4-1-2022

“Being a Chi O to a Fraternity Boy is the Greatest Thing That Could Happen”: Reputation, Heterosocialization, and Status Among Sorority Women

Anne Elizabeth Harrington
Mississippi State University

“Being a Chi O to a Fraternity Boy is the Greatest Thing That Could Happen”:

Reputation, Heterosocialization, and Status Among Sorority Women

By

Anne Elizabeth Harrington

Rachel Allison

Assistant Professor

Department of Sociology

(Director of Thesis)

Diego Thompson

Assistant Professor

Department of Sociology

(Committee Member)

Eric Viver

Associate Professor

Department of English

(Shackouls Honors College Representative)

Honors Thesis submitted to Shackouls Honors College, Mississippi State University, Spring 2022

“Being a Chi O to a Fraternity Boy is the Greatest Thing That Could Happen”: Reputation, Heterosocialization, and Status Among Sorority Women

Abstract

Since their establishment, National Panhellenic Conference sororities have existed to maintain traditional white femininity and womanhood in an age of women’s higher education. A central aspect of this traditional womanhood was marriage, so sororities focused heavily on appealing to and socializing with men, called “heterosocialization.” Drawing on in-depth interviews with 19 women affiliated with 8 National Panhellenic Conference sororities at Mississippi State University, I examine how a woman’s reputation and status – and thus her access to heterosocialization opportunities - in the Greek system is still dependent on her appeal to fraternity men. There is a clear and consistent, but informal, hierarchy that establishes some chapters as “top-tier” and others as the “bottom-tier.” I find that these rankings are based upon the chapter’s reputation, which originates with fraternity men. A reputation that appeals to men – namely “good girl” femininity and physical attractiveness – earns the chapter a spot in the “top-tier.” Findings indicate that heterosocialization remains a major focus of sororities, and women in the top-tier sororities have exclusive access to a network of fraternity men because of the status and reputation that fraternity men have given them. Thus, the Greek system illustrates a microcosm where a woman’s place in the social system is not only determined by how well she appeals to men, but also determines her access to the most valuable resource in the system – men.

Keywords: gender; femininities; status; reputation; class; sororities

Introduction

"They imported Betsy straight from Kansas with her bouncing blonde pony-tail and Sweetheart-of-Sigma-Chi smile" (Plath 1963:6). In Sylvia Plath's 1963 classic book *The Bell Jar*, Betsy is portrayed as a cover girl – a model of white, middle- to upper-class American womanhood in the mid-20th century. Betsy was unsurprisingly defined by her looks – blonde ponytail and smiling. This narrative, though, also points out the role that men play in defining traditional femininity and the American woman. Betsy is said to have a smile that would be associated with a Sweetheart of Sigma Chi – an honorary title given to women by fraternity men. The smile that would have earned her this title is the same smile that earns her a place on the cover of a magazine, suggesting that the quintessential American woman was defined by what appealed to men.

This isn't incredibly surprising in a world where a woman's place was largely dependent on her relationship to men. In the early 1960's, the legal system recognized women as the "weaker sex" and largely allowed men control over a woman's property and financials. A woman had to have her husbands' permission to open a credit card, and single women could be denied a credit card. Employers could explicitly refuse to hire women, and when they did hire women, they could pay them much less because they were assumed to have men as their primary provider. Birth control was all but inaccessible for unmarried women. Many girls had never even seen a woman doctor, police officer, professor, or lawyer, and they were advised to stay within the acceptable range of feminine pursuits, such as a teacher, nurse, secretary, or, the most ideal of all, a homemaker. The world was not built for unmarried women, and it was difficult for a woman to function in society without status given to her by a man (Collins 2014).

Nearly 60 years later, women live in a much different world – a world where their place in society is much more independent from their relationship to a man. Rather than subjecting women to men's controls, the legal system has enacted measures to protect women's rights, such as the Equal Rights Amendment and Title IX. Single and married woman certainly can and do open their own credit cards and manage their own finances and businesses. Young women of all ages have increasing access to numerous methods of birth control. Women have even served in some of the most high-status positions in the country, such as governors, Secretary of State, Speaker of the House, and currently, Vice President. In the modern era of greater women's equality, one would assume that a woman would no longer be defined as having a "Sweetheart-of-Sigma-Chi smile." It seems archaic to suggest that womanhood is defined by how well a woman appeals to men, and, with all the rights and protections that women enjoy, their status in society is surely no longer dependent on how well they meet this definition of womanhood.

