proposes an alternative history of optimism that is reshaped into their concept of *cruel* optimism, which is described as follows:

> A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project. It might rest on something simpler, too, like a new habit that promises to induce in you an improved way of being. These kinds of optimistic relation are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially (2013, p. 1).

Berlant therefore troubles the notion of cruel optimism as a causal effect (or affect): rather, much like Ahmed's conception of happiness, it is a relational assemblage of historicized, material-discursive formations. While Ahmed focuses on feelings of (un)happiness or optimism as productive orientations – ways of shaping the world that are shaped by our emotions and affective experiences (2010, p. 24) – Berlant's work frames optimism as a manifestation of attachment. The emotional or affective sensations that emerge from that attachment are

contextual and historicized (2013, p. 13). Berlant's analysis traces the production of cruel optimism across affective and aesthetic (media, literary, philosophical) forms. Their book "track[s] the becoming general" of cruel optimism in a neoliberal, post-Second World War socio-economic period to present optimistic attachment as "a structure of relationality" (pp. 12-15). Berlant's study uses a variety of visual, nonverbal, and textual data, again troubling the linguistic and representational logic of humanist inquiry (St. Pierre, 2013). Data is collected with attention to how it reproduces "patterns" of affective attachment, a highly subjective and yet effective means to map the becoming of cruel optimism over time and space. This rigorous approach to data collection and meaningful coherence of the data with other sources marks the study's goodness (Tracy, 2010). Berlant's analysis maps how these affective attachments developed, and how they (re)shape contemporary subjectivities, presenting cruel optimism as "a moving entity whose articulations produce effects, leaving traces of its passage in the form of […relationships, subjectivities, and] physical and ephemeral manifestations" (Freeman, 2016, p. 94). Like Ahmed (2010, 2017), their data reporting is presented as a form of situated knowledge that is drawn from their subjectivity and experiences.

Mapping theory and method in the dissertation

In this dissertation, I fold these theoretical and methodological perspectives into my study of the RushTok phenomenon by focusing on the affective, immanent, and material trajectories (and histories) of this media. I use posthuman theories to address the immanence, relationality, and materiality of the RushTok phenomenon, and to critique the "multiple and internally contradictory aspects of [European humanist] knowledge practices" (Braidotti, 2019, p. 90). This theoretical framework informs my methodological approach, which includes analysis of RushTok discourses as well as intraviews with RushTok users to "abstract the humanist subject

as an object for analysis" (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012). My analysis of 2022 RushTok discourses in Chapter 3 will follow Berlant (2011) and Ahmed (2010, 2017) by deconstructing the structures of relationality in RushTok and sorority culture. More specifically, I follow the "sorority girl" around in this media and think with popular media and academic texts to explore what follows from the enactment of this subjectivity (Ahmed, 2010). Intraviews are used in Chapters 4 and 5 to center the perspectives of RushTok users while foregrounding the (im)material, embodied, and affective nature of the RushTok community and content. These intraviews aim to transform the "perception and perspective" of the interview from a linguistic, representational framework to one of relationality and becoming, in keeping with a posthuman theoretical framework (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012). These intraviews include two rounds: the first was conducted using a more traditional format, either in-person or using virtual modalities like email, Zoom, or FaceTime. The second round was conducted via direct messages (DMs) on TikTok and text messages. Both rounds include elicitation of RushTok content to discuss participants' intra-action with this media. I followed concepts such as the "sorority girl" and "fashion influencer" around in my intraview data to explore how these subjectivities are produced with(in) RushTok, how they "create texture [and] shared impressions," and what follows from the embodied enactment of these subjectivities (Ahmed, 2010, p. 219).

Literature review

The following sections map existing literature related to fashion and social media; race, class, and gender on social media; algorithmic visibility; TikTok; and sorority style-fashion-dress.

Fashion and social media

Fashion media has traditionally been used to communicate the symbolic properties of "written fashion" and "image-clothing" (Barthes, 1983) in both static and moving representations to not only "[map] key changes in fashion and commodity culture" (Bartlett, Cole, & Rocamora 2013, p. 1), but also to engage and educate consumers regarding fashion and taste. Fashion photography and journalism evolved throughout the 19th and 20th centuries to not only display how clothing looked, but to produce a "tactile and emotional" response in the viewer (Uhlirova, 2013, p. 125). Fashion media started to transition from traditional to digital formats in the late 1990s, and the first fashion weblogs or "blogs" were created in the early 2000s (Findlay, 2015; Rocamora, 2012). This "new" fashion media centered discourses of identity and "citizen journalism" in unique ways, as a means of establishing their "fashionable persona" and connecting "authentically" to readers (Hanssen et al., 2010; Rocamora, 2011; Pedroni, 2015; Titton, 2015; Marwick, 2013). Fashion bloggers were initially ostracized by mainstream fashion media, but became industry insiders by the 2010s (Findlay, 2015). However, microblogging sites such as Facebook and Instagram – which were founded in 2004 and 2010, respectively – gradually became more influential sites for emerging fashion figures. These social media networks are digital communities of interconnected actors who share content, information, and communication (Appel et al., 2020).

As a "digital intimate public" that "represent, facilitate and archive people's social and emotional investments," (Dobson et al., 2018, p. 10) social media is a particularly potent space for the development and communication of identity. The "commitment to deploying and maintaining one's online identity as if it were a branded good" has not only facilitated engagement with traditional celebrities – it has created a new kind of celebrity: the

microcelebrity (Senft, 2013, pp. 346-347). Marwick (2015, p. 138-139) further defines microcelebrity as "a mind-set and a collection of self-presentation practices endemic in social media," reminding us that microcelebrity is both a noun – it describes a type of person – and a verb – a set of practices that people do to attract attention, gain online popularity and maintain direct relationships with their followers. Previous studies have described how social media influencers use microcelebrity practices to perform intimacy, connect with followers, and cultivate a self-brand on YouTube (e.g. Jerslev, 2016), Twitter (e.g. Marwick, 2015), and Instagram (e.g. Abidin, 2015). This dissertation explores RushTok users' strategic engagement with fashion and TikTok as microcelebrity practices, which enable them to create a branded identity for entry into sorority as well as influencer culture. Some users' performances of "entrepreneurial brand devotion" attracted sponsorship from brands and retailers, which further incentivized this aspirational labor from other users in the space (Duffy, 2016). The final chapter shows that fashion partnerships may enable some RushTok users to become established influencers, and thereby become microcelebrities. However, the dissertation continually wrestles with the systemic logics and norms – more specifically, algorithms, explored later in this section – that structure each user's engagement with the platform, and thereby make them (un)able to attain this status. I also reflect on my own entanglement with algorithms in each study, to acknowledge their role in making certain content (in)visible to me, and thereby making analysis (im)possible.

This dissertation also explores how RushTok PNMs (re)produce fashion media discourses to attain microcelebrity status by analyzing the trajectory of the OOTD across traditional and digital fashion media. The "outfit of the day" format shows the user modeling an outfit for followers, typically with a detailed description of each item's provenance, and

originated in the 2000s blogosphere (Abidin, 2016; Brydges & Sjoholm, 2018). Many bloggers were not compensated to produce OOTD content; rather, they used this format to produce a fashionable self-brand and thereby attain visibility, with the hope of future financial reward (Abidin, 2016). This has alternately been described as visibility labor (Abidin, 2016) or aspirational labor (Duffy, 2016), and disproportionately rewards people with the expendable income needed to perform the "glam life" of a blogger or influencer (Duffy & Hund, 2015). The OOTD is therefore one of several strategies by which bloggers, and later influencers, secure cultural and economic capital. Other studies have analyzed how the OOTD format is linked to traditional media modes of representation. Though bloggers operated at the margins of the fashion industry when they first emerged (Findlay, 2015), they utilized established methodologies from traditional media to gain recognition in the industry; this "remediation" leads Rocamora (2012, p. 92) to question the portrayal of blogs as "new media." Though they do rely on many "old" photography techniques (particularly in their use of poses, as Rocamora describes), their innovative use of hypertextuality, in which posts and blogs "[turn] into a multi-layered text" and a "potentially unending flow of images, words and sounds," provides a dynamic experience not found in print media (p. 95). This fluid, nonlinear "rhizomatic" network operates "in a perpetual movement of displacement and replacement" and has reconfigured the speed as well as our perception of fashion and time (p. 96-98). This dissertation extends these concepts of hypertextuality and (re)mediation using posthuman and new materialist theory to analyze RushTok as a rhizomatic, (non)human assemblage. RushTok content is understood as a rhizomatic, a-centered system in which users follow the lines of hashtags, audio, and hyperlinks to move rapidly across continuously proliferating plateaus (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Rocamora, 2012). I also argue that RushTok PNMs remediate traditional and digital fashion

media practices via their use of TikTok, as well as their style-fashion-dress (Tulloch, 2010; Kaiser & Green, 2021).

Race, class, and gender on social media

All forms of media have served as sites of ideological production, transformation, and struggle (Hall, 2021 [1981]). Traditional media has (re)produced Eurocentric ideologies of race, resulting in the "fetishization, objectification and negative figuration" of the Black subject as well as the overall "absence or marginality of the Black experience" (Hall 1989, p. 443). Crucially, these Eurocentric ideologies of race and gender make whiteness, heterosexuality, and cisgendered identities invisible and neutral, establishing these as the universal subject positions against which all Others are (re)presented (Dyer, 1997; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Media representation of nonwhite subjects has been continually shaped by discursive ideologies of race and racism (Grey 1995, p. 91). Collins (2002) also analyzes how socially constructed, stereotypical images of Black women in the media legitimize their continued objectification and oppression. While we have arguably moved from mere assimilation to multiculturalism, the "hegemonic gaze of whiteness" and inclusion are still significant frameworks (Grey, 1995). Grey also notes that continued focus on authentic representations and the visibility of Black subjects (and even producers) has "intensified normativities" and made difference into a "neoliberal technology" (2013, pp. 792-785). The same might be said for the representation of women and gender expansive people, which has diversified and improved but still retains stereotypical content (D'Heer et al. 2020) and cisnormative worldviews (Mocarski et al., 2019). Lane (2022) and Alvares (2018) consider how on- and offline power relations shape representations of women on social media, which are often idealized and reflective of normative gendered

discourses. Algorithmic media also (re)produces gendered bodily ideals (Carah & Dobson, 2016).

Meanwhile, mass media continues to disproportionately celebrate wealth and consumption while evading nuanced narratives of lower class or poor people (Kellner & Share, 2019). Social media platforms often perpetuate similar class inequities. For example, Instagram was only available on Apple devices when it launched in 2010, excluding users of (often cheaper) devices with other operating systems (Moore, 2012). Verma (2020) argues that while lower class Indian social media content creators use TikTok as a platform for self-expression and activism, their content is still marginalized by upper class Indian users and used to perpetuate the social caste system. However, Browne (2020) analyzes several viral TikTok trends such as #middleclasscheck, in which users offer a tour of their home following a checklist offered by a viral sound; these videos inspired commentary on class differences and privilege, which Browne suggests may be linked to increasingly progressive political attitudes among Generation Z. Becoming an influencer also requires a significant amount of unpaid labor, excluding people who are not economically privileged (Duffy, 2016; Newlands & Fieseler, 2020).

Previous research has explored how digital and social media can alternately perpetuate and counter racism (Mueller et al., 2018), and provide space for gender expansive people to undo or do gender differently (Darwin, 2017). Litchfield et al. (2018) found that Black women disproportionately experience discrimination and harassment on social media, which emphasizes the compounding effect of intersecting marginalized subjectivities (Crenshaw, 1989). Other studies have analyzed a lack of diverse representation in fashion media (Ellington, 2017; Thompson Summers, 2017). This perpetuates white supremacist, ableist, and imperialist ideologies (Lewis, 2019), though some social media influencers use their platform to interrupt

these discourses by building an "authentic" persona (Peterson, 2020). Although many RushTok

PNMs are not using this community to disrupt or even question hegemonic gender, class, and

racial norms in sorority culture, a number of other content creators in the RushTok community

have used this hashtag to make those norms more visible. The following section considers how

algorithms matter in the visibility of online content and users.

Algorithmic visibility

Algorithms are a set of instructions that tell a computer how to calculate data in order to

produce specific outputs, such as information, predictions, or even more algorithms (Denny,

2020). Algorithms are often invisible, posing a number of dilemmas for user interaction as well

as researchers (Hamilton et al. 2014). Algorithms are embedded in many digital systems and

increasingly mediate our online interactions, particularly on social media networks (Simpson &

Semaan, 2020). They increasingly involve machine learning, a process by which algorithms

"learn" based on past examples to make new predictions (Denny, 2020). Although this

automation is often presented as value-neutral, algorithms have been found to carry very human

biases (Bozdag, 2013) and reproduce biocentric systems of knowledge, which can (further)

dehumanize marginalized populations (McKittrick, 2020). The data that is calculated and

processed by these algorithms also has its own history of temporal and spatial production,

thereby reproducing racializing assemblages (Dixon-Román, 2016). These algorithms structure

online identities by tracking and manipulating engagement, "situating subjects within networks

of power that govern indirectly and without proximity" (Cheney-Lippold, 2011). Algorithmic

media are therefore a biopolitical assemblage that "performatively disciplines humanity" (Dixon-

Román, 2016). This research considers how the TikTok algorithm makes RushTok content

visible, and how this maps onto existing discursive dynamics of race and gender on the platform.

It offers an intersectional analysis of RushTok content to explore the legacy and impacts of hegemonic (white) femininity in online fashion media (Crenshaw, 1989; Hamilton et al., 2019).

TikTok's algorithm is driven primarily by engagement: while the user's device, location, and settings play a role in the type of content they are shown, watching a video all the way through, commenting or "liking" a video, and sharing a video are more influential in shaping their feed (Alexander, 2019). When you watch a TikTok video – whether it is sharing recipes or far-right extremist content – the app will usually recommend similar videos to you, even when you don't follow the creators (Weimann & Masri, 2020). Engagement with the video via likes, comments, and shares are used to find additional content "For You," the name of TikTok's personalized home page for each user (Klug et al., 2021). TikTok creators hoping to "trick or please the algorithm" and reach the coveted visibility of the "For You" page often use trending (i.e. popular) hashtags in addition to the tags associated with that page (i.e. #fyp, #foryou). However, research indicates that this is not reliable or particularly effective; views, comments, and likes are the best way to gain visibility (Klug et al., 2021). Engagement, visibility, and recommendations are thus intertwined in a positive feedback loop on TikTok (Bandy & Diakopoulos, 2020).

These feedback loops have several negative consequences. A great deal of social media research has focused on the "filter bubbles" produced by predictive algorithms, which can steer users to stereotypical, violent, extremist, or otherwise harmful content ("How TikTok recommends videos #ForYou," 2020; Massanari, 2017; Noble, 2018). Human and algorithmic moderation can exacerbate this effect by further limiting what users encounter. Havens (2020) argues that algorithmic recommendations on Netflix renders Black content as well as Black audiences invisible. Nonwhite TikTok users frequently complain that their content related to race

or social justice is "shadowbanned," or suppressed, by the platform, resulting in fewer views and thereby constraining their ability to monetize (Contreras & Martinez, 2021). In 2019 TikTok admitted that its moderation system buried or deleted content related to political protest, homosexuality, and disability (Hern, 2019). Black TikTok creators in particular have struggled for visibility, often while watching their content go viral and elevate the careers of white TikTok users. For example, while Jalaiah Harmon choreographed a viral TikTok dance, she remains relatively obscure next to white TikTok stars like Charli D'Amelio, who performed the dance without crediting Harmon (Lorenz, 2021). Meanwhile, other writing has explored how female-identified people are hypervisible on the platform, which often leads to their harassment (Jennings, 2021a). This undermines utopian ideals of diversity and inclusion in the media by emphasizing that equitable representation often does not equate to political power (Grey, 2013). More specifically, focusing on issues of accuracy and authenticity contributes to an "esthetic[s] of verisimilitude," which oversimplifies the experiences and representation of marginalized communities (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 178). At the same time, the media enables the dissemination of "perspectival truths" (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 179) which has the power to uphold or rewrite dominant histories, making representation both onscreen and in production key to deconstructing racist ideologies as well as provoking the "sentiment and resonance" of media (Grey 2013, p. 793). Therefore visibility is still important, even if its overall power is contested. This dissertation explores the limitations of racialized, classed, and gendered visibility on TikTok due to algorithmic moderation. Although (some) RushTok content made hegemonic ideologies (more) visible, I argue that white, hyperfeminine, hyperconsuming users were disproportionately represented in this community, and therefore reaped the greatest rewards.

TikTok's affordances also make (in)visibility (im)possible, which I consider in the following section.

TikTok

TikTok is the international version of Douyin, which was founded by Chinese company ByteDance in 2016. ByteDance acquired US app Musical.ly and integrated features from Douyin to create TikTok, which launched in 2018. The two apps are similar but have several key differences in their interfaces and functionality (Kaye et al., 2020). Both are driven by a proprietary algorithm, which influences the content seen in each user's "For You" page (Alexander, 2019; Kaye et al., 2020). TikTok enables users to create, share, and view short-form videos using the app's editing software and library of audio clips. Users can respond or react to content by "stitching" their content onto existing videos or making a "duet" with other users using a split-screen mode. Videos are also linked via background audio, which functions as a template for content production (Abidin, 2020). These features promote creative interaction with video content rather than discursive or interpersonal interaction with other users, which is unique among social networking apps (Zulli & Zulli, 2020). In fact, many TikTok and Douyin users seek entertainment rather than socialization when using these apps (Yang & Ha, 2021).

TikTok is now one of the most popular social networking platforms in the world: it boasts over 1.2 billion global monthly users as of 2023 (Iqbal, 2023), with over 150 million monthly users in the United States (Thorbecke, 2023). TikTok created a partnership program in 2020, and has since worked to lure both luxury fashion brands and top influencers to the app in order to boost its fashion content (Maguire & Biondi, 2020). The platform also introduced video and livestreamed shoppable advertisements in 2022 (Lo, 2022). Very few scholarly studies have

explored the relationship between TikTok and the fashion industry, likely because the app remains quite new compared to other social media platforms. However, Rogers (2021) analyzes subcultural fashion trends on TikTok, arguing that liminal styles such as the "clown" and "rebel" are a result of the app's "algorithmically driven micro-communities." Beyer (2022) also describes how TikTok, along with the COVID-19 pandemic, was a "catalyst" for the resurgence of crafting and knitting in 2020, and for the increased popularity of these pursuits among cis men. These studies emphasize the app's ability to target and promote even micro-fashion trends to the mainstream, leading to ultra-fast fashion (Jennings, 2022). This dissertation explores how TikTok's algorithm makes sorority style-fashion-dress visible to mainstream audiences. I also consider how RushTok users intra-act with the app itself to promote themselves as becoming-sorority-member and becoming-influencer. These issues of promotion and visibility are deeply intertwined with gendered, classed, and racialized media assemblages. In the following section, I consider how sorority style-fashion-dress, history, and culture also matter in the production of RushTok content.

(Southern) sorority culture

White Greek life organizations (WGLOs) started as secret societies at North American land-grant universities in the 19th century (Hogg, 2018). These include fraternities, which are typically for male-identifying undergraduate students, and sororities, which are typically for female-identifying undergraduate students. Sororities have historically been racially segregated on the national and local level: WGLOs are governed by the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC), historically Black Greek life organizations (BGLOs) are governed by the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), and multicultural Greek life organizations (MGLOs) are governed by

the Multicultural Greek Council (MGC).[4] Despite efforts to diversify WGLOs, this de facto

racial segregation is still an issue, especially in Southern US chapters (DeSantis, 2020). Both

UGA and UA have continually struggled with sorority diversity and inclusion. Both campuses

made national news when highly qualified Black PNMs were denied membership in NPH

sororites: UGA in 2000, and UA as recently as 2013 (Roche, 2000; Ford & Crain, 2013).

Consequently, many campuses have introduced legislation to prevent discrimination based on

race, gender identity, and sexual orientation; however, historically white Greek Life

organizations (WGLOs) maintain exclusionary practices that constrain the inclusion of

marginalized members (Hughey, 2010; Laird, 2005).

Style-fashion-dress codes in sorority culture are highly structured and reflect the

organizations' ties to the antebellum South (Freeman, 2020). During rush, potential new

members must wear clothing that adheres to a daily dress code, and are encouraged to bring

personal hygiene and beauty products with them to ensure they are always polished

("Panhellenic Pointer," 2022). Sorority membership also entails participation in a number of

leisure and social events with highly disciplined gender expectations, which are often reinforced

by fellow sorority members (Berbary & Johnson, 2012). Research on sorority style-fashion-dress

describes how recruits and new members use dress to facilitate belonging (Krueger, 2013),

which requires adhering to the organizations' appearance norms (Arthur, 1999). More

specifically, members are encouraged to maintain thin, well-groomed bodies, and to dress in

modest, hyperfeminine clothing such as dresses, skirts, and heels (Arthur, 1997; Hunt & Miller,

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[4] The national governance of fraternities is less clear-cut. The North American Interfraternity Council (NIC) coordinates and oversees member fraternities, which include historically white, Black, and multicultural organizations, on a national level. On a campus level, Black sororities and fraternities are linked and governed by the NPHC, while multicultural sororities and fraternities are likewise associated with the MGC.

2011; Ispa-Landa & Oliver, 2020). These standards evoke the archetypal "Southern Belle," whose gentle, feminine, youthful demeanor romanticizes white, upper-class domination (Farnham, 1994). WGLOs thereby "uphold and privilege" this vision of hegemonic femininity (Walter, 2019). Sorority style-fashion-dress must also be contextualized within the culture of the university as well as sorority chapter, which also structure these discourses of race, class, and gender (Berbary, 2012b). However, few studies have explicitly addressed how sorority style-fashion-dress during recruitment is informed by these material-discursive formations, let alone their intra-action with social media. Beaird et al. (2021) describe the demographics and dress practices in sorority recruitment videos, and describe how the limited, "tokenized" representation of nonwhite and plus-sized members – not to mention the frequent use of all-white clothing – perpetuates racial, gender, and class hierarchies in Panhellenic culture.

Sorority culture therefore remains a fraught site of contradictory gendered, classed, and racialized meanings. Representations of sorority life in the media often emphasize the hyperfemininity, wealth, and whiteness of sorority culture (Ortiz & Thompson, 2020). Handler (1995) argued that while historically white sororities promote bonding, they are also invested in heterosexual relations with men and therefore do not challenge male domination. Both historically white and Black Greek organizations have also often been unwelcome to queer, trans, and gender expansive people (Duran & Garcia, 2021; Literte & Hodge 2011). However, Hernandez (2011) found that membership in historically Black sororities may allow Black women to challenge controlling images in media and culture.

Prior to 2020, the NPC severely restricted social media activity by current and potential members during the recruitment period. The organization has since relaxed its rules: current members can now express their affiliation and engage PNMs more actively via social media

("Resolved to Educate," 2020). Most sorority chapters use social media to engage and provide internal information to members, as well as regulate external perceptions of their organizations (Taylor & McArdle, 2018). For example, sororities share recruitment videos on YouTube to show their organizational activities and values to PNMs. However, these videos often de-emphasize racial, socioeconomic, and gender tensions (Beaird et al., 2021). Similarly, while current and potential members are encouraged to use social media to express their personality and values (Anderson, 2018; "Sorority Scoop," n.d.), this can also exacerbate inequities among marginalized people. One participant in Duran and Garcia's (2021, p. 25) study of queer women of color in sororities called social media a "blessing and a curse" because while it helped to facilitate positive conversations about their queer identity, it also fostered stereotypes and maintained divisions between queer and straight sorority members. These posts are also more likely to be censored or moderated; individual chapters have the ability to sanction or fine members for "inappropriate" posts. The 2021 NPC Manual of Information accordingly warns members that social media posts should be "tasteful and appropriate for the intended audience (e.g., students, parents, campus community and alumni)" and promote the values of the organization. Social media therefore has mixed appeal to sorority members and PNMs. Meanwhile, social media is subject to the constraints of corporate and algorithmic control, which have perpetuated racist, sexist, and ableist ideologies (Benjamin, 2019; Noble, 2013, 2018). The viral popularity of RushTok suggests that while attitudes toward social media use among sorority members may be relaxing, these spaces and subjects nevertheless appear to remain subjected to an intra-acting set of hegemonic values that structure terms like "tasteful" and "appropriate."

In this dissertation, I position RushTok as a sociality that is not bound by localities, but rather produced in relation among online and offline groups (Postill & Pink, 2012). RushTok

PNMs intra-act with this sociality to enact becoming-sorority-girl and becoming-influencer. These enactments (re)produce gendered, racialized, and classed discourses of sorority culture, social media, and style-fashion-dress.

INTERLUDE 2

ON VISIBILITY

This interlude uses my experience generating data for this dissertation to reflect on the effects of visibility on (and in) RushTok. As I began to recruit participants for my intraviews, I found that making myself and my study visible altered the kinds of data that was visible to me on TikTok. I also consider how the unprecedented visibility of RushTok influences the ways in which sororities and RushTok users make themselves visible, and how this altered not only the sorority recruitment process but also my own participant recruitment.

"The Panhellenic Pointer told me to wear black so that's what I did"

The following is an excerpt from a memo written after attending the Preference Round breakfast for UGA Panhellenic Primary Recruitment.

I knew that the Panhellenic Pointer "suggested" that PNMs wear black for Preference Round, and I wanted to blend in as much as possible. It came down to two dresses (had to be dresses, of course, lol): a black and white polka dot wrap dress and my trusty A-line Reformation dress. I went with the second one because pockets, duh, but also because it stays put a little better (no sneaky bodice moving around and exposing my bra, or migrating wrap skirt that suddenly gapes open at my thigh) and is less… noticeable. Again: dressing to blend in, here…

The OOTD was fun to film, I did 3 tries before I landed one that felt right. There's a moment when I'm trying to flip up my foot and show my shoes where I say, "This is hard!" and

you know what, it is! It's a funny bodily movement that isn't natural to me, that I don't do when

I'm trying to show people my shoes in real life… but I did it because that is what this genre

demands. I also slipped into the conversational mode, leaning into the camera, almost selling

what I was wearing; it was really odd. I kind of expected it but at the same time, it's always

surprising to think about how deeply unoriginal so much of this type of content is.

***
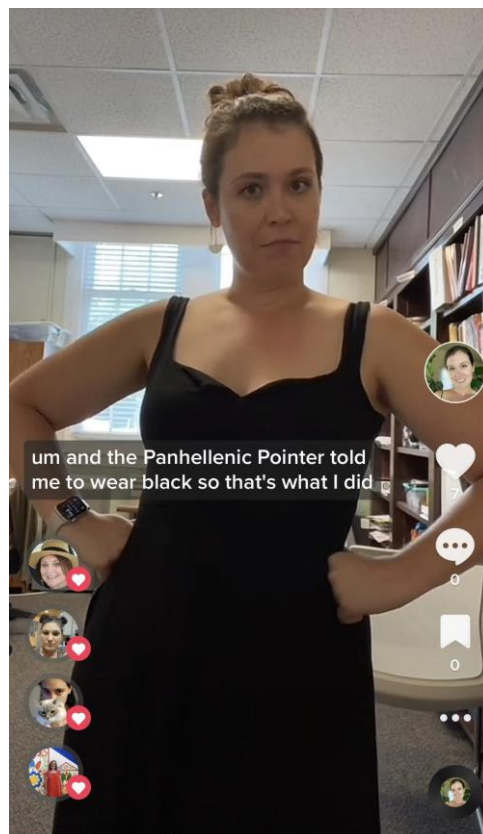
Figure 2.1 A screenshot of the OOTD that I filmed after attending a recruitment event at UGA

***

In order to make my study visible to potential participants on TikTok, I needed to work

around the platform. When I started recruiting for the study in August 2022, a veritable deluge of

RushTok content was at my fingertips – and with it, untold numbers of potential participants. However, TikTok requires that users mutually follow each other in order to exchange direct messages, making it difficult to recruit these participants. I decided to follow each person I wanted to interview, and then post a comment on their most recent videos to attract their attention. This brought up an additional concern: how to make my profile appealing, informative, and legitimate to potential participants after they read these comments. I posted several videos documenting my field research at recruitment events, including a "What's in my rush bag" and OOTD video, which are linked in the dissertation appendix. These videos and follows formed a sort of feedback loop which gradually reshaped and reinforced my TikTok algorithm to focus more acutely on RushTok content. While I previously saw perhaps one RushTok video out of every twenty, my For You Page was soon dominated by this content. Making myself visible to intraview participants therefore made this content more visible to me.

<div align="center">***</div>

"I went full RushTok, didn't I?"

The following is an excerpt from a memo written after I filmed my first TikTok video ever to share what was in my "researcher" RushTok bag. I made the video to populate my TikTok account with content to make it appear more legitimate to potential participants, but it also helped make some of the RushTok practices more visible.

It was really funny how commercial it felt: it reminded me of when I was a kid and my sister and cousins and I would use a video camera to record "infomercials" of ourselves selling the kitchen sink or blender. The only brand I called out explicitly was Megababe, mostly because a lot of my stuff is not explicitly branded (though I suppose I could have stated where my

planner, umbrella, or backpack came from?). I also found myself slipping into recognizable

filming and speech patterns from this part of TikTok. I was making eye contact with the camera

as much as possible, speaking in a light, bright voice, and purposely filmed some bits to be more

engaging and fun (sprinkling my snacks from over my head, for example). Slang like "girlies"

felt right. I also directly spoke to the imaginary viewers, and though I don't think I said the

dreaded "hey guys," I probably (definitely) said "hey" and GOD HELP ME directed people to

the comments with suggestions, just like I'd seen on RushTok. I added some bouncy sound to

make it more well-rounded, and I seem to remember that jaunty music in the background of a lot

of videos I've seen… lord.

I went full RushTok, didn't I?

***

Meanwhile, RushTok's heightened visibility had other unintended consequences for the

recruitment process. Within days of the first University of Alabama PNM post, rumors began to

swirl about a documentary about RushTok that was being filmed on the UA campus. On August

4th, @carisfairfax replied to comments from user @jillsauce15, who "was told by an active

member" that HBO Max was producing the documentary and that "Panhellenic isn't happy and

is trying to find out who to stop it." By August 12, the start of UGA's recruitment events, *The*

New York Times published a story about an Alabama PNM who was kicked out of recruitment

for allegedly wearing a microphone for the documentary during chapter visits (Kircher, 2022).

Vice Studios and HBO Max finally confirmed that they were co-producing a "Bama Rush"

documentary at UA on August 16 (Maas, 2022). These rumors made it difficult for me to recruit

participants in person. I took to carrying my UGA student ID to recruitment events on campus so

that I could demonstrate that I was not affiliated with the documentary, but was unable to get much out of PNMs besides the brands that they were wearing. Given the many rules surrounding conversations with sorority members, the media, and others during recruitment, it was remarkable that anyone talked to me at all during these events ("Panhellenic Pointer," 2022). Several UGA PNMs that I spoke to off the record during recruitment confirmed that they had heard about the documentary filming at UGA. Whether this was true remains to be seen, but is also beside the point, which is that all of these rumors made an already secretive process even more inaccessible to me as a researcher.

RushTok's viral popularity brought unprecedented visibility to NPC sororities, but it came with a price: more attention to the racial, gendered, and socioeconomic inequities that are hardwired into the system (DeSantis, 2020; Hughey, 2010). From 2021-2022, two of the most visible PNMs – one biracial, another nonbinary – were dropped from UA recruitment. Making yourself visible on RushTok can expose you to exciting rewards, from sisterhood to sponsorships, but only if it is in accordance with sorority standards; if not, you're exposed to suspicion and exclusion. These highly visible exclusions renewed conversations about the lack of gender and racial diversity in NPC sororities (Hughey, 2010; Ortiz & Thompson, 2020). In the face of this criticism, NPC sororities use social media to promote values of diversity and inclusion, though Beaird et al. (2021) argue that this media tokenizes non-White sorority members. As the system attempts to restore some of its secrecy, and thereby protect the racial, socioeconomic, and gendered privileges that sustain it, such gossip serves as a disciplinary force; it keeps PNMs and active members caught within the panoptic web of sorority surveillance (Foucault, 1997). This system encourages self-monitoring of dress, bodies, and social media, which likely contributed to my difficulties recruiting participants at campus events or online. As

RushTok continues to grow, PNMs and researchers alike will need to reckon with the extreme visibility of the community and the exposure that comes with it.

***

Tearing the veil

-Noelle

Sure, there are things in Greek life that HBO

could expose

the stuff that goes on behind the scenes…

it's not all as gorgeous as it is on Instagram.

Duh.

The veil started to tear for me. And that is not necessarily a bad thing.

I had this very idealistic version of recruitment [but]

I've had to come to terms with the real

history of Greek life.

The messy history, the dark stuff.

But if that veil is completely torn off by HBO

recruitment will not look the same

ever again.

CHAPTER 3

"IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT THE OUTFITS": FASHIONING GENDER,

RACE, AND CLASS ON #RUSHTOK[5]

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[5] Lehto Brewster, M. 2023. To be submitted to *Feminist Media Studies, Social Media + Society,* or *Critical Studies in Fashion & Beauty.*

Abstract

From 2021-2022, many TikTok users who participate in primary recruitment for sororities have used outfit of the day (OOTD) videos to share what they are wearing, typically using the hashtag "#RushTok." These videos name the brands and retailers for each garment and share each potential new member's (PNM) recruitment experiences. This manuscript analyzes 2022 OOTD content on RushTok to consider how the style-fashion-dress and social media practices in this digital sociality intra-act (Barad, 2007) to (re)produce gender, race, and class norms in historically White sororities. I use feminist virtual ethnography to collect and explore 97 OOTD videos produced by PNMs during the 2022 Panhellenic sorority recruitment cycle. I follow the "sorority girl" around (Ahmed, 2010, 2017) in this data, looking for resonances in her appearance and effects. Firstly, similar to OOTD content seen on other media platforms, RushTok OOTDs remediate gestural and communication practices from traditional fashion media. I also find that RushTok style-fashion-dress practices emphasize luxury branding; highly feminine but conservative styles, and bodily discipline. These are (re)shaped by spatial and algorithmic logics, which privilege enactments of the sorority girl that (re)produce the White, wealthy, cisfeminine ideal. Ultimately, I argue that the racializing logics of White sororities intra-act with the TikTok algorithm to make this idealized sorority girl more visible, further (re)producing racialized, gendered, and classed hierarchies of difference.

Keywords: TikTok, fashion, OOTD, sorority culture, algorithmic visibility

Introduction

> *Don't stand there in your pretty little Gucci shorts*
> *and tell these girls that their outfits don't matter.*
> *That is all that matters.*

> TikTok user @makeupartistatlaw, August 6, 2022

American popular culture depicts women who join Panhellenic sororities with little nuance: they are often represented as superficial, spoiled, conformist; sometimes wild and sexualized, but above all, beautiful, highly feminine, wealthy, and usually White (Arthur, 1999; Boyd, 1999; Freeman, 2020). These stereotypical depictions evoke normative gender, race, and class ideals of Southern femininity, which underpin the structure and traditions of Panhellenic sororities (Boyd, 2022). These traditions have largely remained out of the public eye. However, videos of potential sorority members (PNMs) sharing their recruitment experiences, or "rush," at the University of Alabama went viral on TikTok in August 2021, shedding light on this secretive process. RushTok returned in August 2022, again coinciding with the Panhellenic sorority recruitment period. From 2021-2022, PNM "outfit of the day" (OOTD) videos were particularly popular and attracted considerable media attention (e.g. Jones, 2021). These videos show the outfits worn by PNMs for each day of recruitment, listing the brand or retailer information for each item. The most visible RushTok PNMs are those from Southern sororities, whose OOTDs broadcast a series of elaborately feminine, luxury-branded outfits in their lavishly decorated dorm room. As these videos became viral memes and marketing campaigns (Krentcil, 2021), their portrayal of sorority life made inequities in WGLOs, TikTok, and fashion media more visible (Contreras & Martinez, 2021; Newlands & Fieseler, 2020; Thompson-Summers, 2017). While popular PNMs emphasized that rush "is not just about your outfits," viewer responses

such as @makeupartistatlaw's, quoted above, point to the significance of clothing not only on RushTok, but in sorority culture.

In this study I use feminist virtual ethnography to map RushTok as a digital sociality and explore the material-discursive formations that emerged with(in) it during 2022 Panhellenic sorority recruitment (Davis & Craven, 2022; Postill & Pink, 2012). My analysis focuses on OOTD content produced by RushTok users during this period, and how this content maps back to style-fashion-dress practices (Tulloch, 2010) in sorority culture and fashion media. This ethnography is feminist because it "center[s] equity and justice in both methodology and substance" (Dennis et al., 2020, p. 749), specifically by attending to power differentials of race, gender, and class (Davis & Craven, 2022). I first describe my entanglement with this sociality and my experiences catching up, sharing, exploring, interacting, and archiving RushTok data (Postill & Pink, 2012). I then use archival TikTok data to explore 2022 RushTok content, noting the influence of algorithmic logics in this process. I use Ahmed (2010, 2017) to follow the 'sorority girl' around RushTok content, listening for resonances among users' style-fashion-dress and mapping material-discursive relationships among their practices to hegemonic ideals of the sorority girl in American culture. This analysis helps me trace the trajectory of RushTok and its intra-action with representational hierarchies in the fashion and media industries (Ellington, 2017; Thompson Summers, 2017).

This study uses 2022 OOTD content on RushTok as an entry point to consider how the style-fashion-dress and social media practices in this digital sociality intra-act (Barad, 2007) to (re)produce the hegemonic ideal of the Southern sorority girl as White, wealthy, and cisfeminine. This gendered, classed, and racialized ideal reflects deeply entrenched discourses of beauty and the body in the Western fashion industry (Downing Peters, 2018; Mears, 2011; Walters, 2018)

and on social media (Hund, 2017), which systematically exclude non-White, queer, and other marginalized subjectivities (Carbone, 2020; Miller, 2009). Previous research explored gender (e.g. Boyd, 2022), class (e.g. Partington, 2013), and racial (e.g. Hughey, 2010) norms in Greek Life, while others have analyzed style-fashion-dress practices associated with historically White sororities (Arthur, 1999; Rose, 1985). Several other studies have analyzed how sororities and their members use social media, though they focused on Instagram (e.g. Duran & Garcia, 2021) and YouTube (e.g. Beaird et al., 2021). This study adds to this existing scholarship by focusing on TikTok, which is quickly emerging as a resource for sororities and their members to promote Panhellenic culture.

My research questions include:

- How do gender, race, and class come to matter in RushTok OOTD videos?
- How does style-fashion-dress come to matter in these videos?
- How do RushTok videos, and the algorithms that promote them on TikTok, make race, class, and gender (in)visible? How does this map onto discourses of race, class, and gender in Greek Life and/or on social media?

Theoretical Framework

This study is framed by posthuman and new materialist theory, and accordingly follows an onto-ethico-epistemology of relationality, immanence, materiality, and agency (Barad, 2003). Posthumanism contests the Western values and legacy of the humanities, including universalism and representationalism (Braidotti, 2019). New materialism rejects the dualistic, anthropocentric, and structural fixation of historical or critical materialisms to assert the agency of (non)human bodies in material-discursive formations (Barad, 2007; Fox & Alldred, 2017). New materialism

is explicitly grounded in feminism to (re)consider agency as an immanent, productive force that gives subjects "freedom to" become-differently (Grosz, 2010). (Non)human bodies are not ontologically distinct but rather are entangled, intra-active, and always in flux (Barad, 2003). This (re)turn to matter invites closer attention to the animacy of so-called "inanimate" objects such as the clothing and smartphones in this study, as well as discourses of race and gender, which are reconceptualized here as entangled phenomena that intra-act to produce RushTok users and content (Barad, 2007; Warfield, 2016). I use posthuman theory to explore RushTok as an assemblage, or as a productive arrangement of (non)human relations that is always becoming (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987; Livesey, 2010). The "sorority girl" is not distinct from but is rather produced (with)in this assemblage through intra-action with these entangled phenomena. The sorority girl is therefore "not [an] essence but [a] doing": a fluid, productive multiplicity (Barad, 2007, p. 62).

I am particularly interested in articulating the significance of algorithmic logics, which frame the movement of this content. TikTok's algorithms are programmed to promote videos with more (and longer) views, comments, and shares on the "For You" feed, which is effectively the app's home page (Alexander, 2019). Algorithms calculate data to "learn" from past examples and make predictions; though this process is presented as value-neutral, they are created by humans and carry similar racial and gendered biases (Bozdag, 2013; Denny, 2020). Accordingly, TikTok's human and algorithmic moderation policies have limited the visibility of Black creators (Contreras & Martinez, 2021) and queer, disability, and antiracist activists (Hern, 2019). Algorithmic media calibrate the display of certain embodied subjectivities to monetize flows of attention and affect, which amplifies and thereby reinforces hegemonic beauty ideals (Carah & Dobson, 2016). I conduct a feminist virtual ethnography of RushTok to map and explore this

content, but also to acknowledge the marginalization of non-White, gender expansive, and lower-class people in this algorithmic, affective assemblage (Davis & Craven, 2022; Pink, 2015).

Literature review

In this section I map existing scholarship related to sorority style-fashion-dress, TikTok, and race, gender, and class on social media to contextualize this study.

Sorority style-fashion-dress

Many theorists have explored the expressive function of dress in culture, and its significance in the definition of individual or group identity (e.g. Simmel, 1957); the signification of taste (e.g. Laver, 1945), economic capital (e.g. Veblen, 1953) or (sub)cultural capital (e.g. Thornton, 1997); as well as the articulation of one's gender (e.g. Kaiser & Green, 2021), class (e.g. Partington, 2013), or racial identity (e.g. Miller, 2009). Dress should not be confused with fashion, which is a more conceptual term that reflects the system or social process by which dress acquires symbolic value (Kawamura, 2005). I use the term style-fashion-dress to convey the ontological relationship between style as the autobiographical expression of self, fashion as a social process, and dress as an assemblage, involving the situated intra-action of bodily modifications, objects, and affects (Kaiser & Green, 2021; Puar, 2017, Tulloch, 2010, 2016). I therefore include hair and beauty practices in my analysis of RushTok OOTDs.

In this study, I consider how traditional sorority style-fashion-dress is gendered, classed, and racialized, and how these discourses emerged in 2022 RushTok content. Panhellenic sororities are historically White Greek Life Organizations (WGLOs), which promote an idealized image of cis- and heteronormative Southern femininity; this includes maintaining a thin, fit,

well-groomed body, as well as wearing figure-flattering yet modest clothing, preferably from

trendy brands (Arthur, 1999; Hunt & Miller, 2011; Ispa-Landa & Oliver, 2020). Most campus

Panhellenic organizations publish guides with specific instructions for what to wear each day of

formal recruitment: earlier rounds are typically more casual, while later rounds require "dressy"

clothing that you might wear to church or as a wedding guest ("Panhellenic Pointer," 2022).

Purchasing outfits with these specifications for up to ten days of events adds to the sometimes

considerable cost of joining a sorority (Glum, 2021), and requires adherence to fairly

conservative modes of femininity. Sorority style-fashion-dress is therefore imbued with race,

gender, and class privileges, essentializing the image of the sorority girl as a young, White,

wealthy Southern Belle (Boyd, 2022; Freeman, 2020). I follow the silhouettes and styles seen in

these OOTDs with(in) fashion history to reflect on their (re)production of Southern femininity.

PNMs from schools across the country used "outfit of the day" (OOTD) videos to share

their style-fashion-dress for each day of recruitment, from orientation to Bid Day. While some

PNMs waited to post their OOTDs until after they received a bid– perhaps to avoid rumored

repercussions for posting about this secretive process on social media (Kircher, 2022)– the

majority excitedly shared their outfits on RushTok, day after day. The OOTD format originated

in the fashion blogosphere of the early 2000s as a way to chronicle users' personal style and

build a personal brand, with the hopes of attaining social and economic capital (Abidin, 2016;

Brydges & Sjoholm, 2018; Duffy, 2016). This format "remediates" modes of photography and

self-presentation from traditional fashion media to gain recognition in the fashion industry while

using hyperlinks to provide a more dynamic experience for users (Rocamora, 2012). The

affordances of social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have facilitated more recent

shifts in the OOTD format, such as the practice of tagging brands and using video instead of

photography. In this study, I consider how RushTok PNMs use these strategies to demonstrate their "entrepreneurial brand devotion" (Duffy, 2016) not only to the retailers and designers that they wear, but the sorority chapter they hope to join.

RushTok

TikTok is an international video sharing and social media platform that was founded by the Chinese company ByteDance in 2016. The platform has over 1 billion monthly active users and is the most-downloaded app in the United States as of 2022 (Cyca, 2022). TikTok encourages users to produce content related to their niche interests or experiences (Alexander, 2019). These users form "algorithmically driven micro-communities" (Rogers, 2021), which are organized around algorithms, hashtags, and sounds (Abidin, 2020). "RushTok"– a portmanteau of sorority "rush" and TikTok– is a community on TikTok organized by this and related hashtags (e.g. "#rushtok" or #rushtiktok") that first appeared in 2021. TikTok, and by extension RushTok, has since become a major platform for sorority engagement (Jones, 2021). The RushTok community is mostly focused on Panhellenic sororities, and has therefore attracted criticism for perpetuating the exclusionary practices of WGLOs (Lang, 2021). Previous studies have explored style-fashion-dress on TikTok, including how the app's algorithmic communities promote subcultural fashion trends (Rogers, 2021), inspired a resurgence of knitting across genders (Beyer, 2022), and created a "safe space" for young queer people to explore personal style (Lin, 2022). This study similarly explores how TikTok facilitates the development and movement of fashion trends. I also consider how TikTok's algorithmic logics intra-act with style-fashion-dress and WGLO values to make the Panhellenic sorority girl (more) visible.

Producing gender, race, and class on social media

This study also explores how PNMs use TikTok to create a contingent, mediated identity for an imagined audience (Krueger, 2013). Previous research has analyzed identity construction in digital fashion media (e.g. McFarlane & Samsioe, 2020; Rocamora, 2011; Titton, 2015). However, I use posthuman and new materialist theory to consider how 2021 RushTok participants used TikTok to produce fluid and relational subjectivities. This reflects a paradigmatic shift from identity, which suggests one or more fixed and stable subject positions. A great deal of research on social media and subjectivity focuses on influencers, who strategically (per)form an online subjectivity that is optimized to cultivate a large following and attain branded partnerships (Abidin, 2015; de Perthuis & Findlay, 2019). Influencers must calibrate their subjectivity and values for their desired audience, including brands, without sacrificing perceptions of their authenticity (Jacobson & Harrison, 2021; van Driel & Dumatrica, 2019). However, the pervasive influence of brand culture also promotes this kind of strategic self-mediation among non-professional social media users (Senft, 2013). For example, Lane (2022) finds that although digital environments such as Facebook supposedly offer users the opportunity to freely construct self-representations, they are often idealized and reflective of normative gendered discourses. Sorority members' social media use is restricted by Greek Life policies, which require posts to remain "tasteful and appropriate" to best represent the purported values of the organization (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021). I therefore consider how RushTok users' online subjectivities are produced in relation not only to cultural ideals of gender, race, and class, but also those of their (future) organization.

Methodology

Social media is not only a place where research is conducted, but also a method of conducting research (Ardevol and Gomez-Cruz, 2014). The unique affordances of social media platforms make them rich sites for qualitative exploration. I use feminist virtual ethnography to map the material-discursive formations with(in) RushTok (Davis & Craven, 2022; Postill & Pink, 2012). Virtual ethnography, which is sometimes referred to as netnography, online ethnography, or digital ethnography, among other terms (Lester, 2020), is a form of participant-observation conducted on the Internet (Kozinets, 2006; Davis & Craven, 2022). Unlike in-person ethnography, virtual ethnography consists of "experiential rather than physical displacement" (Hine, 2000, p. 45). Fashion studies scholars have previously used virtual ethnography to explore online communities for menswear (Weiner, 2019) and sarees (Sandhu, 2022). I use virtual ethnography to explore RushTok content from my smartphone, following users, hashtags, and content online rather than in person.

This ethnography is informed by a (Black) feminist commitment to addressing intersectional oppression and resisting matrices of domination (Hill Collins, 2000). Though feminist ethnography aims to promote alternate ways of knowing and redress systemic imbalances through subjective, reciprocal research, Stacey (1988, p. 22) questioned "whether whether the appearance of greater respect for and equality with research subjects in the ethnographic approach masks a deeper, more dangerous form of exploitation" of those subjects. Doing feminist virtual ethnography requires attention to the power (im)balances of the virtual field, including my (lack of) relationship and identification with research subjects (Pillow & Mayo, 2012). Following Lather (2001, p. 219), I approach this project with the "practical, political intent of feminist ethnography" but also "the ethics of not being so sure." More

specifically, my methodology engages posthuman theory to address the immanence, relationality, and materiality of the RushTok phenomenon while also acknowledging my situated perspective (Braidotti, 2019).

Data collection

The data for this study includes 97 OOTD videos produced by PNMs that were shared on RushTok, which also includes the comments, likes, responses, and even the TikTok algorithm itself. I spiral through(out) this data set to think with other videos produced on RushTok, newspaper articles, and the reverberations of RushTok in sorority life and popular culture to consider the "agentive and intra-active" nature of this matter (Barad, 2007, p. 170). I collected this data from July-September 2022, which overlapped with the sorority recruitment process for most Panhellenic chapters in the United States. I collected a total of 290 videos related to RushTok throughout this period, which ranged from critiques of sorority life to elaborate dance videos. These videos were produced by a wide variety of users, some of whom are not affiliated with a sorority. I focus exclusively on OOTD content produced by PNMs in this study to explore how people going through recruitment approach and mediate their style-fashion-dress.

Like many users, my TikTok "For You Page" (FYP) remained my main path through RushTok content: I opened the app daily throughout recruitment to catch up with this sociality (Postill & Pink, 2012). I deliberately liked, commented, and saved RushTok videos, and followed some of the PNMs producing this content, until the platform began to regularly include RushTok videos in my FYP. However, I often diverged to wander through specific creators' content, particularly those affiliated with Greek Life, to collect additional videos about recruitment. I follow a posthuman framework to consider how this field is produced by material-

discursive intra-actions of "my" algorithm, subjectivity, and other forces, which shape my entry

and movement with(in) space (Barad, 2007). I used memos throughout the research process to

remain response-able to my data: to take space for a "deconstructive pause" and look for

"pathways towards a response" to what I encounter in my ethnographic research (Barad, 2010;

Higgins, 2020, p. 280).

As I encountered RushTok content, I archived videos by downloading them to my phone

if enabled by the content creator; if that feature was unavailable, I saved the videos to my

"favorites" on TikTok. I also took screenshots of comments at the time that I downloaded or

saved each video. I documented video metrics– i.e. the number of likes, comments, and shares

for each video– in my field notes, along with a summary of the video content and a description

of the style-fashion-dress practices that were presented or discussed in the video (Table 3.1). My

notes also take into account the intra-actions of RushTok viewers who commented and engaged

with this media (thereby making it more visible on and off-line) as well as the network of

nonhuman materials that facilitate these exchanges (Barad, 2007).

Table 3.1

Sample of my social media fieldnotes

Username	Date	Metrics	Affiliation
@madison._elaine	Posted: 8/2/22 Collected: 8/17/22	Likes: 37.6k Comments: 192 Saves: 332 Shares: 489	Alabama

Caption/Text	Tags	Notes
Caption: Anyways love my sisterhood **Text on video:** pov you're a masc lesbian at the university of alabama and your bestie is teaching you how to tiktok for bama rush part 2	#wlw #foryou #bamarush #bamarushtok #lesbiantiktok #LoveisLove #Pride @CJDrake [twinkle stars]	**Music:** clip from L$d - Luclover **Description of video:** Girl on left is wearing brown and tan plaid shirt untucked with backwards black baseball hat, brown hair long. Leans in to start video then backs up, does a dance with friend (wearing white skirt, blue floral hawaiian shirt, lei, floral bucket hat, pigtails). They do a TikTok dance together, video is a few seconds long. **Comments:** positive; some people note that they knew she was AOII. Several are UA Greek alums who were "told not to be a lesbian" or are happy to see this representation. Took screenshots of comments

Data analysis

I use Ahmed (2010, 2017) to *follow* the concept of the 'sorority girl' around this sociality, paying particular attention to how sorority style-fashion-dress (Kaiser & Green, 2021; Tulloch, 2010) appears on RushTok, and the meanings that it produces. As a theory and method, Ahmed's (2010) concept of *following* involves tuning into not only the concept itself, but to *follow* its effects and affordances. RushTok videos offer an entry point to follow the logics and effects of the sorority girl with(in) this sociality. As I watched and rewatched the videos in my data set, I noticed resonances among them based on their intra-actions with their space, screen, and style-fashion-dress, which became my central focus for analysis. Approaching the data in this way was an attempt to think with these producers, to explore the ways in which their content (re)produced and refracted against images of the "sorority girl" on RushTok and in popular media. I made annotations to generate diffractive lines of thought in my field notes to plug in new materialist theory (Mazzei, 2014) and note resonances in other sites or sources, such as popular culture or literary materials (Ahmed, 2010, 2017).

I then used my notes and annotations to "listen for resonances" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 12) among the style-fashion-dress practices in these videos to explore how they (re)produce dominant images of the sorority girl. I also engage posthuman theory to consider how the (non)human bodies of this assemblage intra-act to produce the sorority girl (Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2019). I used memos throughout the data collection and analysis process to reflect on my subjective and mediated encounters with this assemblage. This analysis is therefore "grounded, accountable and active," with attention to nonhuman agents within this assemblage as well as their influence upon my own subjectivity (Braidotti, 2019, p. 19). My encounters with this data, including analysis, are shaped by the predetermined futures encoded in these

algorithms, which are themselves subject to human biases that make Whiteness, economic privilege, and hyperfemininity more visible (Kennedy, 2020; McKittrick, 2021). This algorithmic data must therefore be considered as "more-than-human performative acts that are forming, shaping, and reconfiguring 'difference' via their exponentiated iterability in digital architectures" (Dixon-Román, 2016, p. 487). TikTok's algorithm steers content to users partly based on their demographic information, which means that the RushTok content on my For You Page is not only influenced by my intervention, but also by my subjectivity as a White, middle-class, cisgendered, queer woman located in the Southern US. This analysis is therefore positioned as a window into the RushTok sociality, rather than an objective understanding of the phenomenon as a whole: in other words, an entry point with productive meanings that are specific to this assemblage.

Findings and Discussion

This dataset includes videos from PNMs around the US, but the majority are participating in recruitment at Southern US universities. Location is given a "lower weight" in the algorithm that powers TikTok's FYP ("How TikTok Recommends Videos #ForYou," 2020), but is likely a significant factor in the prevalence of Southern PNM videos in my dataset. The sorority girl that appears in this dataset is thus deeply entangled with Southern culture and femininity, as I will discuss throughout this section. As I follow the sorority girl around on RushTok, I consider how PNMs' intra-actions with their phone; TikTok; space and place, and style-fashion-dress, among other formations, (re)produces the nostalgic allure of the archetypal (Southern) sorority girl, which makes hegemonic race, class, and gender norms in Greek Life more visible.

I first explore how place and space matter in the RushTok OOTD format and aesthetics, and how these (re)produce the Southern sorority girl. Then I turn to an analysis of RushTok style-fashion-dress, with particular attention to the historical discourses of race, gender, and class with(in) the silhouettes and styles of PNM clothing. Finally, I consider how the background of RushTok OOTD videos also shapes the appearance of the sorority girl.

The Southern sorority girl

Most of the PNM videos in this dataset followed a similar formula: after a quick greeting– often a cheerful, "Hey y'all" or "Hey guys,"they would explain which day of recruitment they were on, and then point to their clothing and share the brand or retailer information. Most PNMs are very conversational, even conspiratorial, as they share their excitement and fear about the recruitment process or ask for feedback on their outfits; they lean into the camera as they tap their phone to start and stop their videos, and make eye contact between pointing out brand names. These intra-actions with the screen– leaning, touching– bring the PNMs closer to you, perhaps producing feelings of perceived interconnectedness (Abidin, 2015). The sorority girl is warm, bubbly, and friendly: she smiles when she sees you, shares her favorite dresses but also her fears, and asks you for help. By the time Bid Day rolls around, she might even feel like your friend. This kind of online communication maps back to that of social media influencers, who deploy these strategies to develop intimacy and build their following online (Lehto Brewster & Sklar, 2022). The sorority girl's voice also matters: she often speaks in a high-pitched tone with a syrupy-sweet Southern accent, which drips from every "y'all" and turns the brand name "She-in" into "Sheen"– even if she's not actually from the South, which is increasingly likely given that as of Fall 2022, 57.9% of UA students are from out of state ("Quick Facts," 2023). Though there are some differences in perception based on race, class, and

gender, people with Southern accents are generally considered friendlier, but also less educated and more politically conservative (Kinsler & DeJesus, 2013). As this accent reverberates on RushTok, untethered from place or space, it flattens these conflicting dynamics of the sorority girl into a generically charming veneer (Barad, 2007).

Leaning into the screen, and into a Southern accent, appear to be strategies to produce RushTok videos that grab– that is, videos that capture more attention on TikTok (Warfield, 2016). When following the metrics of these videos, it is clear that the Southern sorority girl grabs the most attention on RushTok, especially those at the University of Alabama: for example, an August 10, 2022 OOTD made by UA PNM @kylan_darnell has over 3.9 million views as of January 2023. This provides an entry point to consider how place and space matter in the RushTok assemblage. The physical location of the video production– namely the campus and region– produces particular enactments of the sorority girl, and therefore of the RushTok OOTD. The sorority girl in Southern RushTok videos is usually blonde; her hair is often hanging in loose, full waves; she has lacquered fingernails, often with acrylic tips; her skin is clear and luminous, and usually tan; she wears multiple pieces of jewelry, and a lot of dresses. Because these videos go viral, PNMs from other campuses in regions outside the South are incentivized to (re)produce these aesthetics in order to gain greater visibility on RushTok (Carah & Dobson, 2016). As a result, these deeply gendered, racialized, and classed aesthetics are further entrenched with(in) the figure of the sorority girl as she proliferates on RushTok. While not all of the PNMs in this study are blonde, their hair and beauty practices on RushTok are "euphemisms of race and status" (McMillan Cottom, 2023). The style, length, and texture of their hair; neutral-colored, moderately-sized acrylic nails; tan skin, and trendy yet modest clothing are carefully calibrated to produce them as "feminine" but not overly sexualized, lower class, or non-White

(McMillan Cottom, 2023). These ideals reflect hegemonic beauty standards in America, but are also produced via intra-action with campus culture: Panhellenic recruitment at Southern schools such as UA, The University of Georgia, and the University of Mississippi, which have become epicenters of RushTok content, have a more structured schedule with more traditional style-fashion-dress policies ("Greek Chic," 2022; "Panhellenic Pointer," 2022). Berbary (2012b) argues that the "long traditions and strong legacies" of Southern sororities produces specific "ideals, pressures, or expectations" of femininity for their members (p. 32). RushTok videos from Southern sororities tend to (re)produce the sorority girls that she describes: "perfect teeth, perfect skin, perfect hair, perfect outfits" (p. 7).