The definition of "womanhood" is significant in the context of the heteropatriarchy. The term "heteropatriarchy" describes "social systems in which heterosexuality and patriarchy are perceived as normal and natural, and in which other configurations are perceived as normal, aberrant, and abhorrent" (Arvin et al. 2013:13). Essentially, the social system depends upon these narrow, binary definitions of male and female, and aspects of power are associated with men, particularly white men, such as being strong, capable, and wise. On the other hand, characteristics such as weak, naïve, and incompetent are associated with females. This means that those who exhibit these characteristics – men who appear strong and women who appear weak – benefit within a heteropatriarchy structure. Thus, the definition of womanhood is significant because not only does it exists as a binary contrasted to men, but also in a social system where this power men have is "normal" because the patriarchy is perceived as "normal".

Additionally, heterosexuality is assumed as normal as well, so the definition of womanhood assumes that women are interested in appealed to men (Arvin et al. 2013).

In this study, I investigate men's role in defining modern womanhood by looking at an institution that has historically existed to preserve traditional definitions and social norms of affluent, white, heterosexual womanhood in an age of the diversification of higher education – sororities. White National Panhellenic Conference sororities were popularized in the mid- to late-19th century as they protected this ideal and cultivated the young women's femininity, promoting the idea that these women were still marriageable even if they are in college (Freeman, 2018). A central focus of these sororities was to provide opportunities for women to mingle with men, or "heterosocialize." As termed by Freeman, heterosocialization is social interaction between sorority women and fraternity members (2018). Those women who met the ideal of traditional American femininity and womanhood were rewarded both with status in the Greek system and men as partners, affording them status post-graduation as well.

All of this was to be expected in a time where women's status was largely determined by men, but in a new, post-feminist era of female empowerment, do women still need a "Sweetheart-of-Sigma-Chi smile" to win male-derived status based upon male-derived standards? Based on 19 in-depth interviews with members of eight National Panhellenic Conference sororities at Mississippi State University, I examine whether and how a woman's status in the Greek system is based upon her appeal to men. I find that sororities are ranked in an informal hierarchy according to their reputation – reputations that are determined by fraternity men based upon the sorority woman's heterosexual appeal. In order to win men's approval, white women still must conform to the standards of traditional, heterosexual femininity. The idea that these sorority women are smart, pretty, "good girls" may appear to be progress in women's

empowerment, but my findings reflect instead traditional femininity that has been repackaged into standards that are "acceptable" in the modern age of feminism. These aren't necessarily negative attributes, but they become negative when they become a metric by which men rank women – an unrealistic standard that women have to reach in order to be deemed valuable by men. A woman's place in the Greek system is not only determined by how well she appeals to men, but also determines her access to the most valuable resource in the system – men.

Literature

Reputation and Sorority Ranking

Reputation is a building block of the Greek system, so it is essential to first understand its function in order to understand other aspects of the system. Across literature regarding Greek life, there is consistent reference to an informal hierarchy within which houses are ranked. The rankings are referred to in several different ways, such as "high-status houses," "lower-tier sororities," or simply "top houses," but the same conclusion is evident - some houses are considered "better" than other houses (Hess 2006, Ispa-Landa 2020, Kilanski 2017, Krendle 2011, DeSantis 2007). Additionally, within a given campus, there doesn't seem to be much debate about the reputation of each house and rankings are surprisingly consistent no matter who the account comes from (DeSantis 2007, Ispa-Landa 2020). Ranking, though, isn't necessarily consistent for the same chapter across different universities, so while the structure of high-, middle-, and bottom-tier sororities stays consistent, the chapters that inhabit the rankings vary by university (Hess 2006). This means that the same sorority can have a top-tier chapter at one university and a bottom-tier chapter at a different university, even though the chapters are part of the same national sorority. Essentially, this suggests that reputation plays a major role in ranking

because reputation is one of the major things that does change between different chapters of the same sorority.