Sorority girl style-fashion-dress

These "perfect outfits" are selected according to the exacting specifications of the campus Panhellenic recruitment policies, which require PNMs to dress as if they are attending a "wedding," "brunch," or "church" in the final rounds of recruitment ("Greek Chic," 2022; "Panhellenic Pointer," 2022). PNMs are discouraged from wearing clothing that excessively reveals their body: this means no strapless or thin straps, nothing tight or too short, no cut-outs, and no low-cut necklines (@aanastasia.m_, June 23, 2022). These rules uphold the modest and conservative values associated with Southern sororities (Arthur, 1998; Boyd, 2022; Freeman, 2020). Tracing RushTok style-fashion-dress throughout fashion history enables further exploration of the ways in which the idealized sorority girl persona is entangled with Southern values. For example, consider the These Three Boutique dress in Figure 3.1, worn by @gracynedmondsonnn for the Sisterhood Round of recruitment at UA (August 11, 2022). The smocked bodice is fitted to her bust, and a tie at the natural waist emphasizes the fullness of the short skirt; the sleeves swell outward as they extend nearly to her elbow. This silhouette evokes a

nostalgic ideal of femininity through stylistic resonance with the richly colored, decadent *gigot* sleeves and crinolines of mid-nineteenth century Western dress, which are themselves (re)produced from 18th century European court dress. These styles (re)presented femininity as restrictive and ornamental, a performance of respectability based on gender, race, and class status (Crane, 2015; Nead, 2013). Wealthy White women in the West would wear these dresses for promenades throughout the city to perform and thus teach this respectability to non-White, lower-class people (Jacobson, 2017). The reappearance of this silhouette in the mid-twentieth century is similarly associated with the reinforcement of conservative gender and racial norms in Western society (O'Brien & Baird, 1997). The dress' green and pink print of impressionistic hibiscus flowers simultaneously intra-acts with this silhouette to evoke 1980s textiles and aesthetics. Worn with pearl jewelry by ALV Jewels (which can be yours for 20% with @gracynedmondsonnn's personalized discount code) and cork wedge heels, this outfit is youthful but still feels just a little bit outdated: an anachronism, or a void, devoid of a coherent spatial or temporal home. The sorority girl is of this void: a contemporary figure fashioned by the intra-actions of many historicized, material-discursive entities (Barad, 2013).

Figure 3.1 @gracynedmondsonnn shares her OOTD for UA Panhellenic Primary Recruitment, featuring a pink and green floral print dress by These Three Boutique (TikTok)

When (not) sorority girl aesthetics and style-fashion-dress practices intra-act on (not) sorority girl bodies, these discourses of gender, race, and class become more visible in the RushTok assemblage. For example, UA PNM @madisontowner used her RushTok videos to depict what recruitment looks like when you're a sophomore "ballin' on a budget" (August 7,

2022). The majority of her clothing was from Halara, Shein, and other discount retailers, and featured more relaxed silhouettes and styles; her hairstyle and makeup were also very understated (Figure 3.2). Commenters were thrilled to "finally [see] normal people!!!" (@jenn53086, August 7, 2022) who "don't wear 20000 dollars in clothes" (@sammienicolez, August 7, 2022). These comments, along with her style-fashion-dress and social media practices, produce her as (not) sorority girl. Though she follows the gendered and racialized aesthetics of RushTok, and thereby Greek Life, her understated appearance does not (re)produce the luxury-branded, fully-accessorized, classed aesthetic typically seen in these spaces– a distinction emphasized by video comments. Warfield (2016, p. 2) discusses how the production of self images, or "selfies," requires users to enact a series of agential cuts, which are guided by "gendered apparatuses of bodily production." Like selfies, RushTok OOTDs are self-produced images that are always-already entangled with(in) bodies, technology, discourses, and these gendered apparatuses (Barad, 2007). As PNMs produce their OOTDs, their (not) sorority girl bodies emerge through a series of cuts that "limit the potential expressions of self" and "demarcate the boundaries of that which is not [them]" (Warfield, 2016, p. 4). @madisontowner's decision to share and wear her modestly priced clothing demarcates class boundaries, and in doing so, makes them more visible on RushTok.

Figure 3.2 @madisontowner shares her OOTD for UA Panhellenic Primary Recruitment as a sophomore "ballin' on a budget" (TikTok)

The sorority girl space

I also want to consider how the filming location of RushTok OOTDs is also part of the

gendered apparatuses that produce the sorority girl (Warfield, 2016). As I explored RushTok, I

noticed a resonance among the spaces in which PNMs film their OOTDs. While 2021 RushTok

PNMs filmed their OOTDs in varying locations, in 2022 most were filmed in the PNMs' dorm

rooms. As PNMs twirl to show their dresses and lean forward to point out their jewelry, their

room and its contents become visible behind them. These are the spaces where the RushTok

world unfolds, where the (Southern) sorority girl's body takes shape (Ahmed, 2006, p. 543-545).

Many of these rooms are decorated with custom furnishings: @natalie.robertson's room at

Mississippi State University features a tall white console table and white futon sandwiched

between high twin beds, which have matching white upholstered headboards. Large gold letters

spell "HAIL STATE" across the wall (August 15, 2022; Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3 Mississippi State PNM @natalie.robertson's highly decorated dorm room (TikTok)

@Shelby.rose4's room is a bit more colorful: there's a rainbow throw pillow and a bright red studded headboard on the bed; a framed print of Audrey Hepburn is on the wall, a pink neon "love" sign above the bed, and tiny silver disco balls are draped from the ceiling. A gold and glass shelf holds jewelry trees filled with necklaces, earrings, and bracelets, and her open tote bag can be seen in the corner of the video (August 14, 2022). These backgrounds affect how the sorority girl comes into view. This is at once spatial– the dorm room and its objects are behind them, framing their bodies and allowing their OOTD to take shape– and temporal: the lavish interiors hint at the socioeconomic conditions of their family backgrounds that enable the emergence of these coordinated objects (Ahmed, 2006). The sensory overload of RushTok spaces produces the sorority girl as an aspirational fantasy (em)powered by consumption (Coulter, 2018).

Conclusion

Before sharing her OOTDs, @kylan_darnell often gave a brief disclaimer about the role of style-fashion-dress in the recruitment process: as she stated in one video, "I just want to remind you that it's not all about your outfit, it's about your grades, your community service, your philanthropy, and there's so much more that goes into the making of a sorority" (August 10, 2023). In the next breath, however, she shows off her $500 Jovani cocktail dress, Shein heels, and pearl earrings– a graduation gift from her mom. The structure of this video exemplifies the tension between the stated values of Greek Life and those that underpin RushTok. While Panhellenic sororities promise PNMs a place to find sisterhood and share in professional development and community service opportunities, recruitment procedures– particularly those regarding PNM style-fashion-dress– limit those opportunities to those who can successfully package themselves following a very specific racialized, classed, and gendered ideal. This is

further amplified by TikTok's algorithm, which gives greater visibility to videos that depict "recognizable and conventional" gender performances (Carah & Dobson, 2016) and tends to suppress videos by marginalized people (Contreras & Martinez, 2021).

To conclude, I want to return to the video by @makeupartistatlaw, which is quoted at the beginning of this paper: when @kylan_darnell says that you won't get into a sorority because of your outfit, "we ain't buying it" (00:40, August 6, 2022). Although outfits are just one component of the sorority recruitment process, style-fashion-dress clearly matters on RushTok. RushTok style-fashion-dress (re)produces the hegemonic gender, race, and class norms of WGLOs, which are themselves entangled with the culture and values of the American South (Boyd, 2022). The RushTok sorority girl is also produced (with)in this assemblage through intra-action with the video format and appearance. Her affective intra-actions with the screen, including her (affected) friendliness and accent, promotes perceived interconnectedness (Abidin, 2016) by leaning into the sweetness of the Southern belle (Boyd, 2022). Place and space also affect how the sorority girl comes into view on RushTok (Ahmed, 2006). Sorority chapters at Southern US universities have more traditional recruitment procedures, producing more traditional style-fashion-dress codes (Arthur, 1999; Freeman, 2020). The ornamental, luxury-branded outfits of RushTok (re)produce fashion historical discourses of White cisfemininity (Nead, 2013). The RushTok sorority girl's dorm room also intra-acts (with)in this assemblage to (re)produce her as an aspirational fantasy of feminized consumption (Coulter, 2018). RushTok OOTDs thereby (re)produce the Southern sorority girl as someone with not only "perfect teeth, perfect skin, perfect hair, [and] perfect outfits" (Berbary, 2012b, p. 7), but also perfect voices, videos, and bedrooms.

If the RushTok sorority girl is "not [an] essence but [a] doing" (Barad, 2007, p. 62), it is important to consider what exactly she is doing, and how this might contribute to existing and future scholarship. This study offers several theoretical contributions. First, the study articulates how RushTok (re)produces systemic inequities in Panhellenic sororities, extending previous research related to social media representation and WGLOs. More specifically, it appears that the tokenizing practices of sorority content on YouTube (Beaird et al., 2020) are being (re)produced on TikTok. RushTok also (re)shapes the sorority girl as thin, White, wealthy, and cisfeminine, further excluding (potential new) members who can not shape themselves into this "idealized sorority look" (Hughey, 2010; Ortiz & Thompson, 2020; Duran & Garcia, 2021; Literte & Hodge 2011; Rose, 1985). The study also contributes to literature on algorithmic logics and visibility. The RushTok sorority girl is (re)produced by algorithmic logics, which makes this idealized, "recognizable and conventional" performance of White Southern femininity more visible on TikTok (Boyd, 1999, 2022; Carah & Dobson, 2016). The racializing logics of WGLOs intra-act with the TikTok algorithm to privilege the uniform sorority girl, further (re)producing racialized, gendered, and classed hierarchies of difference. The RushTok sorority girl is thus "both a product and producer of the sociopolitical forces of racializing assemblages" (Dixon-Román, 2016). Future studies might explore how users intra-act with this media to explore the meanings produced by these assemblages.

The increasing influence of this digital sociality in Greek Life and the fashion industry is therefore troubling, but not surprising. RushTok is literally and metaphorically invested in the "perspectival truth" of the idealized sorority girl (Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 179) because it not only promotes dominant histories, but also consumption. The app integrated shoppable features in 2021 and has a robust influencer marketing initiative (Woo, 2021). The RushTok sorority girl

consumes style-fashion-dress and furnishings to (re)format herself for public consumption, making her an ideal TikTok user in this context. Meanwhile, primary recruitment at Southern universities such as UA now spans 9 days, during which PNMs and active members alike are expected to dress following specific guidelines ("Fall 2023 Primary Recruitment," 2023). They are now also dressing for an audience: gaining visibility on TikTok can result in brand sponsorships, gifts, and media attention (Spruch-Finer, 2022). So far, the sorority girls that benefit from this process the most are those that can best approximate the idealized sorority look. This suggests that RushTok is (re)producing the race, gender, and class ideals of fashion media (Ellington, 2017; Thompson Summers, 2017). Further research is needed to explore the RushTok sorority girl's influence in fashion media and popular culture.

INTERLUDE 3

RUSHTOK AS A RELATION OF NON-RELATIONS

Figure 3.4 Close up images of my RushTok collage. I used pins instead of glue to facilitate movement and play

In this interlude I use artful methods to analyze data from my intraviews, RushTok content, and Panhellenic policies and procedures at several Southeastern universities. I bring these elements into a "relation-of-nonrelation" by collaging them together (see Figure 3.4). I also provide a reflection on the process of creating the collage, in which I consider how the material-discursive intra-action of these elements makes posthuman concepts of agency and power, feminine subjectivities, and their relationship to place and space more visible (Hanawalt, 2019). I conclude by reflecting on how this relation-of-nonrelations made the RushTok sorority girl more visible, and how my encounter with her shaped the development of Chapter 4.

A collage is an arrangement of multiple elements to create productive juxtapositions of meanings, associations, and sensations (Butler-Kisber, 2008; Garoian & Gaudelius, 2008). These elements might include words, images, and objects (Hanawalt, 2019). Gathering and selecting elements for my collage was at first a reflective exercise to think through my intraview data, but soon produced new relations among sorority culture, style-fashion-dress, and space and place; in other words, this collage served as a method of data analysis (Leavy, 2020). The intra-action of data and reflections in a "relation-of-nonrelation"– disparate multiplicities brought into relation, if not connection– brought the sorority girl forward (Hanawalt, 2019). I began by reading through my intraview data, selecting quotes that spoke the RushTok sorority girl into being. I took care to select quotes from participants with different relations to Greek Life, and that spoke to different aspects of the sorority girl persona. I began to bring these quotes into relation with images of the sorority girl that I hoarded from 2022 RushTok videos (Holbrook & Porchier, 2014), mostly stills of PNMs posing in the OOTDs or viewers' comments. I began pinning them together, (re)arranging them as each still emerged from the printer to "generate new constellations of possibilities" (Cambre, 2013, p. 75).

Figure 3.5 Collage paths not taken

Though this process was theoretically informed, it was also guided by sensation: what "just felt right" to me as an artist-researcher (Holbrook & Porchier, 2004, p. 757). As I happened across collage elements that affected me, I moved and gathered those together(Ahmed, 2010). As I arranged the initial set of images and text, I felt myself drawn to one RushTok still: a PNM wearing a dress with a travel-themed pattern that resembled a *toile de jouy* print. The toile de jouy is a pictorial, wood block and copper print textile developed in eighteenth century France (Miller, 2005), which often depicts arrangements of people, landscapes, and objects. I began to search for contemporary toiles, and printed off a few examples to bring into my collage. I left

some collage elements behind when I turned toward the toile (Figure 3.5). Thinking with these images (re)turned my focus to the power of space and place in the sorority girl assemblage. First, the "ginormous houses" (Sasha, September 8, 2022) on RushTok intra-act with style-fashion-dress to produce the sorority girl as wealthy. The houses most visible in this sociality are the grand, historic properties that house Southern sorority chapters. I collected images of UA and UGA sorority houses, partly because they were aesthetically pleasing– tall columns, sweeping porches, wrought iron details– but also because these universities are the epicenter of RushTok content. The collage thereby began to (re)produce the *Southern* sorority girl, leading me to collect more images of flowers, trees, and patterns that brought this spatial relationship into clearer focus. Magnolia blossoms, dogwood trees, and other flora soon dotted the collage.

The nineteenth century edifices and eighteenth century prints also intra-acted with the style-fashion-dress in the PNM stills to produce new connections to historical dress and aesthetics. The full sleeves of one PNM's dress resembled 19th century *gigot* sleeves, while the pattern reminded me of 1980s wallpaper. I brought images of these relations into the collage to form new articulations of the Southern sorority girl (Holbrook & Porchier, 2014). One dress, designed by John Galliano for Dior, looks like an 18th century *robe a la francaise,* complete with a boned bodice, trailing sleeves, and a broad skirt. Despite these historical references, like sorority style, the Dior dress defies temporal fixation: it was actually produced in 2006. This element of the collage makes the power of gendered discourses of beauty and belonging in sorority culture more visible (Berbary, 2012b; Boyd, 2022) through its intra-action with the landscapes and garments of contemporary sorority life.

Producing the collage is therefore an iterative fabrication of research data to "get at something different" about the sorority girl (Holbrook & Porchier, 2014, p. 755). Each act of

searching, printing, cutting, and arranging collage elements became an agential cut in the

research assemblage, producing the research and thus the sorority girl differently (Barad, 2007).

These cuts also produced moments of disruption: intraview quotes that address the class, gender,

or racial biases in sorority culture intra-act with images to disrupt the aestheticized landscape of

grand houses and flouncy dresses, making it strange. The collage produced the print and

silhouette for the dress design in Interlude 4, but it is also entangled with the body chapters of

this dissertation. Bringing the temporal (dis)orientation of RushTok style-fashion-dress into

focus made the gendered ideals of WGLOs more visible, as I discuss in Chapter 3. The tension

between the quotes, garments, houses, and references to systemic inequity evoked the tension

between values of belonging and practices of exclusion in WGLOs, which I describe in Chapter

4. Intra-actions among the RushTok PNMs, style-fashion-dress, viewers, and the screens also

made affective moments of influence, discussed in Chapter 5, more visible. Finally, stitching my

thoughts, insights, and feelings into this relation-of-nonrelations also helps me sit with the

tension of the research process, and makes visible my entanglement in the research assemblage.

Fabricating this collage is a reminder that the sorority girl in this dissertation is a fabrication, a

fragmented, temporary, and contingent arrangement made with(in) my perspective (Holbrook &

Porchier, 2014).

CHAPTER 4

BECOMING SORORITY GIRL: FOLLOWING SOUTHERN FASHION

AND SORORITY CULTURE ON #RUSHTOK[6]

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[6] Lehto Brewster, M. 2023. To be submitted to *Convergence, Clothing & Textiles Research Journal,* or *Journal of Fashion Marketing & Merchandising.*

Abstract

Sorority recruitment or "rush" has historically been shrouded in secrecy, but in August of 2021, potential new sorority members (PNMs) at the University of Alabama (UA) went viral after posting about their rush experience on TikTok. This network of users and content, called "RushTok," expanded in 2022 and continues to promote a relatively narrow, idealized image of the sorority girl: thin, White, wealthy, and cisfeminine. This image reflects hegemonic ideals of race, class, and gender in White Greek Life Organizations (WGLOs). In this study, I conduct two rounds of intraviews with 13 RushTok users to explore their intra-action with these formations in 2022 RushTok content. I follow the 'sorority girl' within the intraview data to explore her (re)production in this content, and how she comes to matter in the process of becoming-sorority-girl. I use critical posthuman theory to acknowledge the animacy of non-human items such as phones, clothing, place and space, and even algorithms to explore how they come to matter in the becoming-sorority-girl assemblage. I argue that the style-fashion-dress practices seen on RushTok– particularly the brands, styles of clothing, and types of bodily maintenance used by RushTok content creators– (re)produces the *Southern* sorority girl uniform, which (re)produces PNMs as becoming-sorority-girl along gendered, racialized, and classed lines. I also consider how RushTok users' intra-action with TikTok's algorithmic logics make hegemonic ideals of gender, race, and class in WGLOs more visible and widespread.

Keywords: TikTok, algorithmic visibility, fashion, posthumanism, intraview

Introduction

> *Blonde, self tanner, um, pageant,*
> *cheerleader...super involved...they're everything*
> *that a sorority wants, you know?*
>
> Lila, December 5, 2022

Every fall semester, National Panhellenic Council (NPC) sororities recruit new members during a weeklong series of events, which is informally referred to as 'rush.' This term reflects a sense of competitive urgency that continues to define the recruitment process, in which potential new members (PNMs) strive to get a 'bid' or membership offer from the sorority of their choice. Sorority rush has historically been shrouded in secrecy, but in August of 2021, PNMs at the University of Alabama (UA) went viral when they posted about their rush experience on the social media network TikTok. The resulting network of users and content was known as 'RushTok,' a portmanteau of 'rush' and 'TikTok.' Many of these videos shared users' outfits for rush events, including brand or retailer information and sometimes even the price for each garment. This "outfit of the day" (OOTD) content has been used by fashion bloggers and influencers as "a self-reflexive strategy for self-conspicuousness" and identity construction (Abidin, 2016; Titton, 2015). As they (re)fashion themselves as 'sorority girls,' RushTok PNMs navigate racialized, classed, and gendered assemblages in sorority culture (Duran & Garcia, 2021; Freeman, 2020). These assemblages are entangled (with)in their style-fashion-dress practices (Tulloch, 2010; Kaiser & Green, 2021). RushTok, like a great deal of popular media about sororities, produces a very specific vision of the sorority girl: often the blonde, tan, perky, dedicated person that Lila, a sorority affiliate, describes in the quote that opens this paper. This visualization of the sorority girl (re)produces specific gender, race, and class norms in NPC sororities. In this study, I conducted intraviews (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012) with RushTok users to

explore their intra-actions with these formations in 2022 RushTok content. My research questions include:

- How does style-fashion-dress come to matter in the process of becoming-sorority-girl on RushTok? How does this vary across different institutional (chapters, universities, TikTok), geographic (Southern), and temporal (2021-2022) locations?

- How does race, gender, and class come to matter in RushTok style-fashion-dress? How does this matter in the visibility of RushTok users?

- Who do these users follow, how does that matter in their intra-actions with RushTok and style-fashion-dress?

The study adapts Kuntz and Presnall's (2012) "intraviews" to connect with 13 TikTok users who engaged with RushTok videos during the 2022 sorority recruitment period. Intraviews are a "productive reunderstanding" of the traditional interview to make visible the "multiple interactions of material contexts that collude in productive formations of meaning" (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012, p. 733). These intraviews were conducted in-person or virtually in two rounds. In the first round, participants discussed their experiences and perceptions of RushTok. In the second round, participants shared meaningful content that they produced or encountered on TikTok during this period via text messages and TikTok DMs. I use Ahmed (2010, 2017) to follow the 'sorority girl' within the intraview data to explore her (re)production in 2022 RushTok content, and how she comes to matter in the process of becoming-sorority-girl. I also consider how RushTok users' intra-action with TikTok's algorithmic logics (Benjamin, 2019) make the hegemonic ideals of gender, race, and class in NPC sororities more visible and widespread.

Theoretical framework

This study uses critical posthuman theory to reflect an onto-ethico-epistemology of materiality, affective relationality, and immanence (Barad, 2003). This involves an ontological shift from the causal, dualistic relationships conceptualized in representationalism to a different metaphysics, in which entities do not have determinate boundaries or properties (Barad, 2003): rather, they are entangled and always-already becoming via intra-action with other entities (Barad, 2007). Whereas *interaction* presumes that entities are independent prior to their encounter with external others, the concept of *intra-action* describes how phenomena are "relations without preexisting relata," that is, they are ontologically indeterminate until the enactment of an *agential cut,* which produces a local subject and object (Barad, 2003, p. 815). Like Warfield (2016), I consider how RushTok content is produced by a series of cuts, which efface certain subjectivities whilst making others more visible. This includes attention to gendered, racialized, and classed discourses in sorority culture. Accordingly, this chapter uses posthuman theory to rethink the differential positioning of humans and non-humans, nature and culture, and before and after to map the ongoing intra-activity of PNMs, style-fashion-dress, and TikTok (Barad, 2007). I acknowledge the animacy of non-human items such as phones, clothing, and even algorithms to explore how they come to matter in the production of RushTok content as well as the visibility of the community. These entities calibrate affective flows among this online community to (re)produce hegemonic racial, gender, and class norms on TikTok as well as offline (Carah & Dobson, 2016).

Literature review

This section briefly reviews existing literature related to sorority culture and style-fashion-dress to contextualize this study.

Sorority culture

Historically white Greek Life organizations (WGLOs) started as secret societies in the 19th century and spread throughout North America in the 20th century, primarily at land-grant universities (Hogg, 2018). WGLOs are distinct from historically Black or multicultural Greek life organizations, reflecting a tradition of racial segregation in Greek Life (DeSantis, 2020). Potential new members must be an enrolled student at their university and identify as a woman to join a WGLO sorority (Anderson, 2021; "Recruitment Rules," 2022). Previous literature has described how WGLOs systematically exclude non-White members through their recruitment and governance policies (Hughey, 2010; Yeung et al., 2006). Others have explored how these organizations use rhetorics of belonging and tradition (Hogg, 2018) to promote cisnormative, heterosexual values that marginalize queer and trans members (Duran & Garcia, 2021; Literte & Hodge 2011). This study focuses on Panhellenic sororities, a group of WGLOs that are governed by the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC), because the majority of RushTok content relates to the Panhellenic recruitment process.

The growth of TikTok as a major platform for sorority relations highlights other issues with representation and diversity in Greek Life. Although social media can help marginalized sorority members find community, it can also emphasize division and stereotyping (Duran & Garcia, 2021; Beaird et al., 2021). The NPC's policy on social media is also designed to suppress posts that are not "tasteful and appropriate," leading to excessive moderation of female-

identifying members' dress practices (Dean, 2019; "Manual of Information," 2021). However, as the RushTok phenomenon demonstrates, social media is now a powerful tool to display, explore, and critique sorority culture (Jones, 2021). Algorithms are a significant agent in this assemblage because they structure the appearance of the sorority girl, and privilege particular enactments of the sorority girl subjectivity on RushTok (Carah & Dobson, 2016). I therefore consider how algorithmic logics intra-act with sorority culture to make gender, class, and race hierarchies in Greek Life more visible.

Style-fashion-dress

My analysis of RushTok style-fashion-dress explores how these hegemonic race, class, and gender assemblages come to matter in 2022 RushTok content, specifically through their intra-action with style-fashion-dress. The term *style-fashion-dress* refers to the ontological intra-action of the fashion system, style narratives, and individual dress practices. This term encompasses clothing, personal grooming, and other body maintenance or modifications (Tulloch, 2010; Kaiser & Green, 2021). Style-fashion-dress is a central means for Panhellenic recruits and new members to facilitate belonging (Krueger, 2013). Previous literature on style-fashion-dress and identity has described how clothing is used to construct and communicate one's gender (Entwistle, 2020), racial (Miller, 2009) and class (Partington, 2013) positionality, among others. I extend this scholarship by using posthuman theory to explore the agency of (non)human bodies such as clothing, bodily practices, and Panhellenic values in the (re)production of the sorority girl subjectivity.

Panhellenic organizations promote cis- and heteronormative ideals of Southern femininity by encouraging members to remain thin, well-groomed, and dressed in trendy and

figure-flattering yet conservative clothing (Arthur, 1998; Hunt & Miller, 2011; Ispa-Landa & Oliver, 2020). Style-fashion-dress in 2022 RushTok content largely adhered to these traditional standards: many participants wore dresses and heels, including coordinating jewelry, showing off tan skin and flicking back long, often blonde, blown-out hair as they filmed their OOTDs. These standards evoke the image of the youthful, white, wealthy, Southern Belle, reflecting WGLOs historical relationship to– and idealization of– the antebellum South (Freeman, 2020). Boyd (1999, 2022) also argues that Panhellenic recruitment procedures, including standards of style-fashion-dress, (re)produce normative ideals of Southern femininity. I consider how this might be conceptualized as a uniform, an (in)formal type of specialized clothing that codify authority, identity, and behavior (Craik, 2005; Langner, 1965). Uniforms embody meanings of "sameness, unity, regulation, hierarchy, status [and] roles" even as they "involve formative moments of self-hood" (Craik, 2005, p. 5). The sorority girl uniform, much like that of the "power dressing" career women of the 1980s and 1990s, is a mode of self-presentation that enables the construction and recognition of a feminine self based on historicized discourses of the body, fashion, and femininity (Entwistle, 2020). I extend these works by considering how algorithmic logics have made the Southern sorority uniform more visible in popular culture (Benjamin, 2019).

Methodology

My methodology is designed using posthuman theory to honor the immanence, relationality, and materiality of the RushTok phenomenon (Braidotti, 2019). This study specifically focuses on users' intra-actions with this community during the 2022 recruitment period. I conducted *intraviews* with 13 RushTok users to discuss their experiences in this sociality (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012). This method of engaging participants enables material and

affective encounters among participants, RushTok content, and the researcher (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012). Kuntz & Presnall (2012, p. 733) used walking intraviews to modify the traditional interview structure and focus on "the multiple intersections of material contexts that collude in productive formations of meaning." I further modified the intraview for a virtual environment to explore the "inherent indeterminacy between object and agencies of observation" and the "agentive and intra-active" nature of matter in this space (Barad, 2007, pp. 170-174). This relational, embodied, and emplaced approach enabled me to consider the role of place and space, among other material forces, in my intraview data. I then *followed* (Ahmed, 2010, 2017) the figure of the "sorority girl" around in this data to explore how this subjectivity comes to matter in RushTok style-fashion-dress practices, and how this is entangled with material-discursive formations of gender, race, and class in Greek Life.

Data for analysis

All data collection and analysis procedures were approved by the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board. I used two rounds of semi-structured, in-depth intraviews with 13 people to explore my research questions. Unlike traditional interviews, in which meaning is constructed through exchanges between ("inter") the participant and researcher, the term "intra-view" implies that meaning in these exchanges is a "doing" – an "enactment-among" and within human and non-human agents (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012). In this context, the participants, their messages, the content they intra-act with, and even their devices are "entangled relations of becoming" that reveal their material-discursive relationships (Barad, 2015, p. 7). Intraviews are framed as agential intra-ventions within and among these relations (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012). The intraview format enabled me to draw my participants "into the tactical," the everyday nature of their TikTok use – facilitating reflection on their "[im]material wanderings" through this and

other social media platforms (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012, p. 733). Rather than simply serving as a "mediator" of my participants' relationships with TikTok, RushTok content, and even mobile technology, I became an intraview participant myself, thereby emphasizing the relational and entangled nature of boundaries in new materialist research (Barad, 2007). Flint (2019) cites Kuntz and Presnall's (2012) concept of the intraview to elucidate her methodology for walking interviews, which she used to explore how affective, material, and spatial engagements with place came to matter for college students' experiences of belonging on campus. I likewise conduct intraviews on TikTok and text message to consider how these spaces matter in participants' engagement with the sorority girl. The material elements of the intraview– smartphones, social media applications, algorithms, and so on– are not ontologically distinct from the human bodies that use them. Rather, these (im)material "'environments' and 'bodies' are intra-actively co-constituted," and intra-act to produce this research assemblage (Barad, 2007, p. 170).

Both rounds of intraviews were completed in-person or virtually during the 2022 Panhellenic sorority recruitment period. The first round consisted of a semi-structured discussion about RushTok, specifically how users encountered style-fashion-dress. The second round expanded on these themes with the addition of social media elicitation. I asked participants to share RushTok videos that they viewed, shared, or created in these intraviews. Like photo elicitation, in which research participants are shown or asked to produce images, social media elicitation served as a memory aid while also providing further context for participants' navigation of RushTok (Duguay, 2016; Grant, 2019). Following posthuman theory, I also consider the agency of these (non)human encounters, and how they intra-act with(in) the intraview space to produce the "constraints, conditions, and practices" of the intraview (Barad,

2007, p. 152). In other words, the videos shared by participants are "material enactments" in the intraview that "collude in productive formations of meaning" (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012, p. 733).

Data collection

To participate in the study, respondents needed to be at least 16 years old, use the TikTok app on a weekly basis, and be familiar with RushTok content. Affiliation with Greek Life was not required to participate. I primarily used convenience sampling to recruit participants. I posted flyers in various campus offices, and shared digital flyers with Panhellenic sororities via email and on Instagram. Lastly, I followed the #RushTok hashtag on TikTok throughout this period and used direct messages to contact potential participants from other universities. I also posted a digital flyer with study and recruitment information on my TikTok account. All recruitment fliers included eligibility requirements, a brief review of the topic, and provided a QR code which linked potential participants to further study information. Once participants reviewed the study information, they were directed to an online interest form to check their eligibility and provide their contact information. After I confirmed their eligibility, I scheduled the intraview and provided them with the consent form (and the parental assent form when required), which further detailed the expectations, risks, benefits, compensation, and timeline for the study. After completion of the first round intraview, participants received an exit survey to indicate their interest in reviewing their intraview materials (member checking) and participating in the second round of intraviews.

These data collection efforts resulted in a sample of 13 RushTok users (Table 4.1). I conducted the first round of semi-structured intraviews with these participants from August-December 2022. These intraviews were conducted in-person, over Zoom, or via email. Two

participants went through 2022 recruitment as PNMs, and five were active members at the time

of the intraviews. Two participants are sorority alums, or former members. Finally, three

participants are not affiliated with a sorority but followed RushTok content: I call them

"enthusiasts."

Table 4.1.

Intraview participant information

Pseudonym	Age	Sorority Affiliation	University Affiliation
Patricia	17	PNM	UGA
Clarke	18	Enthusiast	UGA
Lauren	20	Active	UGA
Veronica	21	Active	UGA
Sasha	19	Enthusiast	UGA
Eva	36	Alumna	UA
Erin	38	Alumna	Pratt Institute
Callie	18	Enthusiast	UGA
Hailey	21	Active	UGA
Noelle	21	Active	UGA
Emma	19	Active	UGA
Mia	18	PNM	UGA
Lila	22	Alumna	UGA

Seven of the initial thirteen participants completed a second round intraview via text

messages and TikTok direct messages (DMs) from September-October 2022. The second

intraview took an average of 60-90 minutes and was conducted in short sessions over no more

than 7 days. I tracked the duration of each messaging session to ensure that the cumulative intraview did not exceed the allotted time. I used text messages and social media to conduct the second round of intraviews, thereby drawing upon Albin-Clarke (2022), who folds tweets into a multimodal intraview about teachers' management of their personal and professional subjectivities on social media. This design endeavors to challenge the traditional rhythms of speech, power relations, and time in traditional interviews (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012). Direct messaging and text messaging invites a more equal exchange of ideas and content rather than the somewhat lopsided arrangement of traditional interviews. In other words, the intraview reframes my role in the research from an observer or mediator who objectively analyzes my participants' experiences, to an active participant. This promotes reflection among all of us about our intra-action with social and fashion media.

The intraview questions varied slightly in each round, and also depended on the participants' affiliation with a sorority. However, they shared an overall focus on how users intra-act with style-fashion-dress and RushTok in 2022. Questions for active or potential sorority members focused on their experiences of rush and their style-fashion-dress practices throughout this time. Participants who are not affiliated with a sorority offered further insight into how people outside of sorority culture intra-act with this media, and how such users intra-act with style-fashion-dress and social media during rush. Questions for these users focused on their perceptions of RushTok and Greek Life. Intraviewees in both rounds were invited to share social media content that they find meaningful in their engagement with the RushTok community, including content that they created. This content is used in my analysis with their permission.

Data analysis

I use Ahmed's (2010, 2017) concept of *following* as a theory and method to map the material-discursive production of the 'sorority girl' in this data. More specifically, I follow the 'sorority girl' around the intraview data to deconstruct her sources and effects, and how these (re)produce particular power dynamics and subjectivities in sorority culture. This enables me to not only follow the origins of this figure in RushTok content but to also explore what follows from her appearance (Ahmed, 2010). Ahmed's work takes up "sweaty concepts" such as happiness (2010) and feminism (2017), acknowledging their material potential to shape bodies as well as social discourse – in other words, their ability to quite literally "shape how the world coheres" (2010, p. 15). This analytical method rejects the "constriction and containment" of traditional academic knowledge production to make new connections across disparate disciplinary terrains (Bilge, 2021).

My analysis not only explores participants' speech (i.e. the content of their words or messages) but also the *embodied vibrations* that arise within the intraview, such as their gestures, pauses, or tone (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012). I used my interview annotations to plug in posthuman theory (Mazzei, 2014) and map resonances with academic and popular texts (Ahmed, 2017). This includes drawing lines of flight among transcript data and these theories or texts (Mazzei, 2014). These lines emphasize references to gendered, racial, or classed assemblages to make their intra-action with RushTok and the sorority girl subjectivity more visible. This analysis situates RushTok as a "space of encounter," which shapes what and how users touch (Ahmed, 2017, p. 17). Guyotte et al. (2020) used Ahmed's (2014, 2017) theory and method of following to explore willfulness as a sweaty concept in academia, to complicate the concept of "giving up" in the face of gendered challenges. My study similarly explores the "becoming-sorority girl"

subjectivity and its role in structuring relations among RushTok users, style-fashion-dress, and TikTok. I also explore how these encounters are structured by algorithmic logics, which lead users to specific spaces based on their subjectivities (Benjamin, 2019). My analysis of user-submitted or generated media attempts to follow and make those logics more visible.

I must also acknowledge the role of my subjectivity in this research assemblage. Noting the core attributes of my subjectivity– I am a White, middle-class, cisfeminine, able-bodied, queer Millenial living in the South– is pertinent not only because it structured my data collection and analysis as a researcher, but also because it structured my engagement with RushTok. More specifically, my subjectivity made it possible for me to safely navigate Greek Life and establish trust with my participants. It also shaped who and what I saw on RushTok. Like most of my participants, I did not encounter many PNMs that did not adhere to the "idealized sorority look," which is to say, PNMs that were not White, thin, able-bodied, cisfeminine boutique consumers (Arthur, 1999; Rose, 1985). These privileged subjectivities are algorithmically privileged, as I discuss in this study (Carah & Dobson, 2016).

Findings and discussion

Although some participants identified subtle shifts in the sorority girl seen on RushTok, their perception of the sorority girl largely upheld the "idealized sorority look" first articulated by Rose (1985), Arthur (1999) and Berbary (2012a, 2012b). RushTok style-fashion-dress is remarkably "homogeneous" to Emma, an active sorority member, which she attributes in part to sorority "standards" of dress and appearance. Emma felt pressured to conform to this uniform standard of appearance, even though it clashed with her personal style: "Since recruitment is a selection process, girls will do and look however in order to be 'wanted.' I know because I was

one of them!" (October 17, 2022). In order to be selected to join a sorority, you have to "do and look" becoming-sorority-girl, which participants describe as becoming-more-uniform. In this section I discuss how the style-fashion-dress practices seen on RushTok– particularly the brands, styles of clothing, and types of bodily maintenance used by RushTok content creators– (re)produce this idealized look to (re)fashion these creators as becoming-sorority-girl. Sorority standards have become standardized on RushTok, intensifying the visibility and power of what I call the sorority girl "uniform." I explore the style narratives of the sorority girl uniform to consider how they (re)produce gendered, classed, and racialized discourses of WGLOs (Boyd, 2022; DeSantis, 2020). Wearing this idealized sorority girl uniform makes PNMs visible in the sorority system, but also reinforces the uniformity of Panhellenic sororities.

Branding the sorority girl

When asked to describe the style-fashion-dress practices of RushTok, most participants agreed that it's "definitely going to be on brand things" (Sasha, September 8, 2022). The brands that they most frequently mentioned include Lululemon, Princess Polly, Shein, Zara, Kendra Scott, and Cartier. This mix of fast fashion, specialty, and luxury brands is partly due to sorority recruitment procedures, which require casual dress for some rounds and more formal dress for others. Coordinating athleisure sets from Lululemon and Shein are popular choices for orientation, for example, while dresses from Princess Polly and Zara might be worn for later rounds. Becoming-sorority-girl is not just about wearing the right brand, but wearing them the right way. For example, participants discussed how RushTok PNMs frequently mix luxury and fast fashion retailers. Wearing "Shein [with] their Cartier bracelets" (Lauren, August 26, 2022) shows PNMs' fashion and economic capital: that they have the style and money to assemble a unique outfit for the daily theme. Eva, a sorority alumna, notes that counterfeit luxury products

were popular when she was an active member as a way to mimic this "high/low" aesthetic (October 12, 2022). Real or not, the luxury brands seen in RushTok videos (re)produce the privileged, pampered sorority girl.

Participants agreed that socioeconomic status plays a significant role in RushTok style-fashion-dress, and that this is reflective of similar dynamics in sororities: as Noelle puts it, "The level of affluence and the discrepancy of that within Greek life" (September 21, 2022). Patricia goes a step further: "I think instead of saying [that] beauty is the defining factor, I think I would say wealth is" (August 22, 2022). Both described feeling pressure to purchase new clothing from recognizable brands or boutiques for recruitment, a sentiment shared by other sorority affiliates in the study. The cost of assembling a series of unique outfits that are suitably branded but also suitable for recruitment– conservative but expressive, comfortable but polished– adds to the already significant cost of sorority membership. Several participants feel that RushTok has increased the pressure to perform sorority recruitment in this way, exacerbating socioeconomic inequities.

The (Southern) sorority girl uniform

Although they noted that boutique clothing can be expensive, several of the sorority affiliates in the study shopped at boutiques for recruitment because they "knew that [their clothing] would be different" from that found at mass retailers (Veronica, August 26, 2022). Standing out is important because, as participants overwhelmingly agreed, RushTok style is extremely uniform: just "different variations of the same outfit," according to Lila (December 5, 2022). This makes RushTok content uniform: as Eva put it, "you can see 100 'ootd's' they are basically all the same" (October 11, 2022). Becoming a sorority girl means wearing a variation

of this uniform on RushTok. The components of the sorority girl uniform are "highly specific and deliberately calculated to produce a certain array of body techniques" (Craik, 2005, pp. 7-8). Participants describe the becoming-sorority-girl "uniform" as highly branded and note that it shares several common stylistic features: highly embellished, brightly colored, frilly, ruffled, and sparkly. Callie is more succinct, calling this style-fashion-dress "expensive, colorful, and poofy." She notes that it is not just the brands that PNMs wear, but the sheer amount of items they assemble for their outfits– "tons of jewelry," plus luxury-branded shoes and purses– that makes the sorority girl uniform seem so "expensive" (September 22, 2022). The "poofiness" of the sorority look refers to the exaggerated silhouettes on RushTok, which participants think has intensified the highly gendered sorority look. For example, Patricia noted that "babydoll" and "princess" silhouettes were popular during 2022 recruitment; these epitomize the girlish, demure ideal of traditional sorority femininity (August 22, 2022; Arthur, 1999). RushTok style-fashion-dress thereby (re)produces traditions of WGLOs, which are rooted in racial and class exclusion (Hughey, 2010). These race and class norms resonate in terms like "classy" and "put together," which participants repeatedly used to describe sorority style-fashion-dress. Putting together the right sorority girl uniform is only possible for PNMs who have the money to put the right brands and styles together, and can embody these ideals in the right way.

Other elements of sorority style-fashion-dress are also imbued with gendered, race, and class norms, which further shape the meaning and appearance of the sorority girl. Large, full sleeves, which have been popular on RushTok from 2021-2022, are another frequently mentioned part of the sorority girl uniform. Mia initially disliked these "puffy sleeves" because she felt they didn't match her style, but eventually acquiesced:

The puffy sleeves was a big thing. My friends were very against it. They were like, Mia,

we don't want to see you become like a puffy sleeve, like, bitch, like– don't do that. And I

was like, sorry, guys (September 30, 2022).

Mia's friends feared that she would become a "puffy sleeve bitch" by donning the sorority girl

uniform, a moniker that evokes the many negative stereotypes associated with this subjectivity:

mean, exclusive, materialistic, vain. University of Mississippi PNM Marilee Cleveland is shown

wearing a dress with puffy sleeves in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 An example of the RushTok puffy sleeve– but not a puffy sleeve bitch!
(@marilee_cleveland, August 19, 2022; TikTok)

This resonates with Clarke's description of the sorority aesthetic as having a "popular girl vibe" (August 24, 2022). If sorority recruitment is "the proving ground of competitive femininity" (Boyd, 1999, p. 58), the puffy sleeve is not just artifice but armor, a strategic appropriation of traditional values to position the wearer as a "popular girl." The sorority girl uniform might therefore be considered as an "orientation device," which both shows the direction of sorority culture and takes the wearer in certain directions (Ahmed, 2006, p. 26). These directions are shaped by the shape and style of the garment. The puffy RushTok sleeve, an echo of 19th century *gigot* sleeves filtered through 1980s romanticism, (re)produces highly gendered and classed aesthetics of those eras (Neal, 2013). This style of dress is oriented toward a nostalgic ideal of femininity rather than any particular time period (see Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2 An example of the gigot sleeve (FIT/The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

This timelessness might explain why sorority style-fashion-dress is considered outside of the fashion cycle by participants like Veronica, who juxtaposed "regular clothes/trending" and

"sorority outfits" (September 2, 2022). Though RushTok has made the sorority girl uniform fashionable, its orientation toward traditional "ideas about family and femininity, race and place" is unfashionable (Boyd, 1999, p. 58). Wearing this uniform on RushTok and in recruitment, however, can make social (media) capital proximate if the sorority girl orients herself toward trending styles (Ahmed, 2006).

Embodying the sorority girl

The appearance of hair and skin are also perceived as uniform on RushTok, and intra-act to racialize the sorority girl. Participants described the importance of hair color, style, and texture in (re)orienting their body toward the sorority girl subjectivity (Ahmed, 2006). This requires careful maintenance. For example, Hailey has routinely altered her "naturally pretty curly hair" since becoming a sorority girl:

> I try to make it straight [...because I noticed that] everybody has like…a blowout kind of hairstyle. And I don't think I let my hair go curly to like, any event, at least for the first two years. Because everyone looked… well kept, I guess? No fly aways…So every day, I fried my hair. I would get up and straighten it. Curl it, do whatever, but to keep it from looking like there was any humidity in the air, which is not realistic, so that was hard. Not fun (September 19, 2022).

The term "well kept" operates much like "put together"; in other words, another "euphemism for race and status" (McMillan Cottom, 2023) used here to frame curly, coarse-textured hair as "unkempt" and therefore something to avoid at all costs. Though she acknowledges that this look is "unrealistic" in the humid South, Hailey felt compelled to damage her hair to make it appear more uniform. Hair color is less significant, but "in certain sororities [it might be] better to be

blonde just so that it's more cohesive" (Patricia, August 22, 2022). Several participants described the typical sorority girl as having "long, blonde hair" (Sasha, September 8, 2022), which Rose (1985) and Arthur (1999) also link to the idealized sorority look. This also suggests that Panhellenic sororities perpetuate hairism, or the hierarchical stratification of hair color, texture, length, and style which privileges proximity to Whiteness (Eley, 2017). RushTok makes this "well kept" sorority girl more visible, rewarding those who can make their hair cohere into the right color, style, and texture. In other words, the uniformity of RushTok hair reinforces the sorority girl's proximity to Whiteness.

The sorority girl not only has "long hair [that's] blonde or highlighted," but is "also tan, most likely" (Lauren, August 26, 2022). Though most participants did not explicitly racialize the sorority girl, her artificially tan skin, much like her hair color and style, (re)produces her as White. Tan skin is historically associated with Whiteness (Dyer, 1997) and has been "constructed as a marker of beauty, wealth and health that evokes the semantics of holiday and leisure time" in Western culture (Graefer, 2014, p. 113). The sorority girl's tan skin is seen as artificial: "It sounds bad," says Sasha, "but most likely a spray tan" (September 8, 2022). Artificial tanning often produces an unnatural, orange skin tone, which (re)produces racial and class discourses of "excessiveness and lack of taste" (Graefer, 2014, p. 113). Though Sasha mocks the artificially tan sorority girl, the pervasiveness of this bodily practice in sorority culture suggests that it does not have the same negative class connotations that Graefer (2014) describes. On the contrary, the intra-action of tan skin, "well kept" hair, and branded clothing (re)produces the "classy" sorority girl.

Place and space also matter in this assemblage: namely, the campus and regional culture, which produce the sorority girl differently. Sasha notes that her perception of the spray-tanned

sorority girl is based on UGA and UA, which are "more…extreme" than other places (September 8, 2022). Lauren also links the prevalence of blonde hair and tan skin with "the Southern standard of beauty" (August 26, 2022). However, RushTok has made the Southern sorority girl the dominant image of sorority life by granting privileged algorithmic positions to tan, blonde, conspicuously-branded bodies (Carah & Dobson, 2016). This is about "manners and sociability" as much as clothing (Boyd, 1999, pp. 61-62). According to Lila, being able to "perform" the sorority girl also requires composure and enthusiasm (December 5, 2022), or as Boyd (1999, p. 59) puts it, "the bright sparkle of the [Southern] Belle and the sincere empathy of the [Southern] Lady." (Re)producing these Southern beauty standards on RushTok (re)produces gendered, raced, and classed ideals of WGLOs on a mass scale.

Becoming-sorority-girl

Lila "didn't do self-tanner" before she joined her sorority (December 5, 2022). Like Hailey, she (re)shaped her body to make it more uniform with her perception of the sorority girl. Other sorority affiliates also described how they oriented themselves toward the sorority girl uniform to (re)produce themselves as becoming-sorority-girl (Ahmed, 2006; Barad, 2007). As Emma puts it, "girls feel that they should fit themselves into a mold so that sororities/actives want them" (October 14, 2022). If the sorority girl is a mold, becoming-sorority-girl requires (re)molding yourself so that you can fit this subjectivity. The lines of the sorority girl uniform shape this mold, directing the becoming-sorority-girl body according to the lines of Panhellenic culture (Ahmed, 2006). Place and space matter here: this mold can feel particularly tight in the South, which has highly disciplined gender expectations (Berbary & Johnson, 2012). It also changes shape based on the sorority chapter, each of which has its own ideal sorority girl. "Old Row" sororities are the oldest (and usually most traditional) Panhellenic chapters (Ortiz &

Thompson, 2020). These chapters "tend to have your debutantes and your daddy's money and such" (Noelle, September 21, 2022). Wearing the uniform of the chapter that you want to join is a way of turning yourself toward their values and sisterhood. If PNMs want to become an Old Row sorority girl, they should wear more traditional style-fashion-dress.

Some sorority affiliates feel like their personal style has been (re)shaped by the sorority girl mold. According to Hailey, "Being in a sorority [changed] how I dress. And I'm not necessarily mad about it, because it's not horrible looking. But-- I still do wish that I had a little bit more like…personal style" (September 19, 2022). Turning toward sorority culture requires turning away from personal style, but it also gives participants a sense of belonging: "it's almost kind of like a loyalty thing…where we're all like, we're all in this together" (September 19, 2022). Panhellenic sorority culture encourages uniformity as an expression of loyalty, thereby making this sense of belonging conditional. Sorority affiliates were careful to explain that "putting their own spin and personality" on sorority style is important (Noelle, September 28, 2022), but that standing out too much is discouraged. "There's a time to like, be the center of attention," Lauren says, but not when everyone else is following the designated dress code: that's the time to show that "I can be a part of the sisterhood and not stand out" (August 26, 2022). Becoming a sorority girl is becoming part of a sisterhood, a "shared orientation" toward their sorority and its values (Ahmed, 2006, p. 119). Style-fashion-dress produces feelings of belonging in sorority culture by making members' shared orientations visible (Ahmed, 2006; Krueger, 2013).

Becoming-uniform to belong is not inherently bad: it's a way of making yourself visible and helps you feel a sense of sisterhood. However, this raises the question of who is able to become-uniform– in other words, who can become-sorority-girl. Many participants discussed

Grant (@grantelisikes; Figure 4.3), a UA PNM who gained followers and national media attention during the 2022 RushTok cycle. Grant identified as non-binary during recruitment, which made her "stick out" to these participants (Erin, October 2, 2022). Though she used she/her pronouns and wore the sorority girl uniform throughout rush, her short, curly brown hair and low vocal register made her "out of line" with other sorority girls (Ahmed, 2006). Some participants misgendered Grant, or expressed confusion about how to gender her, partly because she did not clarify her gender identity until midway through recruitment. Though Panhellenic sororities allow anyone who identifies as a woman to rush, Erin described a conversation with a Southern relative who said that "there's no way that those moms are gonna let him, let them through." Though Erin was "really rooting for them," Grant was dropped from recruitment, to her dismay:

> "My heart did– it broke a little bit. I felt really bad. I was like, you know, really trying to pull for them, but also for the Southern culture and the [South to] like– come into the 21st century finally" (September 11, 2022).

Though she wore the sorority girl uniform, Grant's body was out of line with Southern culture and values. She was able to follow lines of Whiteness and class, but her body did not line up with(in) the gendered mold of the Southern sorority girl (Ahmed, 2006). Marilee Cleveland, seen modeling the puffy sleeve in Figure 4.1, also presents an interesting case study of who can become a sorority girl. Cleveland lives with cerebral palsy and uses mobility aids in her RushTok content. Panhellenic sororities are not typically inclusive of people with disabilities (Bauer-Wolf, 2018) but unlike Grant, Cleveland completed recruitment and became a Chi Omega member. Though her body did not precisely fit into the standard sorority girl mold, she did not challenge Southern culture and values in the same way that Grant's gender presentation did. Grant's

experience thereby makes the values of WGLOs more visible, and emphasizes how place and space matter in the (re)production of the sorority girl. Erin suggests that Panhellenic values are intensified by the South, but RushTok makes these values uniform across different spaces. Though these values feel like they are stuck in the past, much like the puffy sleeve, they seem instead to be timeless.

Figure 4.3 Grant shows off her OOTD for day 5 of Alabama rush (TikTok)

Conclusion

"I don't see myself reflected in that culture, in that group," says Clarke, a non-sorority affiliate. As an "outsider looking in" on RushTok, they don't see themselves in the sorority girl, nor do they feel like they belong in sorority culture (August 24, 2022). The uniformity of RushTok content produces feelings of (dis)orientation, making the lines that structure the sorority girl more visible. Such (dis)orientation makes turning toward the shared orientation of the sorority girl (im)possible (Ahmed, 2006). Turning toward the sorority girl uniform is a way of making your shared orientation visible, and produces a sense of belonging for some sorority affiliates. Notably, all participants– including sorority affiliates, past and present– expressed feelings of not-belonging in sorority culture, or a reluctance to turn toward the sorority girl. After all, this shared orientation comes with a complicated history that overshadows even the most bright, sparkly OOTD. Sorority affiliates struggled to reconcile the exclusionary nature of Panhellenic culture with the sense of belonging that they found with their sisters. Some enjoy wearing the sorority girl uniform while others feel that it has restricted their personal style. Belonging to a Panhellenic sorority can feel like a mold that (re)shapes the body into becoming-sorority-girl, sometimes against your will; this mold changes shape as it intra-acts with place and space. This belonging is made (im)possible by the degree to which the sorority space accommodates your body: your skin, your hair, your clothes, and your mannerisms. Moments of not-belonging emphasize that becoming-sorority-girl is relational and produced through embodied encounters (Guyotte et al., 2019).

To become-sorority-girl– to belong in a sorority– means one must become more uniform. In this study, I explored how RushTok content (re)produces the *Southern* sorority girl uniform, which (re)produces PNMs as becoming-sorority-girl along gendered, racialized, and classed

lines. The sorority girl uniform is shaped by intra-actions among (non)human bodies, including style-fashion-dress, Panhellenic values, the (real and imagined) South, college campuses, sorority chapters, and algorithmic logics, among others (Barad, 2007). This material-discursive assemblage (re)produces the lines of becoming-sorority-girl. Wearing the sorority girl uniform is a way to (re)form yourself into the Southern sorority girl on RushTok. TikTok's algorithmic logics reward presentations of the sorority girl that cohere along these lines, making this more uniform sorority girl more visible (Carah & Dobson, 2016). RushTok content thereby (re)produces hegemonic gender, race, and class norms in WGLOs. Uniforms are most effective "as markers of group belonging, authority, discipline and order" when they "appear en masse as a display of identically kitted-out persons" (Craik, 2005, p. 182). The power of the sorority girl uniform is therefore (re)produced not only via the intra-action of its components, but by its spectacular (re)production en masse on RushTok.

This study has several significant theoretical implications. First, the uniformity of the RushTok sorority girl appears to (re)produce the exclusion of non-White, gender expansive, and lower-income people from WGLOs, which aligns with previous research (Hughey, 2010; Ispa-Landa & Oliver, 2020). Secondly, the study uses posthuman theory to explore how style-fashion-dress produces shared subjectivities and feelings of (not) belonging, extending fashion studies scholarship about style-fashion-dress, identity, and group membership (Barnard, 2020; Kaiser & Green, 2021). Though purchasing and styling particular goods– Lululemon skirt, Shein tank top, self-tanner, hair straightener, Cartier ring– can be read as an expression of Panhellenic sorority membership, a posthuman framework complicates the representational dynamic often found in semiotic theories of fashion (e.g. Barthes, 1983; Davis, 1992) or literature on (sub)cultural styles (e.g. Thornton, 1997). I argue that these style-fashion-dress items are not signs to be decoded but

rather an arrangement of bodies, objects, and expressions that produce the becoming-sorority-girl (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987). I use posthuman theory to account for the (non)human bodies that intra-act to (re)produce the sorority girl and her uniform (Barad, 2007). For example, place and space are not merely filters through which the sorority girl is perceived differently; rather, they are active agents in the production of the sorority girl. Becoming-sorority-girl is therefore conceptualized as an immanent, relational, material phenomenon (Braidotti, 2019).

INTERLUDE 4

(AD)DRESSING THE SOUTHERN SORORITY GIRL

This interlude documents the development process of a creative scholarship project. The project contemplates the fabrication of RushTok style-fashion-dress and will consist of two dresses for sorority recruitment. Following Wilson (2018), I will construct these dresses by marking, pinning, measuring, and stitching the hegemonic subjectivities and style-fashion-dress practices of the RushTok community. I am developing the dresses using the collage and reflection from Interlude 3 as well as from my intraview and social media data. The silhouette is designed using garments seen in RushTok content and intraview descriptions of RushTok fashion, and the fabric pattern incorporates reproductions of collage imagery and intraview quotes. As I follow the flows of affect and meaning with(in) my data, making these designs has made the intra-action of bodies, objects, discourses, and affects in sorority culture more visible to me (Barad, 2007). I present the following images as a photo essay to explore the initial stages of this creative scholarship.

***

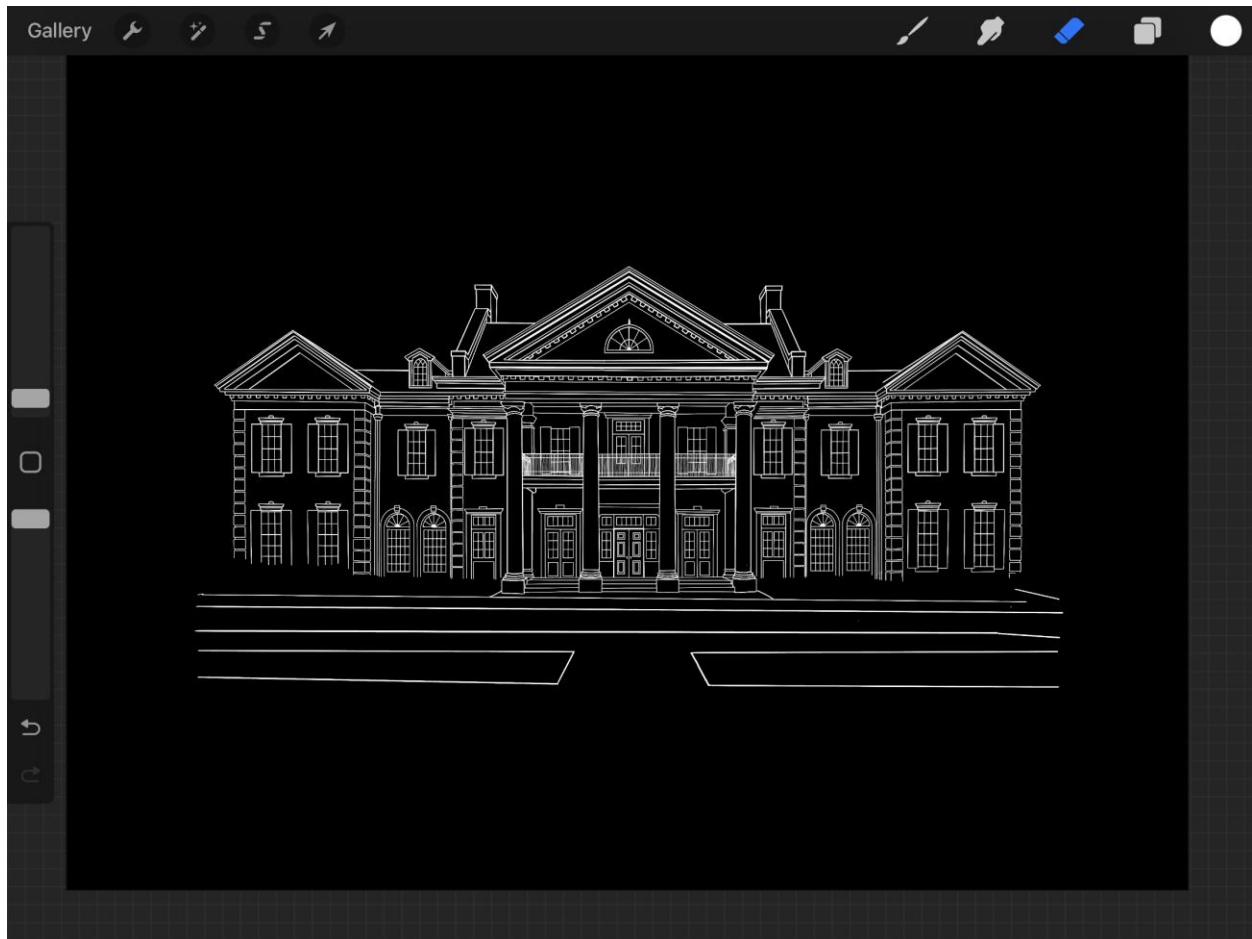**Figure 4.4** Tracing the Zeta Tau Alpha house at the University of Alabama in ProCreate to develop this print element

Figure 4.5 Tracing RushTok content to develop another print element
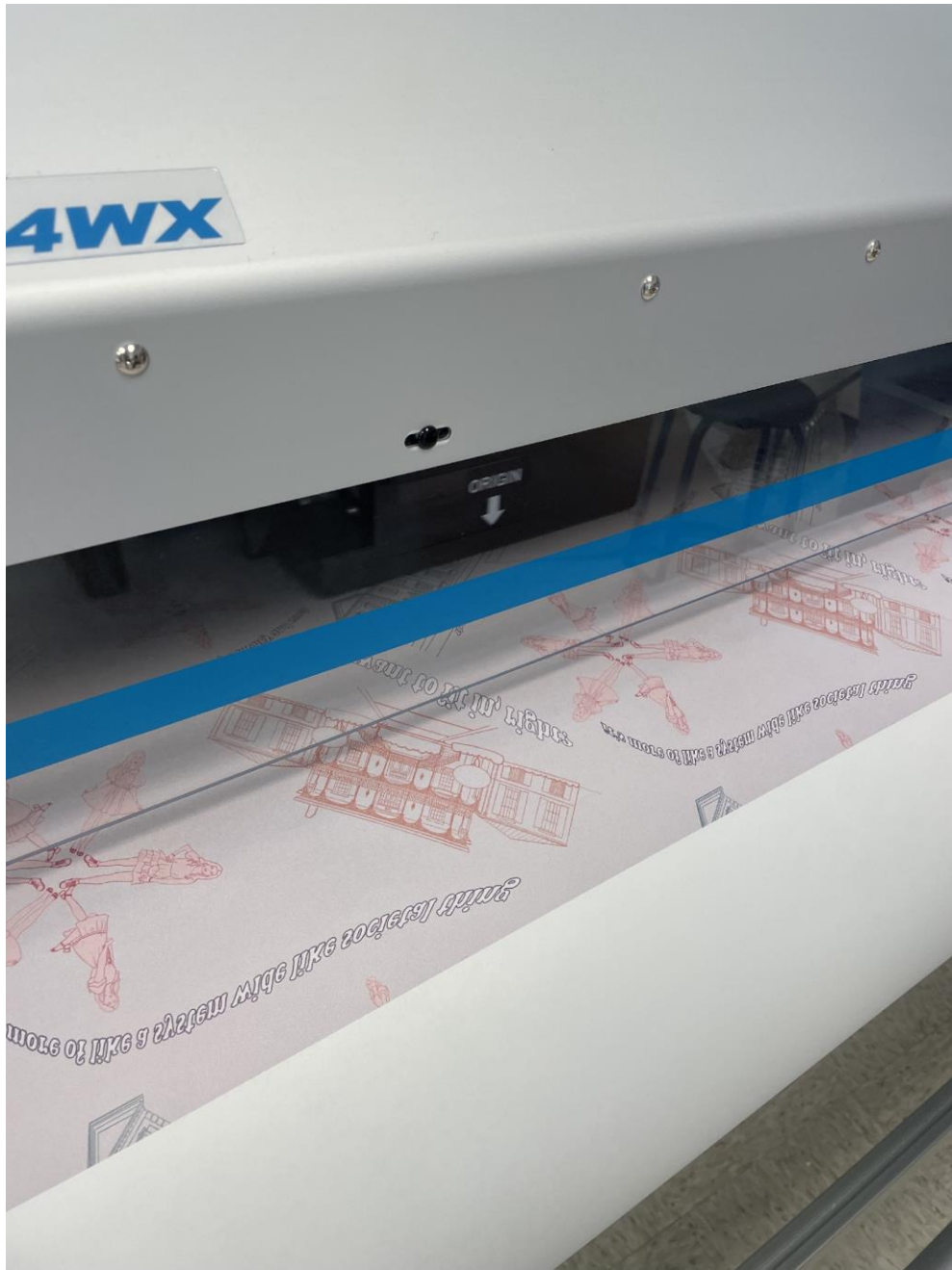
Figure 4.6 The sublimation printer in action

Figure 4.7 Sketching concepts for the Old and New Row silhouettes

Figure 4.8 Image of Alabama sorority members in the late 1950s used as reference for the Old Row silhouette (AL.com)
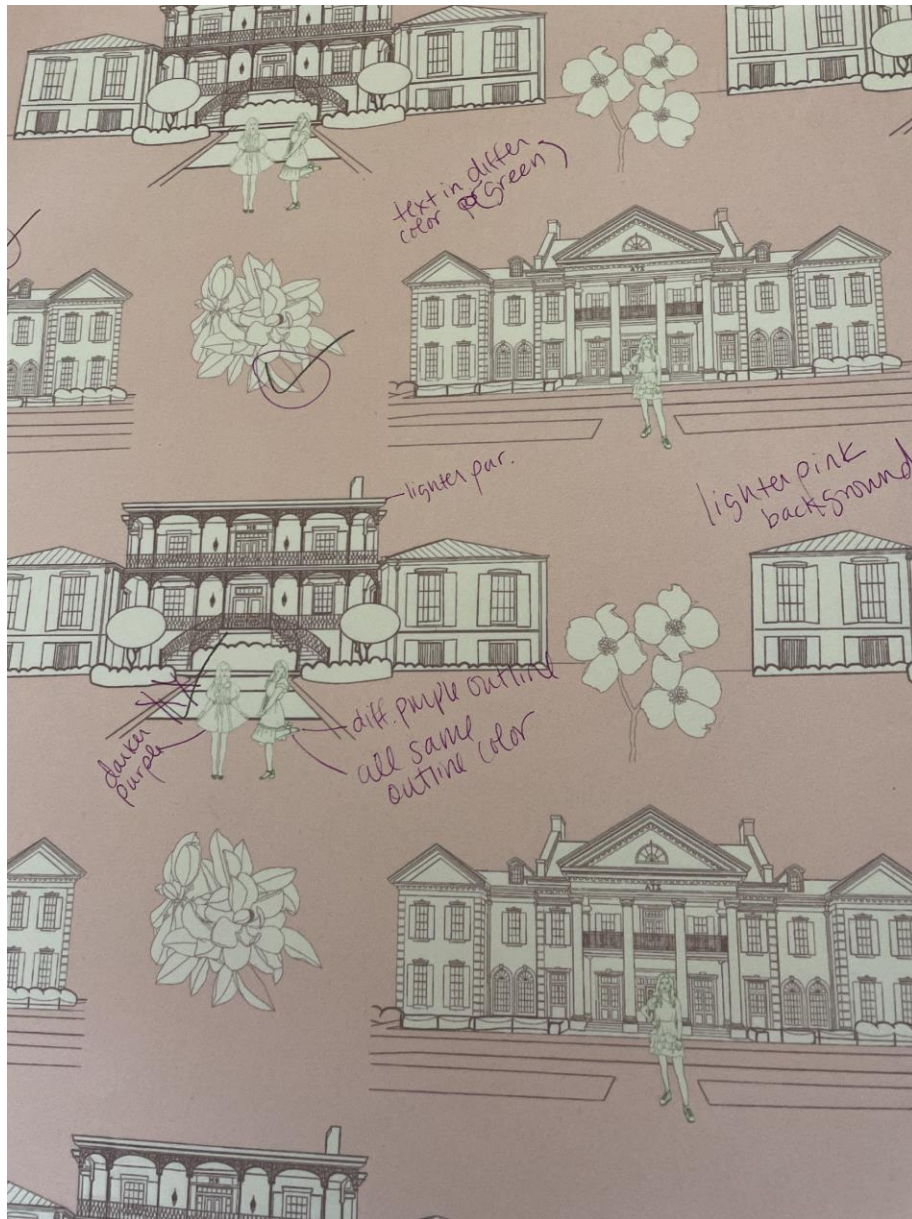
Figure 4.9 Making notes to adjust the Old Row toile

Figure 4.10 Intraview transcripts, collage elements, and examples of sample fabric designs they inspired

Figure 4.11 CAD renderings of potential Old Row dresses

CHAPTER 5

POTENTIAL NEW (BRAND) MEMBERS: SORORITY OOTDS AND BECOMING-

INFLUENCER ON #RUSHTOK[7]

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[7] Lehto Brewster, M. 2023. To be submitted to *Fashion Theory, Feminist Media Studies,* or *Convergence*.

Abstract

RushTok, a portmanteau of sorority "rush," or recruitment, and Tiktok," refers to a digital sociality on TikTok where users share videos related to sorority life. It is best known for "outfit of the day" (OOTD) videos which are typically created by potential new sorority members (PNMs) to share their meticulously created ensembles for each day of sorority recruitment. Using posthuman and new materialist theory, I conducted two rounds of intraviews with 13 RushTok users to explore their experiences on RushTok and their perception of influence(rs) in this space. I followed the (fashion) influencer around in this data to deconstruct her sources and effects, and how these (re)produce the power dynamics of sorority culture and fashion media. I find that becoming-influencer is (re)produced on RushTok via the intra-action of the video format; PNMs' style-fashion-dress practices and communication practices; users' affective responses, and spatial logics. Participants indicated that the style-fashion-dress practices, recruitment schedule, and values of Panhellenic sororities constrains PNMs' ability to become-influencer, instead framing them as influential sorority girls. The study also offers insight into the ways in which the algorithmic logics of TikTok make certain users (in)visible, thereby making their influence (im)possible.

Introduction

> *I still don't think I've processed that making an*
> *OOTD is enough to create influence and become a*
> *representative of brands.*

> Noelle, October 2, 2022

In August 2021, thousands of potential new sorority members (PNMs) descended upon

the University of Alabama (UA) for "rush," or recruitment. Sorority recruitment includes

multiple rounds of events, which each include a recommended dress code for PNMs

("Panhellenic Pointer," 2022; "Greek Chic," 2022). Many PNMs posted videos of their "outfit of

the day" (OOTD) for rush events on TikTok, using the hashtag "RushTok" – a portmanteau of

"rush" and TikTok – to link their content to other social media users and content (Bruns et al.,

2016). Their videos included information about the brands and retailers for each garment, as well

as accessories and beauty products used to complete their ensemble. As Noelle notes in the quote

that opens this study, this extremely commercial content soon attracted brand attention, and some

PNMs received free products or sponsorship deals as a result of their visibility on RushTok

(Krentcil, 2021). These amateur producers used highly gendered and forward-looking strategies

of self-branding not only to join a sorority, but to promote themselves online (Duffy, 2016).

These strategies include their use of the OOTD format, which was first used by fashion bloggers

in the 2000s to narrate and brand their lifestyle (Titton, 2015). RushTok PNMs also connected

with followers – many of whom had little to no familiarity or even interest in sorority culture

prior to encountering this community – by looking directly into the camera, using informal

language, and responding to comments (Abidin, 2015). In other words, RushTok PNMs were

using microcelebrity practices to attain visibility, and thereby social and economic capital

(Duffy, 2016; Marwick, 2015; Senft, 2013). Put even more simply: they were becoming influencers.

This study explores how 2022 RushTok creators leverage style-fashion-dress (Tulloch, 2010, 2016) and microcelebrity practices (Abidin, 2015; Marwick, 2015) to become-influencer. My research questions include:

- How do PNMs become-influencer with(in) RushTok?
    - How do algorithms matter in the production and mediation of this content?
- What are the connections between OOTD content on #RushTok and traditional or digital fashion media?
- How are normative ideals of race, gender, and the body (re)produced in #RushTok OOTD content?

The study first contextualizes RushTok OOTD content within traditional and digital fashion media discourses to consider how it remediates hegemonic ideals of race, gender, and the body from traditional fashion media (Rocamora, 2012). In Fall 2022, I conducted intraviews with 2022 RushTok users to explore their intra-action with the content and strategies in this sociality, and this data grounds my analysis. I think with Ahmed (2010, 2017) to follow the fashion influencer around this community, and to explore the subjectivities and content that follow. The discussion explores how RushTok OOTDs (re)produce established fashion media (Rocamora, 2012) and influencer practices (Abidin, 2016, 2020). I conclude with a consideration of how the gendered, classed, and racialized assemblages of style-fashion-dress in these spaces map onto those of sorority culture (Freeman, 2020), and how these are (re)produced by algorithmic logics on TikTok (Benjamin, 2019; Contreras & Martinez, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

The following section outlines my theoretical framework for this study, which is guided by posthuman and new materialist thought.

Posthumanism and new materialism

I use posthuman and feminist new materialist theory in this study to consider how (non)human entities are entangled in the RushTok community, and how this online space is also an agent in the production of users' embedded, embodied subjectivities (Braidotti, 2019). Posthumanism challenges the representationalism and anthropocentrism of European humanism, while feminist new materialism (re)turns to matter as lively, productive, and pluralistic (Braidotti, 2019; Coole & Frost, 2010). Feminist new materialism is grounded in the political and material realities of gender, race, and class, framing the researcher as "accountable, situated, and responsible" to address and intervene in inequity (Truman, 2019, p. 8). I use these theories to frame RushTok as a space in which "matter and meaning are mutually articulated" through *intra-action* with PNMs but also phones, clothing, and even algorithms (Barad, 2003, p. 822). These entities are ontologically indeterminate until their *intra-action* enacts an *agential cut,* which produces a local subject and object; this is different from *interaction,* which presumes that they are independent entities (Barad, 2003, p. 815). I use this theoretical framework to map the ongoing *intra-activity* of PNMs, style-fashion-dress, and TikTok as entangled and always-already becoming (Barad, 2007). I also consider how these material-discursive formations are entangled with hegemonic racial, gender, and class norms in the fashion and media industries (Barad, 2007). I also use Ahmed's concept of *following* (2010, 2017) as a theory and method in this study. As a theory, this concept enables me to follow the figure of the fashion influencer

through my intraview data and map what follows from the enactment of this subjectivity (Ahmed, 2010).

Becoming-influencer

I think with study participants and Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 256) to theorize becoming-influencer as a "relation of movement and rest, speed and slowness grouping together an infinity of parts," with corresponding "intensities that affect it, augmenting or diminishing its power to act." Under this metaphysical framework, becoming is not imitation or filiation, nor is it progress or the phase between two states; it is not a fixed term or endpoint (Stagoll, 2010). Rather, becoming is an immanent, eternal process that "produces nothing other than itself" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 238). This process-oriented conceptualization of becoming enables me to think of influence(rs) as a multiplicity of potential, "a constantly changing assemblage of forces" instead of a fixed subject (Stagoll, 2010, p. 27). Becoming-influencer is not imitating an influencer or even becoming *an* influencer. However, if you dress, speak, *do Influencer* "with enough feeling, with enough necessity and composition," you bring the particles of your body in relation with the Influencer assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 275). The proper noun *Influencer* therefore designates "an agent of the infinitive" that marks its materiality, movement, and affective potential in the order of the event (p. 264). In this study I explore how RushTok PNMs become-influencer by "entering into a composition" with the Influencer "in such a way that the particles emitted from the aggregate thus composed will be [influential] as a function" of their relations and proximities (p. 274). This enables me to think beyond the binary of not/influencer and instead focus on the ongoing (re)production of influence(rs) with(in) social media: namely, the lines of becoming that carry PNMs and influencers "in a shared proximity" (p. 294), and how this potentiality of influence unfolds. I also consider the affordances of TikTok

and WGLOs shape these lines of becoming and make becoming-influencer (im)possible. Like other posthuman thinkers (e.g. Barad, 2003, 2007; Braidotti, 2019), I draw on Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to conceptualize subjectivity as a relational, affective, wholly immanent process that involves non-human agents.

Literature review

The following sections offer an overview of existing scholarship to contextualize this study. This includes literature on sorority style-fashion-dress and social media; sorority culture and style-fashion-dress; social media influencers, TikTok and RushTok.

Style-fashion-dress and social media

The concept of "style-fashion-dress" follows the work of Tulloch (2010, 2016) and Kaiser & Green (2021), who articulate style as an articulation of sartorial agency, which is deeply intertwined with fashion as a system or process, and the act of dressing the body with clothing, accessories, and other enhancements. I use this term to reflect the intra-action of PNM's dress practices and personal style with those encouraged by sorority culture or TikTok, as well as with the movement of trends with(in) the fashion system. It is important to contextualize the development of the RushTok OOTD with(in) fashion media and on social media, and its representation of style-fashion-dress in these different contexts. The "outfit of the day" genre of social media first appeared in fashion blogs in the early 2000s, as a way to establish and share the blogger's fashion persona (Brydges & Sjoholm, 2018; Titton, 2015). Previous research suggests that this format is a key strategy for fashion-oriented content creators to establish a personal brand and cultivate brand partnerships, thereby securing their social and economic capital (Abidin, 2016; Duffy, 2016). OOTDs use poses and descriptions associated

with traditional fashion media, such as the "straight up" style of photography popularized by independent magazines in the 1980s (Berry, 2012), a process that Rocamora (2012) dubs "remediation." This concept refutes the idea that old and new media are distinct by describing how they continually "represent and refashion each other" (Rocamora, 2012, p. 101). I use this term in this study to analyze how RushTok PNMs further refashion the OOTD for TikTok, specifically via their use of narrativization, video editing, and posing techniques.

Sorority culture and style-fashion-dress

Panhellenic sororities are social organizations for undergraduate students. Named for the Latin word "soror," which means sisterhood, they recruit potential new members with the promise of an exclusive community that is dedicated to service, scholarship, and social events ("Panhellenic Pointer," 2022). I focus on Panhellenic sororities, which are historically white Greek life organizations (WGLOs). Panhellenic sororities have been formally desegregated and are open to anyone who identifies as a woman "regardless of sexual orientation." Though this conflates gender and sexual orientation, it suggests more inclusive membership ("Bylaws," 2022; "Recruitment Rules," 2022). However, the recruitment and governance practices of WGLOs have been found to marginalize queer and trans (Duran & Garcia, 2021; Literte & Hodge 2011; Yeung et al., 2006) as well as non-White people (DeSantis, 2020; Hughey, 2010).

Panhellenic sorority style-fashion-dress practices also reflect WGLOs' idealization of Whiteness, wealth, and hyperfemininity (Arthur, 1999; Freeman, 2020). Boyd (1999, 2022) links these ideals to the American South, where many of the oldest Panhellenic sororities were founded in the mid-late 19th century. The visual and affective qualities of the "Southern belle" continue to influence style-fashion-dress codes in WGLOs across the United States but appear

most pronounced in Southern schools (Boyd, 2022). For example, University of Georgia PNMs are required to wear white for the final day of recruitment ("Panhellenic Pointer," 2022), but chapters at schools outside of the South often have more relaxed standards (e.g. "What to Wear," n.d.). In general, sorority recruitment emphasizes gendered standards of dress, calling for PNMs to dress in modest, conservative, traditionally feminine clothing; active members have less strict rules but are also expected to follow organizational dress standards (Arthur, 1999; Berbary, 2012b; "Greek Chic," 2022). Primary Panhellenic recruitment at UA has ballooned from 5 to 9 days since the early 2000s as the number of PNMs participating has more than doubled (Cruz, 2003; Zengerle, 2002). Each round of recruitment now spans 2-3 days, offering many opportunities for potential and active sorority members to share stylized OOTDs. Their "outfit of the day" videos include information about their recruitment style-fashion-dress in varying degrees of detail. This study explores how RushTok users' intra-act with organizational style-fashion-dress norms in their OOTDs. I also consider how place and space matter in enactments of becoming-influencer.

Social media influencers

An influencer is defined here as someone who strategically develops an online persona and communicates with other users on social media to cultivate a following and attain visibility from brands (Abidin, 2015). Previous research has focused on fashion influencers on social media platforms such as Instagram (e.g. de Perthuis & Findlay, 2019; van Driel & Dumatrica, 2020) and YouTube (e.g. Chapple & Cownie, 2017; Rees-Roberts, 2020). However, only a few studies have explored fashion influencer practices or media on TikTok due to the platform's novelty. Users' content preferences and local culture (Yang, 2022) as well as parasocial relationships (Yang & Ha, 2021) have been found to influence their engagement with influencer

content on TikTok. Influencers on TikTok use the app's unique audiovisual affordances to enact subjectivities specific to their enfolded transnational, gender, and digital context (Hurley, 2022). While many influencers are associated with specific platforms, attaining this status now requires aspiring users to successfully navigate multiple, overlapping social media platforms (Brooks et al., 2021). In particular, TikTok and Instagram are essential platforms for aspiring influencers to develop symbolic capital through the circulation of their content and their engagement with other users (Darvin, 2022). TikTok is unique because aspiring influencers must seek out and participate in viral trends using audio clips or filters to capture an audience, rather than cultivate a singular persona or style as is the practice on Instagram (Abidin, 2020). In this study I consider how RushTok PNMs circulate and engage with both content and other users in the RushTok community, and how platform affordances shape becoming-influencer. I also analyze PNMs' style-fashion-dress content to explore how this comes to matter as they become-influencer.

TikTok and RushTok

TikTok was founded in the United States in 2019 as the international version of the Chinese social media platform Douyin. TikTok has since become one of the most popular social media platforms in the world with over 1.2 billion global monthly users as of December 2022 (Iqbal, 2023). TikTok users can easily create, share, and view short-form videos using the app's editing software and library of audio clips. The platform is unique because it allows users to link and share videos based on audio clips as well as hashtags; users can also interact with each other's content by "stitching" or creating a split-screen "duet" (Abidin, 2020; Kaye et al., 2020). TikTok's proprietary algorithm, which structures the content seen in each user's central "For You" feed, aims to maximize user retention and time spent on the platform (Alexander, 2019; Smith, 2021). The platform's algorithmic moderation has attracted criticism for these "addictive"

qualities but also because it suppresses content from non-White, queer, and other marginalized creators (Contreras & Martinez, 2021; Smith, 2021). TikTok has invested heavily in influencer marketing and sought luxury fashion partnerships (Maguire & Biondi, 2020). Though research on the relationship between the fashion industry and TikTok is still developing, previous studies have explored how the platform's "algorithmically driven micro-communities" promote subcultural styles (Rogers, 2021) and craft practices (Beyer, 2022) to the mainstream. Despite TikTok's moderation of content from queer creators, Lin (2022) considers how queer youth create a "safe space" to explore their personal style using the platform's affordances. In this study I focus on another micro-community, RushTok. Though TikTok content related to sorority recruitment and Greek Life certainly existed prior to 2021, that was when the RushTok content first went viral on the platform and in mass media.

RushTok sprawls across a number of hashtags, shared audio, and content formats. After #RushTok (1.2 billion views as of April 2023), the most commonly used hashtags for sorority recruitment content are #RushTikTok (42 million views) and #BamaRushTok (716.6 million views), reflecting the massive reach of this content and the outsize influence of Alabama in this community. There are several content formats associated with this community: the OOTD, which is the most recognizable content format of RushTok; large, elaborately choreographed dance routines, produced by sorority chapters; commentary about recruitment themes, style, and gossip, and videos that critique WGLOs or recruitment practices. I mainly focus on OOTDs since these were the most commonly discussed in intraviews. These videos do not include shared audio clips; rather, they use original audio of the PNM sharing their outfit and recruitment experiences. In this study I consider how these audiovisual narratives (re)produce influencer media to (re)shape PNMs as becoming-influencer. I also consider how this algorithmically-

driven media is shaped by the values and organizational norms of Panhellenic sororities. These WGLOs have embraced social media as a promotional tool, even as they restrict members' posts to maintain a "tasteful and appropriate" image ("Manual of Information," 2021). Previous scholarship has found that WGLOs tokenize non-White members in organizational social media posts (Beaird et al., 2021), though for individual members, social media might be a space of agency (Duran & Garcia, 2021). In this study I consider how TikTok's affordances enable more diverse representation of sorority life, but continue to privilege certain gendered, classed, and raced idealizations of the sorority girl, limiting opportunities to become an influencer.

Methodology

My methodology is informed by a posthuman and new materialist onto-ethico-epistemology of immanence, materiality, affect, and relationality (Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2019). Accordingly, my research methods center non-human entities such as TikTok, style-fashion-dress, and algorithmic media. I engaged in two rounds of *intraviews* with 13 RushTok users to generate data for this study. This method foregrounds material intra-actions in data collection and analysis, making the "inherent indeterminacy between object and agencies of observation" more visible (Barad, 2007, pp. 170-174). My intraviews focus on users' experiences with RushTok and their perception of influence(rs) in this space. I turn this concept over, "this way and that," exploring the ripples of movement and meaning that follow influence(rs) to consider how this line of becoming shapes users' engagement with the RushTok community and style-fashion-dress (Ahmed, 2017, p. 12).

Data for analysis

After receiving approval from the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, I used two rounds of semi-structured intraviews with RushTok users to generate data for this study. I define RushTok users as people who use TikTok on at least a weekly basis and who are familiar with the RushTok phenomenon. Data collection began in August 2022 to coincide with the NPC Primary Recruitment period, and continued until December 2022. The first round of intraviews was conducted in-person or virtually (Zoom or email) and focused on users' encounters with style-fashion-dress and influencers on RushTok. The second round of intraviews was conducted entirely virtually, via text messaging and direct messages (DMs) on TikTok. This round included social media elicitation to further explore participants' movement through RushTok. Social media elicitation is similar to photo elicitation, providing a memory aid for participants and valuable context for researchers (Duguay, 2016; Grant, 2019). I adapted this method using posthuman and new materialist theory to consider how (non)human bodies such as devices and algorithms shaped participants' encounters with RushTok (Barad, 2007) and produced different meanings in the intraview itself (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012).

The term "intraview" suggests a reworking of the traditional interview based on posthuman and new materialist theories (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012). The "inter" in *interview* emphasizes the construction of meaning via exchanges between the participant and researcher, reflecting a European humanist understanding of causality, subjectivity, and knowledge production (Braidotti, 2019). Using the prefix "intra" and reframing this as an *intra*view implies that meaning in these exchanges is produced by "doing": it is an "enactment-among" and with(in) human and non-human agents (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012). This approach recognizes that RushTok users, their messages, and their devices are in "entangled relations of becoming" that reveal and structure their material-discursive relationships to the figure of the fashion influencer

(Barad, 2015, p. 7). Following Flint (2019), I also consider how the intraview space matters in participants' engagement with the RushTok sociality. The material (dis)embodiment and (dis)connection of text messages and DMs emphasizes the material affectivity of these agents, making their "unforeseen trajectories [and] environmental interruptions" more visible (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012, p. 737).

Data collection

I primarily used purposive sampling to recruit participants. This included digital and physical flyers, which were posted on campus and sent to sorority chapters. Though I followed the #RushTok hashtag and contacted potential participants on TikTok, these efforts did not successfully recruit any participants. My recruitment efforts targeted people over 16 years old who use TikTok on a weekly basis and are familiar with RushTok content. Participants did not need to be affiliated with a sorority. My recruitment materials included eligibility requirements, a brief review of the topic, and a QR code to link potential participants to further study information. Participants were then directed to an online interest form to check their eligibility and provide their contact information to schedule the interview. All eligible participants signed a consent form (and the parental assent form when required) affirming their understanding of the expectations, risks, benefits, compensation, and timeline of the study. Participants completed an exit survey after the first-round intraview to indicate whether they were interested in completing a second round of intraviews or reviewing study findings (member checking). The resulting sample population of 13 RushTok users is shown in Table 5.1. The asterisk indicates participants who completed two rounds of intraviews.

Table 5.1

Intraview participant information

Pseudonym	Age	Sorority Affiliation	University Affiliation
Patricia	17	PNM	UGA
Clarke	18	Enthusiast	UGA
Lauren	20	Active	UGA
Veronica	21	Active	UGA
Sasha	19	Enthusiast	UGA
Eva	36	Alumna	UA
Erin	38	Alumna	Pratt Institute
Callie	18	Enthusiast	UGA
Hailey	21	Active	UGA
Noelle	21	Active	UGA
Emma	19	Active	UGA
Mia	18	PNM	UGA
Lila	22	Alumna	UGA

Two of these participants went through recruitment in 2022 as PNMs, while five identified as active sorority members. Two participants are former members, or alumni, of sororities. Three participants are not affiliated with a sorority but enthusiastically followed RushTok regardless, hence their designation as "enthusiasts." All 13 participants completed the first round of semi-structured intraviews in-person or virtually in August-December 2022. These intraviews took an average of 45-60 minutes. Seven of these participants completed a second round intraview via text messages and DMs in September-October 2022. These intraviews were conducted in short sessions over no more than 7 days, for an average of 60-90 minutes each. I

tracked the time stamps of each messaging session to ensure that intraviews did not exceed the

allotted time. The incorporation of media into the intraview facilitates greater attention to the

role of platform logics and spaces in users' intra-action with RushTok media, as well as the

platform logics that inform the message exchange (Kaye et al., 2020; Wolfe, 2017). The virtual

space also makes the "porosity of public–private-timespace-materialities" of social media more

visible (Albin-Clarke, 2022).

The first round of interviews generally focused more on style-fashion-dress practices in

sorority culture and RushTok, while the second round enabled greater focus on the emergence

and visibility of the RushTok influencer. However, intraview questions differed slightly in each

round and session depending on the participants' affiliation with a sorority. Potential and active

sorority members offered insight into the schedule and procedures of recruitment, and how this

influences the style-fashion-dress and therefore the reach of the sorority girl. Participants who

are not affiliated with a sorority offered a different perspective of the influence of RushTok users

and their content. Intraviewees were invited to share meaningful or interesting social media

content that they encountered on RushTok, including content that they created, throughout the

intraview process. Any such content that appears in this study is used with their permission.

Data analysis

I use Ahmed's (2010, 2017) concept of *following* as a theory and method to follow the

origins of the 'fashion influencer' in RushTok content, and explore what follows from her

appearance (Ahmed, 2010). Like Ahmed (2017), I take up the fashion influencer as a "sweaty

concept," acknowledging how this material-discursive formation shapes the way in which

participants intra-act with TikTok, style-fashion-dress, and the RushTok community. I use

transdisciplinary scholarship and popular media in my analysis to resist the "constriction and containment" of traditional academic knowledge production (Bilge, 2021).

I followed the 'fashion influencer' around intraview data from RushTok users to deconstruct her sources and effects, and how these (re)produce particular power dynamics and subjectivities in sorority culture. My analysis positions RushTok as a "space of encounter," which shapes what and how users touch (Ahmed, 2017, p. 17) based on the algorithmic logics tailored to their subjectivities (Benjamin, 2019). I make those logics more visible by mapping lines of flight with(in) user-generated and submitted media collected during the interview. My analysis explores how the poses, dress, caption, tags, and other features in this user-submitted content (re)mediates those of traditional and digital fashion media (Rocamora, 2012). I also plug in new materialist theory and map lines of flight to academic and popular texts (Mazzei, 2014), and mark resonances with other intraview data (Ahmed, 2017) in each set of transcript annotations. Michel (2020) uses similar strategies to follow her letter about political anti-racist activism against Blackface at a Swedish university to make the institutional use of "performative consumption" and its inhibition of anti-racist politics more visible. Kuby et al. (2015) also plug Deleuzian theory into co-produced data from their study about teaching post-qualitative inquiry. I also follow material objects – style-fashion-dress and TikTok videos – as well as discursive formations related to gender, race, and class to explore the effects of their movement through sorority culture and social media. In the process, I not only focus on the content of participants' messages, but also the *embodied vibrations* in the transcript, including their gestures, pauses, and tone (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012). My annotations map relationships among data and gendered, racial, or classed assemblages in fashion and social media to make their intra-action with RushTok and the influencer subjectivity more visible.

Findings and discussion

Though they widely acknowledged the influence of RushTok PNMs, most participants felt this influence is limited: "I feel like they're influential only in, like, the recruitment, RushTok space…but ultimately…because they're getting their fame, their influence, they're gaining from this specific process, people don't necessarily care what they have to say about other things" (Lauren, August 26, 2022). Participants thereby distinguished between the quality of *influence* and the status of an *influencer,* noting that the "RushTok space" produces these enactments differently than other online spaces. In this section I follow the influencer around RushTok content to (re)define the practices and meanings associated with this subjectivity. I explore how (non)human bodies– particularly style-fashion-dress (Tulloch, 2010, 2016), the OOTD format, and algorithmic logics (Benjamin, 2019)– intra-act with influencer practices (Abidin, 2016; Duffy & Hund, 2015), enabling RushTok PNMs to become-influencer. I also consider how the RushTok algorithm makes some users more visible based on their region and appearance, which (re)produces gendered, racialized, and classed inequities in fashion media (Ellington, 2017; Lewis, 2019) and WGLOs (Hughey, 2010; Ispa-Landa & Oliver, 2020).

Becoming-influencer

As RushTok has become more popular, the incentive to produce content has only increased. In 2021, "it was more casual because they didn't know it was gonna be a thing. And then it became a thing. And so then this year, people were like, 'Oh, these girls went viral! Like, can I do the same thing?'" (Lauren, August 26, 2022). Participants accordingly described their perception that 2022 RushTok PNMs posted content in order to gain online visibility and become influencers. Lila thought that these PNMs were motivated by "a mix of, you know, wanting to be

watched, knowing people will be watching, sharing this content. And being a part of a trend"
(December 5, 2022). Veronica agreed: "I would say a lot of people really just want likes, and
[for] people to like and 'favorite' them…and want to become influencers" (August 26, 2022).
Participants suggested that becoming-influencer is realized through the (re)production of
influencer content and communication practices. I think with Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p.
274) to consider how these "expressions of becomings" enable RushTok PNMs to "enter the
zone of proximity" of the Influencer.

Participants generally associated influencers with the production of advertising and
sponsored content: "reviewing a very specific brand, having like a try-on haul from [a]
company...any routine that they do [with] very specific products, like how they use them, and
their benefits" (Lila, December 5, 2022). They articulated that RushTok PNMs use products that
might be(come) sponsored so that their content becomes-sponsorable. Producing sponsorable
content enables them to enter Influencer assemblages and "effect" their becoming-influencer
(Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 242). This requires a strategic approach to content creation before
recruitment even begins. Eva joked that in 2022, posting a video about the contents of their "rush
bag" seemed to operate as a "Bat signal" for PNMs who were interested in partnering with
brands during recruitment (September 7, 2022). Such videos typically feature tote bags stuffed
with rush "essentials," an ever-expanding list that includes everything from bandages and hair
spray to a personal fan and sewing kit (Figure 5.1). Rush Bag content is typically posted about
one to two weeks before recruitment begins. "That's the time to do it," Eva continued, because it
builds anticipation for RushTok content on TikTok but more importantly serves as an
opportunity for brands to contact PNMs and arrange partnerships, so that PNMs can include
sponsored content in their RushTok videos. In other words, much like the bat-shaped icon

projected in the sky to summon Batman, the Rush Bag video summons advertising opportunities. The video format is an agent in this assemblage that makes PNMs visible to advertisers as potential Influencers.
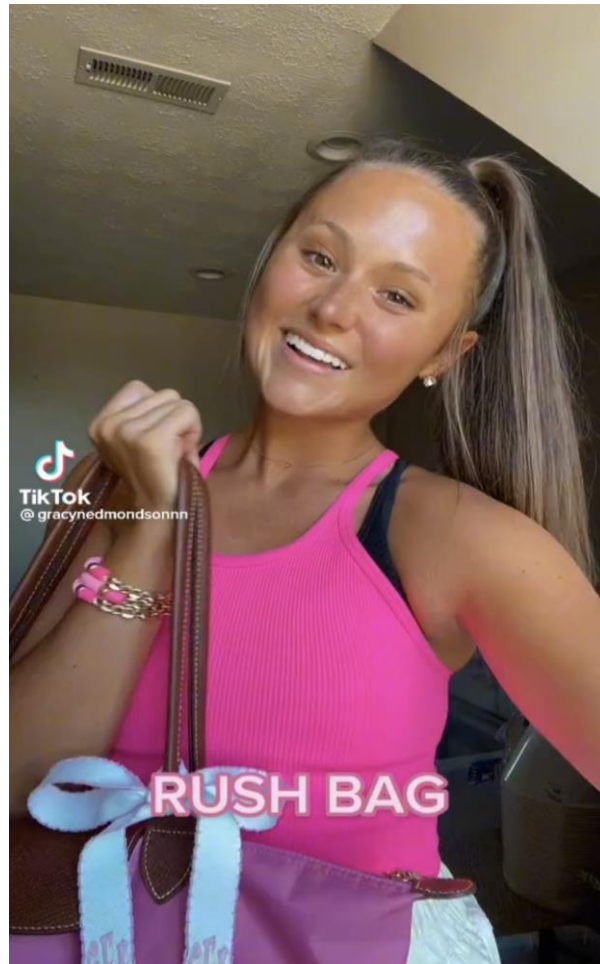

Figure 5.1 @gracynedmondsonnn shows viewers what's in her rush bag in her July 28, 2022 post (TikTok)

The OOTD is also conspicuously branded and therefore presents another opportunity for PNMs to become-sponsorable. Callie noted that the RushTok OOTD is an ideal vehicle for influencer content "because they are basically marketing different clothing brands and/or stores when they talk about where their clothes are from" (October 5, 2022). It also enables PNMs to craft a fashionable persona (Titton, 2015) like the "OG [original] bloggers from 10-15 years ago"

(Erin, September 11, 2022). As they twirl in their dresses, pop their feet up to show their shoes,

and lean into the camera to display their jewelry, PNMs rattle off a litany of brands ranging from

Shein, an online fast fashion retailer, to Cartier, the luxury jewelry and watch company. Their

pauses and poses remediate those of traditional and digital fashion media (Rocamora, 2011).

Previous OOTD content was typically static on fashion blogs and even Instagram, but YouTube

enabled video OOTDs (Bailey, 2016). RushTok OOTDs remediate these earlier forms in several

ways. First, though they are produced in motion, close-up shots of PNM's jewelry (re)produce

similar still images previously seen on fashion blogs. PNMs also include brand information

through hashtags, account tagging, and affiliate links to demonstrate cultural capital and

monetize their content, practices associated with OOTDs on earlier platforms (Abidin, 2016).

These practices (re)produce their content as an advertorial, or a blend of narrative and

advertising– a hallmark of influencer media (Abidin, 2015). TikTok makes it easy for PNMs to

quickly produce and upload their OOTD with relevant affiliate links and brand tags, simplifying

what used to be a multi-step, cumbersome process on sites like Instagram and YouTube (Geyser,

2022). (Re)producing such Influencer content enables them to "enter into a composition" with

this assemblage and (re)produce themselves as becoming-influencer (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987,

p. 274).

The communication strategies that PNMs use also matter to participants, who articulated

that showing one's "personality" is crucial to becoming-influencer: if "it's hard for viewers to

get a sense of who they are as a person," PNMs are more "limited" in the type of content they

can create because people will not be interested in following them (Emma, September 21, 2022).

Emma's comment suggests that becoming-known places PNMs in relation with becoming-

influencer. While RushTok OOTDs frequently include PNMs' experiences during recruitment,

participants were especially drawn to PNMs who offered more intimate glimpses of their personal life because they produced sensations of "knowing" that PNM. Becoming-known matters because it produces sensations of being "familiar, close, and emotionally attached" to the influencer (Abidin, 2015, p. 5), but it is important to note that only some enactments are welcomed on RushTok: specifically, those who can perform Whiteness, wealth, and cisfemininity. These enactments of becoming-known bring the RushTok PNM into proximity of the idealized sorority girl and Influencer, enhancing positive perceptions of her personality and influence. For example, several participants singled out Kylan Darnell, a UA PNM, as becoming-influencer on RushTok. Darnell's luxury-branded outfits, tan skin, and long, blonde hair epitomize the idealized sorority girl aesthetic (Arthur, 1999; Rose, 1985), and she was mocked for suggesting in her videos that outfits don't matter in the recruitment process (@makeupartistatlaw, August 6, 2022). However, some participants indicated that her communication strategies "[showed a] kind side to herself, not just her outfit" (Emma, September 21, 2022). More specifically, Darnell's chipper catchphrase, "have a great day, not just a good day"– usually delivered with a smile, directly to the camera– presented her as warm and friendly. Noelle also appreciated that Darnell was

> …intentional in saying 'you don't get a bid based on your outfit, it's about who you are and how you were involved in the community before college' whether or not that is 100% valid i think she genuinely tried to be very uplifting in her content (October 10, 2022).

Darnell's intra-actions with other PNMs and direct, affective communication style in her videos and comments made her known to these participants as kind, graceful, and engaging. Such strategies produced positive affects among these participants, which (re)directed them

toward Darnell's content (Ahmed, 2010). Notably, Darnell's enactment of becoming-known (re)produced the normative Southern sorority girl: White, wealthy, and poised but "uplifting," so bubbly that her content perhaps "lifts" your mood. Several participants labeled her a "pageant girl," indicating an association with performance– that Darnell is becoming-known in a deliberate way that is not authentic. Lauren was (not) directed to Darnell's content because "I couldn't tell if she was genuine or not" (October 5, 2022). She sent me one of Darnell's OOTDs as an example. In the video, Darnell makes her disclaimer about recruitment outfits then breezily points out her Gucci shorts (@kylan_darnell, August 6, 2022).
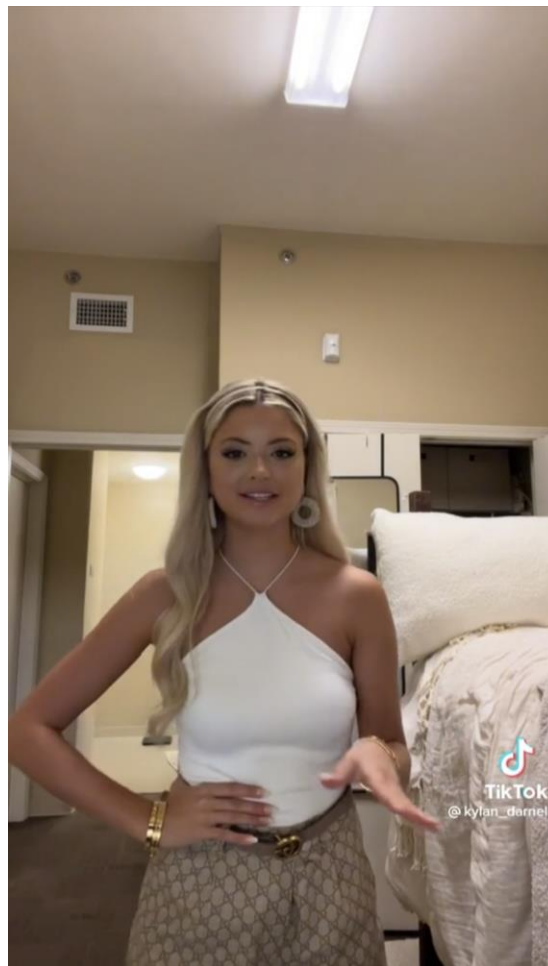

Figure 5.2 Kylan Darnell's questionably genuine, Gucci-clad OOTD (TikTok)

Lauren wondered whether Darnell was anticipating accusations of privilege with this disclaimer and using it "to seem likable without actually believing what she's saying" (October 5, 2022). Darnell might be producing herself as likable or genuine, but it is Lauren's perception of her content that matters, that (re)produces Darnell's content as (not) authentic. Intensities of authenticity thus affect and augment or diminish the action of becoming-influencer (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 256).

Other participants also described moving toward and away from RushTok PNMs "through how [they] are affected by them" as (not) authentic (Ahmed, 2009, p. 32). For example, Erin followed many PNMs on RushTok throughout the 2022 recruitment cycle, but felt especially drawn to two content creators:

> [Naomi Salazar] and Grant [Sikes] were two that weren't like all the others. It was refreshing. I think they were excited and hopeful like the others but they seemed to be a little more down to earth… like they knew about rush, but maybe [were] going into it a bit more blind…the other girls seemed groomed for rush week and they didn't seem like they were (October 1, 2022).

Erin sent me one of Naomi's posts that showed the PNM in "wet hair and no makeup" as an example (@naomi.salazar, August 14, 2022; Figure 5.3). Erin explained that Salazar and Sikes "kept it real" by showing more unpolished, "behind the scenes" content and wearing style-fashion-dress that diverged from the normative RushTok aesthetic (October 1, 2022). Their content creation and style-fashion-dress practices (re)produced them as (more) "real" or authentic than other PNMs, making Erin follow their content more closely than someone like Darnell, whose polished presentation appeared "groomed" to her. Notably, Salazar is not White

and Sikes is trans: both therefore diverge from the Alabama sorority girl mold, making their content even more "refreshing." Sikes, however, was dropped from recruitment. Becoming-authentic may influence belonging on RushTok, but authenticity is not always rewarded in real life when it does not fit the established mold.

Figure 5.3 Naomi appears in wet hair and no makeup before transforming into her RushTok-ready look (TikTok)

Overall, PNMs who appeared authentic "grabbed" participants and intensified feelings of perceived interconnection (Abidin, 2015; Warfield, 2016). These material-discursive relations

produce "visceral…vital forces insisting beyond emotion" that drive followers "toward movement, toward thought and extension" with(in) TikTok's "obstinacies and rhythms" (Gregg & Seigworth, 2009, p. 1). Put differently, becoming-authentic influenced participants' intra-actions with RushTok content. Becoming-influencer is therefore a relational and immanent process that is produced through strategic content creation practices and shaped by affective sensations of becoming-sponsored, becoming-known, and becoming-authentic (Braidotti, 2019). Thinking with Barad (2003, p. 822) makes it clear that this influence is "not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency" among this more-than-human assemblage. This congealing is always becoming, and therefore always unstable. However, it is already clear that some enactments of becoming-influencer are made more visible than others. I consider how algorithmic and systemic logics are entangled with(in) this assemblage and how they (re)direct lines of becoming-influencer on RushTok in the following section.

Making influence(rs) visible

If becoming-influencer is made possible by becoming-visible, the conversation must inevitably turn to who is made visible on RushTok. Becoming-visible is structured by the physical spaces of RushTok– namely the PNMs' university, chapter, and regional location– but also the digital space, which is itself structured by algorithmic logics. Participants noted that PNMs from Southern schools, especially UA, are highly visible in the RushTok sociality. Noelle thought that "so much attention belongs to bama influencers" on RushTok because "[the] style and vibe of their outfits are a little bit more flashy than [UGA's]" (October 2, 2022). Emma agreed that UA OOTDs are "more– not elevated, but…almost more pageanty" because their style-fashion-dress is more extravagant and incorporates more luxury items (September 22, 2022). Like a pageant, RushTok is a "mass-mediated spectacle, firmly embedded within

commodity culture" and a "profoundly political" stage for the performance of gender, race, and class (Banet-Weiser, 1999, p. 3). If RushTok is a pageant, the UA sorority girl competes for visibility with "flashy," luxury style-fashion-dress and a calculated performance of "self-esteem and confidence" (Banet-Weiser, 1999, p. 3).

Algorithmic logics also give the UA sorority girl a competitive advantage by making her more visible on RushTok. Noelle noted that UA is one of the earliest recruitment cycles, which makes content from the "bama influencers" more novel to viewers (October 2, 2022) and therefore more likely to be shared and seen widely. Although UA has formally desegregated its Panhellenic sororities, in the 2021 recruitment cycle– and the first "season" of RushTok– 89% of PNMs identified as White (Hope & Johnson, 2021). If UA recruitment content is most visible on RushTok, this suggests that White PNMs also have a sizable competitive advantage to (re)produce themselves as becoming-influencer in this space. The results of social media elicitation in this study seem to bear this out: when asked to share RushTok content that they had seen or found notable, very few participants shared videos created by PNMs of color, and Erin noted that she did not encounter diverse creators in this sociality. Furthermore, she also mentioned that Naomi Salazar "disappeared" during rush, and that she had to go "back to find her" on RushTok (October 2, 2022). Kylan Darnell's Gucci-clad OOTD, meanwhile, went viral on TikTok and has over 6.9 million views as of April 2023. Becoming-known or becoming-sponsorable are only possible paths to Influence for those who can become-visible. The path to following is (not) cleared for some users based on their algorithmic performance, which is stratified based on their ability to (re)produce normative ideals of race, gender, and the body.

Participants argued that RushTok makes a very specific type of sorority girl visible: "I feel like the people posting rushtok videos i've seen are almost exclusively white, skinny, very

pretty girls," Patricia said (September 17, 2022). She remarked that these PNMs "have the most confidence in the process because they have no issues with fitting the image [...of the] blonde, pretty, slim, bubbly" sorority girl (September 17, 2022). This "process" is a reference not only to RushTok, but also the sorority system. In other words, fitting this idealized image makes one more competitive in Greek Life and on RushTok, and therefore more visible. Mass media and algorithmic attention on RushTok uplifts PNMs like Kylan Darnell, who can easily perform the White, wealthy, "uplifting" sorority girl. Becoming-influencer with(in) this community is made (im)possible by your ability to (re)shape your body, style-fashion-dress, and content according to these lines, which enables you to enter into the "zone of proximity" of the idealized RushTok PNM (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This suggests that RushTok's algorithmic logics amplify and reinforce an idealized image of the sorority girl, thereby (re)producing hegemonic gender, race, and class norms in social media (Carah & Dobson, 2016). RushTok's algorithmic logics are thereby (re)producing systemic inequities of WGLOs, which also privilege this idealized image of the sorority girl. Becoming-influencer is therefore made (im)possible by the affordances and algorithmic logics of the social media platform itself.

(Re)Defining RushTok influence

Despite their influence, most participants hesitated to call RushTok PNMs influencers. "Technically, theoretically, are they influencers? Yes," Emma hedged, "because, like... they have girls buying certain things, you know, because that's what they're wearing…but I don't necessarily– I don't see these girls and think, influencer" (September 22, 2022). Participants defined an influencer as someone who strategically creates online content related to their personal or professional interests for a wide audience, while fashion influencers are defined as people who provide style inspiration by sharing their personal dress practices and fashion

commentary. These definitions mirror existing scholarly definitions of these figures (Abidin, 2015; de Perthuis & Findlay, 2019; Pedroni, 2016). Moreover, RushTok content reaches a staggering number of people: as previously mentioned, the hashtag "#RushTok" has over 1.2 billion views on TikTok as of April 2023. If RushTok PNMs are using influencer practices to create influential content for so many people, why don't participants consider them to be influencers?

RushTok PNMs are defined as (not) influencers mostly because of their narrow content niche. Sorority recruitment is a highly structured series of events that occurs in a short temporal window. Participants shared their perception that PNMs' influence is ephemeral because it is entangled with(in) the content format and timeline of RushTok. Clarke conceded that sharing their rush story might give PNMs "their five minutes of fame," but emphasized that "it's a time-sensitive thing": "I feel like not a lot of people from the sorority thing are going to keep that attention after rush" because "they won't be posting [the videos] that people came for" (August 24, 2022). As Lauren put it, "yes, RushTok has intrigued a lot of people. But ultimately, I feel like, because they're getting their fame, their influence– they're gaining from this specific process, people don't necessarily care what they have to say about other things" (August 26, 2022). She added that the style-fashion-dress practices seen in RushTok OOTDs are more "about showing that you can conform to a sorority's standards" than sharing "a sense of style…and creating a unique look" (September 22, 2022). In other words, sorority standards of style-fashion-dress and behavior shape the influence of RushTok OOTDs. Turning toward these standards makes it more difficult to become an influencer, because they are oriented toward the values of WGLOs rather than the entrepreneurial, branded logics of influencer content (Ahmed, 2006; Duffy & Hund, 2016). This includes the "over the top…pink and very girly" style-fashion-

dress (Clarke, August 24, 2022) worn by RushTok PNMs, which is oriented toward the "homogenous" standard of sorority culture (Emma, October 14, 2022) rather than the "unique look" that Lauren associated with fashion influencers. Because their fashionable persona is centered on sorority standards, it makes it difficult for PNMs to refer to more "collective representations of fashion, femininity, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and modernity" (Titton, 2015, p. 214), thereby limiting their potential to become influencers. This also suggests that becoming-influencer on TikTok is shaped by how mutable your content is: how well you can become-with online trends, and therefore become-influential to the TikTok algorithm (Abidin, 2020).

The RushTok OOTD format is also shaped by the recruitment narrative, which further shapes these PNMs' influence. As they share their daily rush outfits, PNMs also share their feelings about the process, and occasionally ask for support or advice from viewers. This produces them as becoming-influencer by (re)producing influencer practices of follower engagement and personal expression (Lehto Brewster & Sklar, 2022). However, Hailey questioned whether such recruitment "storytimes" produce RushTok PNMs as *influencers*, arguing that these users "aren't really influencers to me. They're more like– it's almost like watching TV every week, there's a new story there" (September 19, 2022). Because their autobiographical details (Rocamora, 2011) are produced in relation to sorority culture, PNMs' storyline is limited to the rush "season," limiting the length and breadth of their potential influence. Hailey thought that these stories give viewers "something to root for" (September 19, 2022) but are not relatable to a broader audience because they are so narrowly focused on the rhythms and values of sorority life. Sasha went further, calling RushTok content "detached from reality" (September 8, 2022) because of its spectacular, opulent displays of clothing and space. While RushTok PNMs use calculated amateurism to present their content as "raw," unfiltered,

and therefore relatable (Abidin, 2016), the structure and values of WGLOs so thoroughly permeate their style-fashion-dress, space, and demeanor that "it does not seem very real" (Sasha, 34:59, September 8, 2022). While they agree that RushTok "influences what [PNMs are] going to buy and what they're going to do during their own recruitment process " (Lila, December 5, 2022), participants think that their influence is limited beyond this context.

Participants therefore indicate that following the RushTok OOTD format produces most PNMs as *influential* but not as *influencers*. "The fit checks [OOTDs]…would influence me, but I wouldn't say that they were influencers," said Mia (September 30, 2022). The "contagion" of becoming-influencer may (not) spread to all RushTok users, may (not) propagate in every intra-action depending on the speed, movement, and elements of its immanent composition (Barad, 2007; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Becoming-influencer, according to Deleuze & Guattari (1987), always denotes the possibility of influence, not the actual status of being an influencer. This influence may take different shapes, or acquire different intensities, depending on its proximity to different molar assemblages (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). For example, participants articulated that most RushTok PNM content places them in the zone of sorority culture rather than Influencer culture, limiting the duration and scope of their influence. Not/influencer is therefore a false binary: becoming-influencer is always about the potential to become-with the Influencer, "an infinite undertaking" in which influence might fail, break, (un)fold you into other assemblages (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 259). Becoming-influencer is not the endpoint, but rather the process by which you (re)produce potential Influence.

Conclusion

Though RushTok PNMs' overall influence is limited according to participants, a number of fashion, beauty, and lifestyle brands have cashed in on the RushTok phenomenon. This includes the cosmetics company Tarte, which gifted products to over 30,000 PNMs during the 2022 recruitment cycle (Spruch-Finer, 2022). Several sorority affiliates in this study received some of these products: "Tarte is definitely…targeting rushtok because they sent my sorority a bunch of products and cards w [sic] a discount code and hashtags to use" (Lauren, September 20, 2022). This "targeted" brand attention is due to the immense potential influence of the sorority girl on RushTok. Participants, and indeed most marketing literature, describe potential influence as a quantifiable product, as something that does/not work based on reliable metrics such as follower count, engagement rates, or the reach of the account (e.g. Wies et al., 2022). These components of becoming-influencer may place RushTok PNMs into new relations, producing their influence differently. However, using a process-oriented framework (re)conceptualizes influence(rs) as a multiplicity of potential rather than a fixed subject: "a constantly changing assemblage of forces" that continually (un)makes influence in different ways (Stagoll, 2010, p. 27). Becoming *an influencer* is different than becoming-influencer. While the former is a static being, the latter is "not a thing but a doing" (Barad, 2003, p. 822), not a subject but a becoming: a "relation of movement and rest, speed and slowness grouping together an infinity of parts" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 256). Each new movement brings new intensities, new power, new lines of becoming: new potential influence. Even if that influence were only in sorority culture– and it is impossible that all 1.2 billion views of the #RushTok tag are from sorority affiliates, especially when you consider that three participants in this study identify as

"enthusiasts" of RushTok– those users' entanglements with RushTok are always-already creating more lines of becoming-influential.

In this study, I explored how becoming-influencer is (re)produced on RushTok via the intra-action of the video format; PNMs' style-fashion-dress practices and communication practices; users' affective responses, and spatial logics. The "Rush bag" and OOTD formats remediate elements of traditional and digital fashion media (Rocamora, 2011) and enable PNMs to become-sponsorable. PNMs also use direct, affective communication of their recruitment narrative to personalize their content and become-known to their followers. Participants follow these affective sensations of intimacy, seeking PNMs who appear likeable and genuine to them; this is consistent with previous scholarship on social media influencer communication (e.g. Abidin, 2015). RushTok PNMs thereby become-influencer by (re)producing the behaviors and actions of the Influencer, but becoming *an* Influencer depends on how their content is picked up by users. Finally, becoming-influencer is also shaped by the organizational logics of WGLOs and the algorithmic logics of TikTok, which make visibility and potential influence (im)possible. Participants indicated that the style-fashion-dress practices, recruitment schedule, space and place, and the values of Panhellenic sororities constrain PNMs' ability to become-visible as Influencers. RushTok also algorithmically privileges enactments of the White, wealthy, and cisfeminine sorority girl, (re)producing hegemonic norms in WGLOs. The hyper-visibility of UA sorority content on RushTok exacerbates these inequities and makes it more difficult for PNMs who do not fit this mold to become visible.

I argue that becoming an influencer depends on your ability to become visible on social media. (In)visibility matters not only because it (re)produces this idealized image of the sorority girl, but because it also makes it (im)possible for creators to attain influencer status. This is

partly because influencer marketing rates are determined by follower count and perceived engagement (Wies et al., 2022). While highly visible PNMs like Kylan Darnell attracted numerous sponsorships during and after recruitment, these opportunities are not available to those whose content was not privileged due to their gender, race, or class presentation. PNMs without the budget for Gucci shorts and Cartier bracelets are algorithmically disadvantaged because they are unable to produce the flashy, spectacular style-fashion-dress that enthralls RushTok viewers, reinforcing the class barrier to influencer status (Forman, 2021). Non-White and gender expansive PNMs also struggle for visibility in this sociality. This dynamic is not new on TikTok: previous research shows that the platform's algorithmic moderation system disproportionately targets media created by non-White, disabled, and queer content creators, which limits their ability to monetize (Contreras & Martinez, 2021; Hern, 2019). The RushTok influencer is thereby produced by a series of agential cuts that efface some subjectivities while making others more visible, reflecting existing dynamics in fashion media and popular culture (Lewis, 2019; Newlands & Fieseler, 2020; Thompson-Summers, 2017).

This study makes several important theoretical and social contributions. First, participants distinguished between the quality of *influencing* and the status of *influencer*. In other words, becoming-influencer– or "doing" influence– is not the same as "being" an influencer. Moreover, becoming-influencer may (not) (re)produce a user as an influencer depending on the movement and (un)folding of the event (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Previous scholarship on social media influencers positions this as a status produced by top-down interactions between users and followers (Abidin, 2015; Duffy, 2016; Jerslev, 2016). However, I use posthuman and new materialist theory to position influence(rs) as an arrangement of bodies, objects, and expressions that is always becoming (Barad, 2007; Deleuze & Parnet, 1987). Being an influencer is static;

becoming-influence(r) is an ongoing intra-action, a block of becoming that carries users into proximity of the influencer assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The immanence and relationality of this enactment makes influence(rs) unstable: it is produced differently among each follower, platform, culture, and time (Braidotti, 2019; Barad, 2007). After all, what is an influencer "independent of the population it appeals to or takes as its witness?" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 239). Becoming-(an)-influencer is therefore immanent to itself, rather than a final product or return. Secondly, this study adds to emerging literature related to algorithmic (in)visibility on TikTok. Like Jaramillo-Dent et al. (2022) I find that RushTok PNMs leverage their narratives and experiences to become visible and connect with followers. I also find that space and place shape the visibility of RushTok content, consistent with previous research (e.g. Bandy & Diakopoulos, 2021). Ultimately, TikTok's algorithmic logics reproduce racializing assemblages and appear to performatively discipline influence(rs) based on hegemonic norms of gender, race, and class (Benjamin, 2019; Dixon-Román, 2016). These logics limit who can become-influencer not only on RushTok but across social media and the fashion industry.

INTERLUDE 5

A PATH UNFOLLOWED

As RushTok gained popularity on TikTok and in the media throughout recruitment, a number of non-sorority members created RushTok content. Many of the OOTDs in the RushTok sociality were created by people who are not sorority members. Though they are not themselves "sorority girls," their varied approach to the OOTD format highlights the normative ideals and ideologies that underpin this subjectivity. My data set included only four OOTD videos produced by non-sorority members, though there are undoubtedly thousands more on RushTok. This section was originally written for Chapter 3 to consider how OOTD videos created by non-members intra-act with– and thereby (re)produce– the RushTok sorority girl. Although their style-fashion-dress and video practices matter in the (re)production of the sorority girl, there was just too much material from PNMs to include this angle. As researchers, we must choose what paths to follow in our research. Ideally this is based on what matters to us: the stories that we want to tell, the people or places we want to uplift. But other things, like targeting journals, reviewer comments, and word count also matter, and they sometimes require abandoning a particular path. This section presents one such abandoned path to briefly consider how non-sorority members intra-acted with the RushTok OOTD. I think with these producers to reflect on the ways in which their dress intra-acts with their surroundings, screens, and the RushTok sociality to establish them as (not) sorority girl, often to comedic effect. These parodies of RushTok content make the values and norms of RushTok not only visible, but laughable.

The sorority girl's consumption habits and style-fashion-dress practices are often satirized on RushTok. In her RushTok OOTD, @lrnssecondlife (September 7, 2022) points out her outfit for "rush day 3" composed of brands commonly associated with RushTok. Her "top"-- a pink and green frog print bathrobe cinched by a brown leather belt– is "from Shein," her red vinyl miniskirt from The Pants Store, her black belt bag is "Lulu" (as Lululemon is colloquially called on RushTok), and though she states that her shoes are from Golden Goose, she's actually wearing Nikes. She rattles off this litany of chaotically mismatched garments in a thick yet listless Southern drawl, standing still with her empty eyes glued to the camera. This is the sorority girl seen in videos of so-called "door songs," often sung to welcome new members into the sorority house, which circulate on RushTok. Most of these videos show sorority members stacked in door frames, their heads swinging back and forth rapidly while they clap along to the song with manic, synchronized enthusiasm. @lrnssecondlife's bland enthusiasm and Southern accent intra-act with her style-fashion-dress practices– particularly her blonde hair, thin frame, and exaggerated dress– to play with the RushTok formula. This satire of the sorority girl mocks her brand devotion, and particularly her conformity to the RushTok OOTD format and to sorority culture. A screen shot of her OOTD parody can be seen in Figure 5.4.
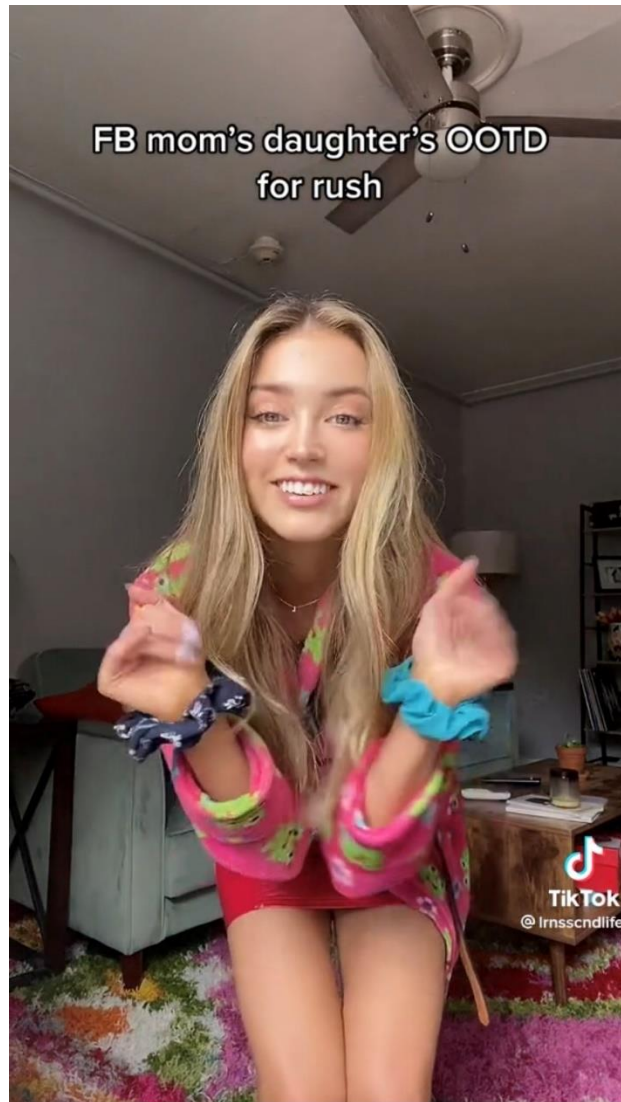
Figure 5.4 @lrnssecondlife's chaotic send-up of the RushTok sorority girl (TikTok)

Another video by @fa2chainz also plays with these gendered and classed dress practices, highlighting more explicitly the ways in which they are often racialized (Figure 5.5). She adopts a Southern accent after introducing her "Bama rush style" OOTD, which includes a gold sequin Prada headband; a white and green Veronica Beard sweater tucked into a white pleated miniskirt from Nordstrom, and low-cut Nike Dunks. After she holds up her gray Saint Laurent tote bag, she leans into the camera and asks, "everybody wish me luck" (August 9, 2022). This intra-action with the screen (re)produces her as a "Bama rush" girl. Her understated makeup and

loose, wavy long hair also intra-act with her preppy, feminine designer-branded outfit to

(re)produce the White, wealthy, Southern sorority girl so often seen on RushTok. However,

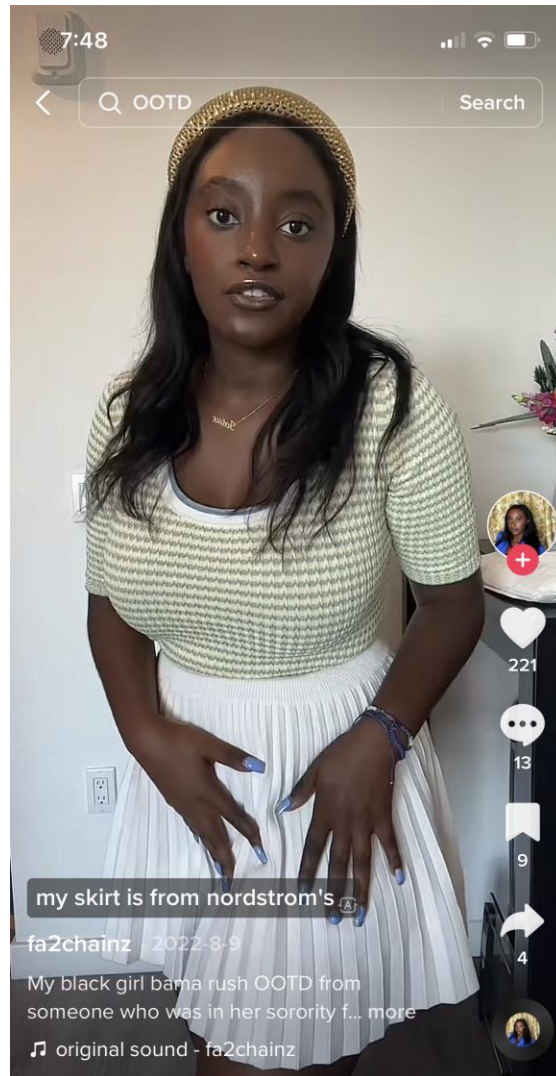there's one important difference: @fa2chainz is Black.

Figure 5.5 @fa2chainz shares her "Bama rush" style OOTD (TikTok)

By wearing the sorority girl persona and outfit as a costume, her video emphasizes the

ways in which the style-fashion-dress of sorority culture, including beauty practices, are

racialized as White. @fa2chainz's impersonation of the sorority girl thereby also makes the lack

of racial diversity in Greek Life (Boyd, 2022; DeSantis, 2020) and RushTok (Lang, 2021) more

visible. Given the ways in which "Bama rush" has historically excluded Black women, even on TikTok, "luck" and a great outfit are still not enough to become a sorority girl.

Other videos play with the OOTD script by subverting the style-fashion-dress practices seen on RushTok. Unlike the elaborate, colorful, often boutique- or luxury-branded items seen on sorority RushTok OOTDs, the outfits in these videos are mostly plain clothing in neutral color palettes, sourced from mass-market and discount retailers. For example, elementary school employee @courtneycalvertlee wore a heathered gray t-shirt that "is so old it's embarrassing" with pink and gold Kendra Scott earrings, a pair of green Old Navy pants, and "comfy" black Crocs flats for her OOTD (August 22, 2022). This (not) sorority girl outfit throws the style-fashion-dress practices of the sorority girl into sharp relief: those sorority girls rarely rewear clothing, at least publicly, instead amassing a brand-new wardrobe to fit the exacting expectations of the recruitment schedule ("Panhellenic Pointer," 2022). The mundanity of the workplace and the pageantry of RushTok intra-act for comedic effects in a video by employees at the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC), which was posted to the official @okwildlifedept account on August 3, 2022. In the video, five employees dart into the frame, one by one, and list the brands that they are wearing that day. The first brand listed is not The Pants Store or even Target: it's the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. The second employee, who appears to be a game warden, points out that his patch and nametag are from ODWC. He flexes his bicep to note that it, too, is from the ODWC, before stepping back to proclaim that "this entire uniform"– olive pants and a tan short-sleeved shirt with patch pockets, complete with a black tactical belt– is from the ODWC. His display of an idealized masculine body and dress prompts an off-camera giggle from another employee. By the time the last

employee shares that his short-sleeved, black dress shirt, chinos, and black shoes are from "Kohls, Kohls, Kohls," the video concludes with a louder burst of off-camera laughter.

The setting, style-fashion-dress, screen, caption and hashtags in these videos are "force[s] at work in the materialization of bodies" (Barad, 2007, p. 225), intra-acting to (re)producing them as (not) sorority girls. Their adoption of familiar RushTok gestures and references produces them as sorority girls, while their (not) RushTok dress intra-acts to produce "different becomings" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 269) that emphasize the distance between their embodiment of the sorority girl and how she typically appears on RushTok. In @fa2chainz's video, the presence of a Black person draws attention to the lack of diversity in RushTok content, which is itself reflective of the racist history of Panhellenic sororities (DeSantis, 2020; Freeman, 2020; Hughey, 2010). In the ODWC video, the presence of male bodies in a feminized sociality and media genre is funny because the sorority girl on RushTok is just that: girly. The most visible PNMs on RushTok are often those who perform this emphasized femininity by carefully styling their hair, wearing dresses and heels, and always smiling. This heternormative, patriarchal standard of femininity has been cultivated over time by sorority culture and solidified in media representations of sororities (Graber & Whipple, 2022). @lrnssecondlife and @fa2chainz's videos notably intra-act with this feminine, chipper, RushTok-ready sorority girl, using a "steady patter of pleasantries" and fashion brands to embody her (Boyd, 2022, p. 2). Though @courtneycalvertlee's OOTD breaks the unspoken dress code of sorority recruitment, drawing attention to classism in sorority culture, her upbeat and direct engagement with the viewer also follows these standards of femininity. Indeed, the organizational policies and recruitment structure of Panhellenic sororities encourages hegemonic femininity, rewarding women who can "approach the traditional cultural ideal of womanhood" with sisterhood (Ispa-

Landa & Oliver, 2020, p. 907; Handler, 1995). In the South, this ideal is represented by the Southern Belle, whose demure yet flirtatious, poised and passive demeanor is called into being through gesture, mannerisms, and etiquette as much as dress (Boyd, 2022). Following the sorority girl around RushTok highlights the ways in which she is enmeshed with this nostalgic vision of Southern femininity.

Though this path was not taken up in the body chapters of this dissertation, it offers an entry point for reflection on the influence of the sorority girl in and beyond RushTok. Though the videos analyzed in this interlude speak to the power of the RushTok sorority girl, they also gesture toward resistance of this subjectivity and the gender, race, and class norms that she has come to represent. As the RushTok OOTD proliferates and is (re)appropriated and replicated online—that is, becomes a meme (Nooney and Portwood-Stacer, 2014)—these subversive performances of the sorority girl are important opportunities to question her normativity and dominance.

CONCLUSIONS

Well, I guess it's…uncomfortable because it's like–
Yes, I'm part of this system that [is] systemically
racist and, you know, looking only for a very
specific type of person. [But] I would say it's
shifting, you know, towards not doing that.

Lauren, August 26, 2022

Many sorority affiliates who participated in this study have reservations about their

involvement in the Panhellenic sorority system. Like Lauren, they acknowledge that WGLOs are

"systematically racist" and seek a uniform presentation of the sorority girl subjectivity based on

hegemonic gender, race, and class norms. This normative sorority girl dominated RushTok: "As

far as diversity– from what I saw on RushTok this/last year– it's very much status quo," says Eva

(October 11, 2022). The "status quo" refers to the "blonde, pretty, slim, bubbly" girls who "have

no problem fitting the image" of Panhellenic sororities (Patricia, September 17, 2022). Their

ability to fit the status quo also gives them greater access to influencing opportunities. These

videos now "set the standard" for sorority culture and online influence, which has changed the

Panhellenic recruitment process. Noelle admits that she "really struggled with RushTok this

year" because it made recruitment more "competitive" and "showy" (September 21, 2022). As

the attention economy (Marwick, 2015) of social media influence maps onto that of sorority

recruitment, these systems' shared orientation toward "blonde, pretty, slim, bubbly" girls

maintains an exploitative and exclusionary environment for those who cannot fit this image.

In this dissertation I used posthuman and feminist new materialist theory to explore how more-than-human assemblages of style-fashion-dress; algorithmic logics; space and place; devices; discourses of race, class, and gender, and RushTok users, among other agents, intra-act to (re)produce the "status quo" of WGLOs in RushTok OOTD content (Barad, 2007; Deleuze & Parnet, 1987). I conducted feminist digital ethnography (Davis & Craven, 2022) of RushTok OOTD content and intraviews (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012) with RushTok users across three manuscripts to map the style-fashion-dress and social media practices in this digital sociality (Postill & Pink, 2012). While RushTok content is entertaining because it shows "shiny outfits [...and the sorority] houses are just cool" (Sasha, September 8, 2022), following the sorority girl and influencer around in these assemblages (Ahmed, 2010, 2017) reveals how these intra-actions make certain subjectivities (in)visible. More specifically, RushTok algorithmically rewards White, cisfeminine users who can perform the spectacular hyper-consumption that has come to define this sociality (Carah & Dobson, 2016). This digital space is oriented toward bodies that can perform this uniform sorority girl, which also shapes their potential to become an influencer (Ahmed, 2006). The context and culture of the South also operates as an agentic force in this assemblage, shaping the gender, race, and class presentations in RushTok media. I review the findings of each dissertation manuscript below. This is followed by a reflection of the theoretical implications of this dissertation and a glimpse of some future research paths.

Chapter 3, "'It's not just about your outfit': Fashioning gender, race, and class with(in) #Rushtok," analyzed RushTok OOTDs as self-produced images that are always-already entangled with(in) bodies, technology, discourses, and gendered apparatuses (Barad, 2007; Warfield, 2016). The exaggerated, luxury-branded dress seen on RushTok (re)produces fashion historical discourses of White cisfemininity (Nead, 2013). The body maintenance strategies

made most visible in this sociality– "perfect teeth, perfect skin, perfect hair" (Berbary, 2013, p. 7)– are also "euphemisms of race and status" (McMillan Cottom, 2023). Place and space also matter in this assemblage because they structure how the sorority girl comes into view on RushTok (Ahmed, 2006), particularly where the sorority girl goes to school, and where she films her video. Finally, this study emphasizes that algorithmic logics also matter in this assemblage. TikTok's algorithm makes the idealized, "recognizable and conventional" performance of the sorority girl– that is, one of White Southern femininity– more visible on RushTok (Boyd, 2022; Carah & Dobson, 2016). The RushTok sorority girl is thus "both a product and producer of the sociopolitical forces of racializing assemblages" (Dixon-Román, 2016).

In Chapter 4, "Becoming sorority girl: Following southern fashion and sorority culture on #Rushtok," I theorized RushTok style-fashion-dress as a uniform that (re)produces PNMs as becoming-sorority-girl along gendered, racialized, and classed lines (Craik, 2005). Participants consistently described the sorority girl as typically blonde and tan and wearing conspicuously branded, highly gendered clothing. This "idealized" sorority girl reflects hegemonic gender, race, and class norms in WGLOs, which have historically privileged White, wealthy, and cisfeminine people (Duran & Garcia, 2021; Hughey, 2010). This subjectivity is also linked to the "Southern standard of beauty" (Lauren, August 26, 2022), emphasizing how place and space matter in this assemblage. RushTok algorithmically privileges the tan, blonde, conspicuously-branded body of the Southern sorority girl, making the uniformity of this subjectivity more visible (Carah & Dobson, 2016). While wearing the sorority girl uniform is a way to (re)form yourself into the Southern sorority girl, it (re)marginalizes people whose bodies cannot fit this narrow mold. Greek Life is perhaps being made (more) uniform by the spectacular (re)production of this sorority girl on RushTok.

Finally, Chapter 5, "Potential new (brand) members: Sorority OOTDs and becoming-influencer on #Rushtok," explored the growing influence of this sociality. My analysis considers how video format; PNMs' style-fashion-dress practices and communication practices; users' affective responses, and spatial logics bring RushTok PNMs into proximity with influencer assemblages (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). I found several similarities between RushTok OOTDs and those from earlier forms of fashion media, noting that TikTok's affordances enable easier monetization of this content. When watching RushTok OOTDs, participants distinguished between influence as a quality and influencer as a status, positioning influence(rs) as an arrangement of bodies, objects, and expressions that is always becoming and unstable depending on how it is "done" (Barad, 2007; Deleuze & Parnet, 1987). Becoming-influencer is not an endpoint or static identity, but rather the process by which one (re)produces potential Influence; the scale and scope of this influence are relationally produced in the order of the event. In this study, participants indicate that although RushTok PNMs enact becoming-influencer, the style-fashion-dress practices, recruitment schedule, and values of Panhellenic sororities constrain their ability to become *an influencer* to a broad audience. I also argue that the TikTok algorithm privileges enactments of the White, wealthy, and cisfeminine sorority girl on RushTok, (re)producing hegemonic norms in WGLOs. The hyper-visibility of this sorority girl performatively disciplines influence(rs) based on hegemonic norms of gender, race, and class (Benjamin, 2019; Dixon-Román, 2016) and (further) limits who can become-influencer in social media and the fashion industry.

Overall, this dissertation has several significant methodological and theoretical implications that can serve as entry points for future research. First, my use of intraviews (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012) folds social media into the research assemblage not only as a research site but

as a method of engaging participants. This approach made the entanglement and "inherent indeterminacy between object and agencies of observation" more visible, in keeping with my posthuman and new materialist framework (Barad, 2007, pp. 170-174). I incorporated social media elicitation into the intraview using this framework to make the material-discursive intra-action of users, devices, and algorithmic logics more visible (Barad, 2007; Grant, 2019). Participants were invited to share media that "grabbed" them, most of which featured the "idealized" White, wealthy, and cisfeminine RushTok PNM (Arthur, 1999; Boyd, 2022; Warfield, 2016). This mostly homogenous shared media supported participants' claims that they encountered little to no diversity in the RushTok content that they encountered, affirming previous research on the disciplinary logics of social media algorithms (Benjamin, 2019; Dixon-Román, 2016). Despite RushTok PNMs tactical approach to generate engagement and followers, platform owners and technologies retain ultimate control over their visibility (Cotter, 2019). Visibility on RushTok appears to be stratified based on PNMs' ability to (re)shape their image according to normative ideals of race, gender, and the body. This study therefore adds to emerging scholarship on the role of algorithmic logics as cultural intermediaries that facilitate the production and exchange of social media content (Bourdieu, 1984; Hutchinson, 2021). By focusing on end users' experiences of this "algorithmically-driven micro community" (Rogers, 2021), my study emphasizes the extent to which RushTok algorithmically privileges content based on performances of race, class, and gender (Carah & Dobson, 2016). Future scholarship might follow RushTok content creators to analyze their strategies and experiences with(in) the TikTok algorithm.

My methodology also enabled more attention to the role of platform affordances in users' intra-action with RushTok media and TikTok message exchange (Kaye et al., 2020; Wolfe,

2017). These affordances significantly shaped the research space and practice. My initial methodological plan was to conduct the second round intraviews entirely on TikTok using direct messages (DMs). However, several participants reported issues sending DMs and receiving notifications, which interrupted the flow of the intraview. This seems to underscore Zulli and Zulli's (2020) observation regarding TikTok's orientation toward creative interaction with video content rather than interpersonal interaction with other users. I pivoted to text messaging, but several participants continued to send me DMs throughout the study, requiring my continued attention across research sites. This virtual format enabled me to conduct intraviews from my couch, a shopping mall, and even while on a boat during a family vacation, making the "porosity of public–private-timespace-materialities" of social media more visible (Albin-Clarke, 2021, p. 2). Like Mainsah and Proitz (2019), I felt this porosity required increased affective energy and occasionally made it difficult to establish boundaries between my research and personal life. However, it also helped me think with participants and made their algorithmic navigation of RushTok more visible. I plan to delve further into the entanglements and affordances of this methodology in a future study. This project will contribute to emerging scholarship on digital ethnography and algorithmic media (e.g. Pink, 2022).

This study offers new insights into the role of social media and style-fashion-dress in Panhellenic sorority culture. Following Beaird et al. (2021) and Duran and Garcia (2021), I find that social media presents opportunities for agency in sorority culture but largely (re)produces deeply entrenched values regarding gender, race, and class (DeSantis, 2020; Hughey, 2010). Participants were drawn to RushTok content creators that diverged from normative presentations of the "idealized sorority girl" (Arthur, 1999; Rose, 1985) but the spatial logics of RushTok and Panhellenic sororities continue to privilege enactments of the sorority girl that cohere along these

lines (Ahmed, 2006). Relatedly, I find that sorority style-fashion-dress remains rooted in the traditional, conservative values of WGLOs (Arthur, 1999; Berbary, 2012b). I further untangle how those values map back to hegemonic norms and systemic inequities in these organizations, adding to emerging research that questions the role of these inequities in sorority style-fashion-dress (Boyd, 2022). Participants noted that sorority style-fashion-dress is strangely anachronistic; though it is informed by contemporary trends, they did not feel that it was fashionable, contributing to their perception of the sorority girl as (not) influencer. This suggests that style-fashion-dress practices matter in social media users' perception of fashion influence, a departure from previous work that mostly focuses on influencers' online communication and presentation strategies (e.g. Abidin, 2015, 2016; Marwick, 2015). Future work might explore different socialities to consider fashion influence as an intra-active, localized process. The majority of my research participants are located in the American South, as am I; the research assemblage and findings are therefore shaped by this local context and culture. However, as I discuss throughout the dissertation, RushTok's global, algorithmic mediation of recruitment and sorority style-fashion-dress has privileged these enactments of fashion influence, making them highly influential beyond this context.

Finally, this dissertation also extends fashion studies literature on fashion and identity, specifically related to group membership and belonging. Using posthuman and new materialist theory enabled greater attention to the (im)material forces that shape sorority membership, particularly discursive and spatial arrangements (Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2019). First, the organizational logics of WGLOs and RushTok shape style-fashion-dress practices: becoming-sorority-girl requires PNMs to become-uniform and (re)shape their bodies according to Panhellenic values. They do so by consuming specific clothing brands and styles, but also

through their speech and gesture. This upholds previous literature related to the style-fashion-dress of sub- and microcultural groups (e.g. Thornton, 1997). However, my focus on (im)material forces also elucidates how the location of each PNMs' sorority chapter and university matter in PNMs' enactments of becoming-sorority-girl and becoming-influencer. As the more "extreme" version of these subjectivities gains prominence in RushTok, it tightens the mold and limits the opportunities of those who do not fit. Belonging to a Panhellenic sorority and becoming a RushTok influencer is made (im)possible by the degree to which the physical and virtual spaces associated with sorority culture accommodate your body (Ahmed, 2006). The gender, race, and class norms of these institutions— not just Panhellenic sororities, but higher education, social media, even fashion media—systematically marginalizes, if not outright excludes, people who are not White, wealthy, and cisgendered. (Re)shaping your style-fashion-dress and social media practices can only do so much in the face of these spatial forces. Future studies might follow PNMs through Panhellenic sorority recruitment, particularly PNMs of color, to further explore how style-fashion-dress makes belonging (im)possible. More scholarship is also needed to learn about style-fashion-dress and recruitment practices in multicultural and Historically Black sororities. I hope that this research improves opportunities for current and future sorority members to feel like they belong.

At the time of writing, the future of TikTok is uncertain as it faces a ban from the United States government due to its Chinese ownership (Maheshwari & Holpuch, 2023). Political debates about its ties to China are necessary but obscure larger issues: namely, that the entire social media model has made users into products (Hari, 2023), and that TikTok is not the only social media platform collecting and selling user data (Sayegh, 2022). TikTok also continually struggles to moderate "highly egregious" content (Berthelot, 2023) and misinformation

(Brewster et al., 2022) but not content from marginalized users (Ifeanye, 2022). TikTok may offer visibility and viral fame, and even the potential for activism and social change, but these come at a significant cost: our privacy, security, attention span, and perhaps also our mental health (Detrow, 2023). In the face of these profoundly disturbing problems, RushTok seems innocuous and perhaps even irrelevant: who cares about a bunch of sorority girls talking about their dresses? However, this dissertation underscores TikTok's tendency to reward extreme content (Jennings, 2023). The deep tans and Southern drawls, bright smiles, luxe dorms, and puffy sleeves that swarm RushTok are algorithmically privileged on the platform (Carah & Dobson, 2016), "appealing to our most base impulses and exploiting existing biases toward thinness, whiteness, and wealth" (Jennings, 2021b). While RushTok makes critiques of sorority culture visible, the most viral and profitable content is that which adheres to these hegemonic standards. Those who wish to become influential in this sociality are therefore tacitly encouraged to modify their bodies and content to become-uniform. Banning TikTok will not change these systemic inequities, nor their "imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarch[al]" roots (hooks, 2013); it will not make user data more secure, or address human biases in algorithmic moderation. Given the platform's vast user base and cultural saturation, improved regulatory policies seem like a more reasonable solution (Detrow, 2023). Besides, they can't ban TikTok now: I need to see what happens on the next season of RushTok.

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APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA IRB LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
1785

Tucker Hall, Room 212
310 E. Campus Rd.
Athens, Georgia 30602
TEL 706-542-3199 | FAX 706-542-5638
IRB@uga.edu
http://research.uga.edu/hso/irb/

Human Research Protection Program

NOT HUMAN RESEARCH DETERMINATION

July 8, 2022

Dear Maureen Flint:

On 7/8/2022, the Human Subjects Office reviewed the following submission:

Title of Study:	Following sorority femininities: Making fashion, gender, and race (more) visible on TikTok
Investigator:	Maureen Flint
Co-Investigator:	Maureen Lehto Brewster
IRB ID:	PROJECT00006030
Funding:	None

We have determined that the proposed activity is not designed as research involving human subjects as defined by DHHS and FDA regulations. The activity is designed to explore fashion trends/practices among RushTok users on a social medial platform, TikTok, as well as community visibility and offline impacts for these users.

University of Georgia (UGA) IRB review and approval is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities are research involving human subjects, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination.

Sincerely,

Jessica Lasebikan, HRPP Assistant Director
Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia

APPENDIX B

ROUND 1 INTRAVIEW CONSENT FORM

**UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM**

FOLLOWING SORORITY FEMININITIES: MAKING FASHION, GENDER AND RACE (MORE) VISIBLE ON TIKTOK

Researcher's Statement
We are 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 Investigators: Maureen Lehto Brewster
Department of Textiles, Merchandising & Interiors
University of Georgia
mlbrewster@uga.edu
559-348-7847

Maureen Flint, PhD
Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy
University of Georgia
maureen.flint@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of the research is to explore how people create and interact with RushTok content on TikTok, and how people who engage with this community dress. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are 16+ years old, use TikTok on at least a weekly basis, and have interacted with RushTok content. The information generated in this study will be used for academic research and will be treated confidentially.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will take part in one interview session. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. It will consist of questions related to your social media use; your experiences on TikTok; your interactions with RushTok content; your experiences with sororities and/or Greek life, and how you dress and shop. The researchers can share the list of questions with you before the interview if you like. You can decline to answer any of the interview questions at any time.

We may ask you to use and discuss specific social media platforms during the interview, including creating original social media content, to better understand how you navigate these platforms. You might also be asked to share specific online content via direct message. All social media content will be saved by downloading or taking a screenshot. We may also ask you to share or discuss your clothing and accessories during the interview: these items will be photographed. You can decline to share these items and/or revoke your consent of documentation at any time.

The interview format and scheduling will be chosen by mutual, affirmative consent between you and the researchers. Interviews will take approximately 45-60 minutes and will be completed in one session. Here are the procedures for each type of interview used in this study:

- The interview may be conducted in person. They will take place in a mutually agreed-upon location, and may involve walking. The audio from these interviews will be recorded.
- The interview may also be conducted virtually such as through email, video conferencing (such as Zoom or FaceTime), or phone call. The audio and video of these interviews will be recorded; emails will be saved as a PDF.

Following the interview, you will be contacted by the researcher to complete an exit survey. This survey will provide you the opportunity to opt in to review the transcript generated from our conversation, as well as participate in a follow up interview conducted asynchronously through social media messaging. If you choose to opt into the follow up interview, it will take place over messaging on a social media app of your choosing, and will last between 5-7 days, taking up no more than 60-90 minutes of your time. You are not required to participate in either follow up opportunity, and can opt out of the study at any time.

Risks and discomforts
We do not anticipate any risks or discomfort from participating in this study.

Benefits
We do not anticipate any direct benefits for you from participating in this study. However, your contribution may offer an indirect benefit, as it will advance scholarship on social media and the fashion industry. The findings generated in this study will further and deepen our understanding of how people interact with digital fashion media.

Incentives for participation
You will not receive any incentive for participating in this study.

Audio/Video Recording

Audio recording devices will be used for in-person interviews, and video devices will be used to record virtual interviews. This data is collected for transcription and analysis, and will be destroyed after six years.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview audio/video recorded or not. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

        _____I do not want to have this interview recorded.
        _____I am willing to have this interview recorded.

You may be asked to share social media content, including content that you have created, as part of this interview. Your personal items may also be photographed. Any/all identifying information will be removed from the media prior to sharing or publication. Please provide initials below if you agree to the use of your media in publications, presentations, or other projects related to this research. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to share the media that you provide for this research.

        _____I do not want my media to be used in any way.
        _____I am willing to have my media used in ONLY (circle one): this project OR future projects.
        _____I am willing to have my media used in this and future research projects.

Recordings and transcripts may be used for future research projects, but will not include any direct identifiers (such as your name, social media username, likeness, image, or voice). These projects may include publications related to the research methods used in this study (the interview process); further exploration of the study topic or themes; study population characteristics, or the evolution of RushTok content over time.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview data used for future research projects. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have your data used for future projects.

        _____I do not want this interview data to be used in future research projects.
        _____I am willing to have this interview data used in future research projects.

Privacy/Confidentiality

We will protect your privacy and maintain confidentiality as much as possible throughout the research project. However, some of your data will include identifying information. Your consent form will include your full name, and will remain on file throughout the duration of the research project. You will be assigned a pseudonym after you consent to participate in the study, which will be used for all of your interview data, including notes, recordings, media, and transcripts. Your social media username(s), phone number, and email address may also be collected to conduct a virtual interview, schedule an in-person interview, or share relevant media during

your interview, but only with your affirmative consent. We will not use your social media username(s) or profile image(s) in any research output (such as publications or presentations).

We will maintain a central record for the study, which will include your full name, email, phone number, and social media username. This document will be the only link between your identifiable information and your assigned pseudonym. The central record will remain in a password-protected folder on a password-protected computer. Only the principal investigators listed on this form will have access to the password and files.

Interview recordings may include some identifiable information. They will also be stored in a password-protected folder on a password-protected computer, accessible only by the principal investigators. Please be advised:

- Email interview recordings may include your email address and signature. These will be blurred or removed in any research output.
- Any social media data (such as posts or messages) shared during the interview may include your username and/or profile image. We will blur or remove any identifying information from screen shots of social media content in any research output.

Taking part is voluntary
Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you have questions
The main researchers conducting this study are Maureen Lehto Brewster, a graduate student at the University of Georgia, and Maureen Flint, a professor at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Maureen Brewster at mlbrewster@uga.edu or at 559-348-7847 or Maureen Flint at maureen.flint@uga.edu. 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.

- IRB #: PROJECT00006030
- IRB Approval Date: 7/8/22

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.

_____   _____   _____
Name of Researcher   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Signature   Date

Digital sign:
- I consent to participate in this research.
- I do not consent to participate in this research.

APPENDIX C

ROUND 1 INTRAVIEW GUIDE

Following sorority femininities: Making fashion, gender and race (more) visible on Tiktok
In-person and virtual "intraviews"

Research topic
Style-fashion-dress and sorority culture on RushTok

Research questions
The overarching research question guiding this dissertation is:
- How does style-fashion-dress come to matter in the process of becoming-PNM and becoming-influencer on RushTok?

This is followed by several subquestions, which follow several threads that are woven into the becoming-PNM and becoming-influencer subjectivities. They include:
- How do gender and race come to matter in RushTok users' style-fashion-dress practices?
- How do #RushTok style-fashion-dress practices shift as they move around TikTok?
- How does the local (sorority chapter, region, university, year) context/culture matter in style-fashion-dress practices?
- How do algorithmic logics come to matter in the visibility of gender and race in RushTok?
- How do traditional fashion media discourses map onto RushTok style-fashion-dress and content development practices?

Initial script
- Welcome, _____! Thank you for coming today!
- I'm a PhD student in International Merchandising at the University of Georgia. I'm conducting this non-traditional interview as part of my dissertation research on sorority culture and fashion on TikTok. Today I'd like to learn more about how you use TikTok, specifically related to your experiences following the RushTok community.
- Over the next 45-60 minutes, I will ask you some questions about your experiences on TikTok, engaging with RushTok content, making your own RushTok content (if applicable), and your experiences with sorority culture. Please feel free to take your time answering questions, and to ask questions of me, too!

Optional prompts/topics depending on modality and participant's interests
- I'd like to walk around [space] with you and talk about how you use TikTok when you're here. If you're comfortable, I would also like to discuss how you make/watch videos, and maybe have you talk me through what that process feels like for you.
- I would like to talk about how you dress for rush. More specifically, I would like to see some of the clothes that you're planning to wear during rush, and talk about why you chose them.

- I might ask you to share your screen, or share mine, if some interesting online content comes up.
- If you feel uncomfortable answering a question, you are welcome to pass on the question. If you need a break or would like to stop the interview, please let me know.

If they consent to record
- I am using my phone and/or my laptop to record this interview, and will also take notes occasionally. I will use a pseudonym in the interview transcript to protect your identity.

If they decline to record
- I will not record this interview in accordance with the terms of your consent form, but I will take notes throughout. My notes will use a pseudonym in order to protect your identity.

If they consent to media use:
- Any media shared or generated as part of the interview may be used in this or future publications. I will remove all identifying information from any photographs or screenshots taken as part of the interview.

If they decline media use
- Any media shared or generated as part of the interview will be kept confidential and will not be included in this or future publications, in accordance with the terms of your consent form.

Do you have any questions or concerns about this?
After the interview, I will send you an email with an exit survey. The survey will ask you if you would like to participate in a second interview, which will be conducted on TikTok using direct messages (DMs). It will also ask about whether you would like to keep in touch and review analysis from this interview. Keep an eye out for that email!

Before we get started, do you have any questions or concerns that you'd like to share with me?

Interview Topics/Questions
TikTok
- When did you join TikTok?
- Do you make videos? When was your first post?
- What is 'your algorithm' like?
- How do you feel when you use TikTok?
- Does that change when you use it more or less? When you follow different things?
  - You mentioned _____. Can you elaborate on that?
- What do you like about TikTok?
- Is there anything that you don't like to follow, or actively avoid, when you use TikTok?

Sorority affiliates
- How do you think RushTok has impacted the rush process?
- Why do you think people started making RushTok content?
- How has your chapter/university/etc. responded to RushTok?
- How does RushTok fashion compare to your understanding or experience of sorority dress?
- How did your chapter select work week outfits?
- How did you select your clothes for recruitment? Tell me about your process. Where did you shop, did you look at RushTok videos, etc.

RushTok
- How did you first encounter RushTok? (Or: Can you remind me how you first encountered RushTok?)

Watching RushTok videos
- When I say "RushTok," what kind of video do you think of? Can you send me or tell me about a video that shows what you mean, as an example?
- What kind of RushTok videos do you like most and why?

Making RushTok videos
- How do you dress to make a RushTok video?
- How long does it take to record and publish a typical video?
- When do you tend to make and post your videos? Why?
- How do you prepare to make a video?
- Why did you wear the clothing you chose? Where did you get each item?
- How do you choose a space to record? How do you set up your space to make videos?
- How do you edit your videos? (Music, tags, settings)
- How do people react to your videos?
- Was there a time that you were surprised by a reaction to your video?
- How do you address comments on your videos?
- What is 'RushTok fashion' or 'Rush core'?

Influencers
- Can you send me a post that feels like influencer content to you?
- How does this post make you feel? What about it makes you feel that way?
  - Can you say a little more about _____?
- Tell me about the influencer: what do you know about them?
- How do you know that about them?
  - You mentioned _____. Can you tell me a bit more about that?
- Let's talk about what they're promoting. What stands out to you?
- Why do you think they are promoting this item?
- What does it mean to be an influencer?
  - You said that they _____. Can you tell me a bit more about that?
- What does it mean to be a fashion influencer?
  - You mentioned _____. What does that mean to you? [Or: Can you elaborate?]
- Do you think that people who make RushTok content are influencers? Why/why not? How so?

APPENDIX D

ROUND 2 INTRAVIEW CONSENT FORM

**UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM**

FOLLOWING SORORITY FEMININITIES: MAKING FASHION, GENDER AND RACE (MORE) VISIBLE ON TIKTOK

Researcher's Statement

We are 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 Investigators: Maureen Lehto Brewster
                                             Department of Textiles, Merchandising & Interiors
                                             University of Georgia
                                             mlbrewster@uga.edu
                                             559-348-7847

                                             Maureen Flint, PhD
                                             Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy
                                             University of Georgia
                                             maureen.flint@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research is to explore how people create and interact with RushTok content on TikTok, and how people who engage with this community dress. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an adult (18+) who uses social media on at least a weekly basis and have interacted with RushTok content. The information generated in this study will be used for academic research and will be treated confidentially.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will take part in one virtual interview session. This interview will be completed using direct messages (DMs) on social media and is anticipated to take approximately 60-90 minutes over a period of 5-7 days. The interview will consist of questions related to your social media use; your experiences on TikTok; your interactions with RushTok content; your experiences with sororities and/or Greek life, and how you dress and shop. The researchers can share the list of questions with you before your session if you like. You can decline to answer any of the questions at any time.

We may ask you to use and discuss specific social media platforms during your session, including creating original social media content, to better understand how you navigate these platforms. You might also be asked to share specific online content with the researcher. All social media content will be saved by downloading or taking a screenshot. We may also ask you to share or discuss your clothing and accessories during the interview: any images or items shared will be documented. You can decline to share these items and/or revoke your consent of documentation at any time.

The interview format and scheduling will be chosen by mutual, affirmative consent between you and the researchers. Here are the procedures for each type of interview used in this study:
- You and the researcher will decide which days and times work best for your schedule to conduct the interview. The researcher will contact you via text message or email on each scheduled day at a mutually agreed upon time to let you know that it is time to start the interview.
- The interview will be conducted virtually, via DMs on social media (mostly TikTok, but might include Instagram or Twitter). These interviews will take approximately 60-90 minutes, and will be completed in short sessions over a period of 5-7 days. This will be timed each day to ensure that you do not go over 90 minutes or 7 days, whichever comes first.
- You will be prompted to share and discuss social media content throughout the interview. The researcher will also share media with you.
- Depending on the format, the interview may be recorded via audio, video, downloading or saving media, or by taking screenshots of media or messages from the interview conversation.

Risks and discomforts
We do not anticipate any risks or discomfort from participating in this study.

Benefits
We do not anticipate any direct benefits for you from participating in this study. However, your contribution may offer an indirect benefit, as it will advance scholarship on social media and the fashion industry. The findings generated in this study will further and deepen our understanding of how people interact with digital fashion media.

Incentives for participation
You will not receive any incentive for participating in this study.

Audio/Video Recording
Video devices and/or screen shots may be used to record virtual interviews. The data will be de-identified by blurring your name, profile image(s), and username(s). These recordings will be used for transcription and analysis, and will be destroyed after six years.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview audio/video recorded or not. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

      _____I do not want to have this interview recorded.
      _____I am willing to have this interview recorded.

You may be asked to share social media content, including content that you have created, as part of this interview. Your personal items may also be photographed. Any/all identifying information will be removed from the media prior to sharing or publication. Please provide initials below if you agree to the use of media that you shared or created in publications, presentations, or other projects related to this research. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to share the media that you provide for this research.

      _____I do not want my media to be used in any way.
      _____I am willing to have my media used in this and future research projects.

Recordings and transcripts of your session may be used for future research projects, but will not include any direct identifiers (such as your name, social media username, likeness, image, or voice). These projects may include publications related to the research methods used in this study (the interview process); further exploration of the study topic or themes; study population characteristics, or the evolution of RushTok content over time.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview data used for future research projects. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have your data used for future projects.

      _____I do not want my interview data to be used in future research projects.
      _____I am willing to have this interview data used in future research projects.

Privacy/Confidentiality
We will protect your privacy and maintain confidentiality as much as possible throughout the research project. However, some of your data will include identifying information. Your consent form will include your full name, and will remain on file throughout the duration of the research project. You will be assigned a pseudonym after you consent to participate in the study, which will be used for all of your interview data, including notes, recordings, media, and transcripts. Your social media username(s), phone number, and email address may also be collected to schedule/conduct a virtual interview or share relevant media during your interview, but only with your affirmative consent. We will not use your social media username(s) or profile image(s) in any research output (such as publications or presentations).

We will maintain a central record for the study, which will include your full name, email, phone number, and social media username. This document will be the only link between your identifiable information and your assigned pseudonym. The central record will remain in a password-protected folder on a password-protected computer. Only the principal investigators listed on this form will have access to the password and files.

Interview recordings may include some identifiable information. They will also be stored in a password-protected folder on a password-protected computer, accessible only by the principal investigators. Please be advised:

- Email interview recordings may include your email address and signature. These will be blurred or removed in any research output.
- Any social media data (such as posts or messages) shared during the interview may include your username and/or profile image. We will blur or remove any identifying information from screen shots of social media content in any research output.

Taking part is voluntary
Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you have questions
The main researchers conducting this study are Maureen Lehto Brewster, a graduate student at the University of Georgia, and Maureen Flint, a professor at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Maureen Brewster at mlbrewster@uga.edu or at 559-348-7847 or Maureen Flint at maureen.flint@uga.edu. 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.

- IRB #: PROJECT00006030
- IRB Approval Date: 7/8/22

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. If you are under the age of 18, your parent or guardian must also sign a separate assent form in order for you to participate.

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

Digital sign:

- I consent to participate in this research.
- I do not consent to participate in this research.

APPENDIX E

ROUND 2 INTRAVIEW GUIDE

Following sorority femininities: Making fashion, gender and race (more) visible on Tiktok
Non-Traditional "Intraview": Direct Messaging on TikTok

Research topic
Style-fashion-dress and sorority culture on RushTok

Research questions
The overarching research question guiding this dissertation is:
- How does style-fashion-dress come to matter in the process of becoming-PNM and becoming-influencer on RushTok?

This is followed by several subquestions, which follow several threads that are woven into the becoming-PNM and becoming-influencer subjectivities. They include:
- How do gender and race come to matter in RushTok users' style-fashion-dress practices?
- How do #RushTok style-fashion-dress practices shift as they move around TikTok?
- How does the local (sorority chapter, region, university, year) context/culture matter in style-fashion-dress practices?
- How do algorithmic logics come to matter in the visibility of gender and race in RushTok?
- How do traditional fashion media discourses map onto RushTok style-fashion-dress and content development practices?

Initial message script
- Hi, _____! Thanks for agreeing to participate!
- I'm a PhD student in International Merchandising at the University of Georgia. I'm conducting this non-traditional interview as part of my dissertation research on sorority culture and fashion on TikTok.
- Over the next 5-7 days, we will chat using direct messages (DMs) on TikTok. I'm interested in learning about how you use TikTok, specifically related to your experiences following the RushTok community. When you use the app, I'd like you to send me a post that you find interesting and want to talk about, any time you feel like chatting. I'm happy to chat as often as you would like, but would like to check in at least once a day, every other day. We can talk more often than that if you like, but the total messaging time will not go over 60 minutes. I'll time each session to make sure. Does that sound ok to you?

- If you haven't had time to contact me, or if you feel more comfortable with me starting the DM session, I will DM you at an agreed-upon time to start chatting. What's a good time to reach you?
- Great, thanks! Once we start messaging, I will ask you some questions about your experiences on TikTok, engaging with RushTok content, making your own RushTok content (if applicable), and your experiences with sorority culture. Please feel free to take your time answering questions, and to ask questions of me, too!
- If you're busy and need to pause or reschedule a chat, that's ok; please let me know. If you feel uncomfortable answering a question, you are welcome to pass on the question.
- Last but not least: I'll be using screenshots to record our DM conversations. I'll remove any identifying information (Instagram handle, profile image, name, etc.) in any screenshots taken, and use a pseudonym in my interview notes to protect your identity. Do you have any questions or concerns about this?
- Before we start, I also want to discuss consent. I emailed you a consent form, which offers an overview of the study and why you've been invited to participate. Take whatever time you need to look and think it over. Do you have any questions about the consent form, or about anything else we've just discussed?

Interview Topics/Questions
TikTok
- How do you use TikTok?
- When do you like to use TikTok?
- How do you feel when you use TikTok?
- Does that change when you use it more or less? When you follow different things?
  - You mentioned _____. Can you elaborate on that?
- What do you like about TikTok?
- Is there anything that you don't like to follow, or actively avoid, when you use TikTok?

RushTok
- How did you first encounter the RushTok community?
- How do you feel when you encounter RushTok content?
- What does RushTok fashion look (or feel) like to you?
- What do you like about RushTok?

Making RushTok videos
- How do you dress to make a RushTok video?
- Why did you wear those things?
- How do you choreograph your videos?

Sorority culture
- What were your experiences with sorority culture before you encountered RushTok?
  - Affiliated:
  - Not affiliated:
- How did watching this content change your perception of sorority culture?

Influencers
- What does it mean to be an influencer?
  - You said that they _____. Can you tell me a bit more about that?
- What does it mean to be a fashion influencer?
  - You mentioned _____. What does that mean to you? [Or: Can you elaborate?]

- Can you send me a post that feels like influencer content to you?
- How does this post make you feel? What about it makes you feel that way?
    - Can you say a little more about _____?
- Tell me about the influencer: what do you know about them?
- How do you know that about them?
    - You mentioned _____. Can you tell me a bit more about that?
- Let's talk about what they're promoting. What stands out to you?
- Why do you think they are promoting this item?

APPENDIX F

INTRAVIEW PARENT OR GUARDIAN ASSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
PARENT OR CAREGIVER PERMISSION FORM

FOLLOWING SORORITY FEMININITIES: MAKING FASHION, GENDER AND RACE (MORE) VISIBLE ON TIKTOK

Researcher's Statement

You are being asked to allow your child to take part in a research study. The information in this form will help you decide if you want your child to be in the study. Please ask the researcher(s) below if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

Principal Investigators: Maureen Lehto Brewster
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Purpose of the Study
The purpose of the research is to explore how people create and interact with RushTok content on TikTok, and how people who engage with this community dress. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an adult (18+) who uses social media on at least a weekly basis and have interacted with RushTok content. The information generated in this study will be used for academic research and will be treated confidentially.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will take part in one interview session. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. It will consist of questions related to your social media use; your experiences on TikTok; your interactions with RushTok content; your experiences with sororities and/or Greek life, and how you dress and shop. The researchers can

share the list of questions with you before the interview if you like. You can decline to answer any of the interview questions at any time.

We may ask you to use and discuss specific social media platforms during the interview, including creating original social media content, to better understand how you navigate these platforms. You might also be asked to share specific online content via direct message. All social media content will be saved by downloading or taking a screenshot. We may also ask you to share or discuss your clothing and accessories during the interview: these items will be photographed. You can decline to share these items and/or revoke your consent of documentation at any time.

The interview format and scheduling will be chosen by mutual, affirmative consent between you and the researchers. They will take approximately 45-60 minutes and will be completed in one session. Here are the procedures for each type of interview used in this study:
- The interview may be conducted in person. They will take place in a mutually agreed-upon location, and may involve walking. The audio from these interviews will be recorded.
- The interview may also be conducted virtually such as through email, video conferencing (such as Zoom or FaceTime), or phone call. The audio and video of these interviews will be recorded; emails will be saved as a PDF.

Following the interview, you will be contacted by the researcher to complete an exit survey. This survey will provide you the opportunity to opt in to review the transcript generated from our conversation today, as well as participate in a follow up interview held asynchronously through social media messaging. If you choose to opt into the follow up interview, it will take place over messaging on a social media app of your choosing, and will last between 5-7 days, taking up no more than 60-90 minutes of your time. You are not required to participate in either follow up opportunity, and can opt out of the study at any time.

Risks and discomforts
We do not anticipate any risks or discomfort from participating in this study.

Benefits
We do not anticipate any direct benefits for you from participating in this study. However, your contribution may offer an indirect benefit, as it will advance scholarship on social media and the fashion industry. The findings generated in this study will further and deepen our understanding of how people interact with digital fashion media.

Incentives for participation
You will not receive any incentive for participating in this study.

Audio/Video Recording

Audio recording devices will be used for in-person interviews, and video devices will be used to record virtual interviews. This data is collected for transcription and analysis, and will be destroyed after six years.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview audio/video recorded or not. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

      _____I do not want to have this interview recorded.
      _____I am willing to have this interview recorded.

You may be asked to share social media content, including content that you have created, as part of this interview. Your personal items may also be photographed. Any/all identifying information will be removed from the media prior to sharing or publication. Please provide initials below if you agree to the use of your media in publications, presentations, or other projects related to this research. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to share the media that you provide for this research.

      _____I do not want my media to be used in any way.
      _____I am willing to have my media used in ONLY (circle one): this project OR future projects.
      _____I am willing to have my media used in this and future research projects.

Recordings and transcripts may be used for future research projects, but will not include any direct identifiers (such as your name, social media username, likeness, image, or voice). These projects may include publications related to the research methods used in this study (the interview process); further exploration of the study topic or themes; study population characteristics, or the evolution of RushTok content over time.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview data used for future research projects. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have your data used for future projects.

      _____I do not want this interview data to be used in future research projects.
      _____I am willing to have this interview data used in future research projects.

Privacy/Confidentiality
We will protect your privacy and maintain confidentiality as much as possible throughout the research project. However, some of your data will include identifying information. Your consent form will include your full name, and will remain on file throughout the duration of the research project. You will be assigned a pseudonym after you consent to participate in the study, which will be used for all of your interview data, including notes, recordings, media, and transcripts. Your social media username(s), phone number, and email address may also be collected to conduct a virtual interview, schedule an in-person interview, or share relevant media during

your interview, but only with your affirmative consent. We will not use your social media username(s) or profile image(s) in any research output (such as publications or presentations).

We will maintain a central record for the study, which will include your full name, email, phone number, and social media username. This document will be the only link between your identifiable information and your assigned pseudonym. The central record will remain in a password-protected folder on a password-protected computer. Only the principal investigators listed on this form will have access to the password and files.

Interview recordings may include some identifiable information. They will also be stored in a password-protected folder on a password-protected computer, accessible only by the principal investigators. Please be advised:
- Email interview recordings may include your email address and signature. These will be blurred or removed in any research output.
- Any social media data (such as posts or messages) shared during the interview may include your username and/or profile image. We will blur or remove any identifying information from screen shots of social media content in any research output.

Taking part is voluntary
Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you have questions
The main researchers conducting this study are Maureen Lehto Brewster, a graduate student at the University of Georgia, and Maureen Flint, a professor at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Maureen Brewster at mlbrewster@uga.edu or at 559-348-7847 or Maureen Flint at maureen.flint@uga.edu. 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.

- IRB #: [insert once received]
- IRB Approval Date: [insert once received]

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
If you agree to allow your child to participate in this research study, please sign below.

_____   _____   _____
Name of Researcher   Signature   Date

_____
Name of Child

_____   _____   _____
Name of Parent/Caregiver   Signature   Date

APPENDIX G

MINOR ASSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM

FOLLOWING SORORITY FEMININITIES: MAKING FASHION, GENDER AND RACE (MORE) VISIBLE ON TIKTOK

We are doing a research study to explore how people interact with "RushTok" content on TikTok, and how people who engage with this community dress. We are asking you to be in the study because you use social media at least once a week and have watched or made RushTok content.

About the interview

If you agree to be in the study, you will you will take part in one interview session. We will decide together what kind of interview to do. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. During the interview the researchers will ask you about your social media use; your experiences on TikTok; your interactions with RushTok content; your experiences with sororities and/or Greek life, and how you dress and shop. We can share the list of questions with you before the interview if you like. You can also decline to answer any of the interview questions at any time. Here are the procedures for each type of interview used in this study:

- The interview might be conducted in person. We will decide together where to complete the interview. Please note that it might involve walking. The audio from these interviews will be recorded.

- The interview can also be conducted virtually if you like: through email, video conferencing (such as Zoom or FaceTime), or phone call. The audio and video of these interviews will be recorded, and emails will be saved as a PDF.

- We might ask you to use and talk about TikTok during the interview, including how you make TikTok videos, to better understand how you use social media. You might also be asked to share TikTok content via direct message (DM): we will download and save this content. We may also ask you to share or discuss your clothing and accessories during the interview: these items will be photographed. You can decide not to share these items at any time.

After the interview, we will send you an exit survey. That survey will give you the chance to decide if you want to review the transcript from your interview and/or participate in a second interview, which will be conducted via DMs on TikTok. If you decide to do that interview, it will

take no more than 60-90 minutes over 5-7 days. You don't have to agree to do either follow-up activity to participate in this interview.

You do not have to say "yes" if you don't want to. No one, including your parents, will be mad at you if you say "no" now or if you change your mind later. We have also asked your parent's permission to do this. Even if your parent says "yes," you can still say "no." Remember, you can ask us to stop at any time. Your grades in school will not be affected whether you say "yes" or "no."

Recording

If you agree, we will record your interview and save photographs or media content that is shared during your interview. We will use these recordings to document and analyze the interviews. All materials will be saved for 6 years so that we can use them for this study, and other studies related to this topic. After 6 years all of these materials will be destroyed.

We will use audio devices to record in-person interviews, and video devices to record virtual interviews. If you don't want us to record you, please check the box below. You can still participate in this study even if you don't want your interview recorded.

☐ I do not want to have this interview recorded.
☐ I am willing to have this interview recorded.

You may be asked to share social media content, including content that you have created, as part of this interview. We might also take pictures of your clothes or other personal items. We will make sure that your name or other identifying information is removed from these materials when we share them in our research presentations and writing. Please check the box below to tell us how you want us to use your media. You can still participate in this study even if you don't want to share your media.

☐ I do not want you to use my media in any way.
☐ I am willing to have my media used ONLY for this project but not for any others.
☐ I am willing to have my media used in this and future research projects.

Recordings and transcripts may be used for future research projects, but we will remove your name, social media username, likeness, image, or voice. These projects may include books, articles, or presentations. They might talk about the way that we conducted these interviews or how RushTok changes over time.

Please check the box below to let us know how you want us to use your interview data. You can still participate in this study even if don't want us to use your data for future projects.

☐ I do not want this interview data to be used in future research projects.
☐ I am willing to have this interview data used in future research projects.

Safety and privacy

We will protect your privacy and maintain confidentiality as much as possible throughout the research project. We will not use your name on any papers that we write about this project. We will use a different, made up name so other people cannot tell who you are. This name will be used in all of the notes, files, writing, and other materials related to this study.

We will make a central record for the study, which is the only place where we will use your full, real name, email, phone number, and social media username. It will also be the only place that links this information to the false name that we will use in all of the research materials. We will keep this record in a password-protected folder on a password-protected computer. Only the researchers listed on this form will have access to the password and files.

Here is how we will keep your information safe:
- If we use email for your interview, the recordings might show your real name and email address. We will blur or remove this information in anything we write or share.
- If you share social media posts, videos, or messages during the interview, they might show your username and/or profile image. We will blur or remove this information from anything we write or share.

Contact

You can ask any questions that you have about this study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you can contact Maureen Brewster at mlbrewster@uga.edu or at 559-348-7847 or Maureen Flint at maureen.flint@uga.edu.

Name of Child: _____   **Parental Permission on File:** ☐ Yes   ☐ No

(For Written Assent) **Signing here means that you have read this paper or had it read to you and that you are willing to be in this study. If you don't want to be in the study, don't sign.**

Signature of Child: _____   **Date:** _____

(For Verbal Assent) **Indicate Child's Voluntary Response to Participation:** ☐ Yes   ☐ No

Signature of Researcher: _____   **Date:** _____

APPENDIX H

MY TIKTOK VIDEOS

I used TikTok to make 7 videos throughout my recruitment and data collection process. I plan to continue making videos about my analytical process, and will also share the dress designs from Interlude 4 once they are finished. The below citation provides a link to my TikTok profile to watch my current and future videos related to this project.

Lehto Brewster, M. [@culturescholar]. (n.d.). *Dr. of #RushTok Fashion* [TikTok profile]. Retrieved April 11, 2023, from https://www.tiktok.com/@culturescholar

APPENDIX I

RECRUITMENT FLYERS

The following three flyers were posted on social media and on the University of Georgia campus to recruit research participants.

Call for research participants:
Sorority fashion on TikTok

Are you 16+ years old?

Do you use TikTok weekly?

Are you familiar with #RushTok?

If you answered "yes" to these questions, you are invited to participate in this study!

Eligible participants will complete a 45-60 minute interview about their experiences on RushTok.

Email Maureen at mlbrewster@uga.edu!