Reputation, though, does not instantaneously appear, and it is almost certainly something either negative or positive. Reputation is an evolutionary concept, and it plays a major role in human cooperation. In recent model, information is spread about individuals who have contributed to the group in the past and based on that information. When that information – their reputation - suggests that they have contributed, they are awarded with benefits (Hess 2006). In this sense, I argue that individuals within the Greek system receive this reputation based on how they contribute to the system. The Greek system existed, as previously established, under the heteropatriarchy, so members who contribute well to this system by being marriageable and embracing standards of a patriarchal and gender binary systems and the standards that the system impose are seen as having a good reputation because they are cooperating with the group. In this sense, individuals' reputations inform the reputations of the house – so an individual's reputation affects their acceptance into a specific house. Reputations can change, as evidenced by the idea that the same sorority can have different reputations at different schools, but in order to change the group reputation, I suggest that individuals within the group would have to establish a pattern of cooperating with the heteropatriarchy.

The next logical step is to determine where these reputations begin and what determines a "good" or "bad" reputation, ultimately leading to a better understanding of why some houses are considered top-tier and why some are not in this gendered and racialized social context. At its core, reputation is related to access to resources, and in this case, the resource is – and has historically been - men (Hess 2006, Ispa-Landa 2020, Kilanski 2017). As aforementioned, this study focuses on white National Panhellenic Conference sororities, and the idea of men,

especially white men, as a resource is unique to white sororities in a heteropatriarchy where white men represent power and a woman's fulfillment of heterosexual norms (Berkowitz 1999, Arvin et al., 2013).

College enrollment for women was increasing in the early 20th century, and there was public concern over white women no longer meeting the traditional, heteronormative expectations for women to be good housewives and mothers (Freeman 2018). The National Panhellenic Conference sororities that began to grow at colleges and universities claimed to prepare their members for this traditional womanhood in the college environment. This means that the activities that the women participated in often revolved around femininity and preparing them to be homemakers (Freeman 2018). The underlying assumption was that these women were expected to be married, which meant that perhaps the most important activity was for these sorority women to socialize with men, specifically fraternity men, a concept which Margaret Freeman terms "heterosocializing" (2018).

Heterosocializing was directly related to reputation. It wasn't enough to simply instruct individual women on how to interact with men, but they had to increase the overall image of their sorority in order to appeal to them (Freeman 2018). It may seem like a dated idea that a good reputation is rooted in being attractive to men, but sorority chapters are still ranked according to their appeal to men (Ispa-Landa 2020). One sorority woman even called the ranking system "patriarchal," implying that it is, in fact, controlled by men (Ispa-Landa 2020). Fraternities control the social scene and thus the social hierarchy on campus, which means the way that they categorize women "directly influences female's status in the social hierarchy" – again suggesting the overarching influence of the heteropatriarchy (Harris and Schmalz 2016:1227, Arvin et al., 2013).

Institutionally, women's power in the Greek social scene is limited. Per the National Panhellenic Conference's regulation, sororities are not allowed to host parties with alcohol in Greek houses. However, fraternities not do not have these same regulations, hence the popularity of fraternity parties (DeSantis 2007, Ispa-Landa 2020). In fact, Harris and Schmalz refer to fraternity parties as a "focal point of weekend campus activities" (2016:1228), emphasizing just how important these parties are socially. At these parties, women are guests on men's territory, which means that not only do men control most aspect of the party, but they also have power over which women are allowed to attend (Ispa-Landa 2020, Harris and Schmalz 2016). This suggests that women must appeal to men in order to be invited to these parties – meaning that men have the power in determining a women's access to heterosocialization. Thus, it is evident that not only is a woman's position in the hierarchy determined by her appeal to men, but it also determines her access to men. Reputation determines the status of a house, and thus the members, because it directly affects the way that men view the house and thus the status position that they have in the hierarchy.

Exclusivity

Exclusivity is another major component of the Greek system. The basic appeal of Greek life is that it creates a "special" social network for a limited group of people that actively excludes others (Armstrong 2013). The fact that sororities are exclusive implies that there must be some metric by which to decide who is accepted and who is not, and that metric is familiar: her appeal to men (Hess 2006). To be clear, this is not at all explicit, because, as aforementioned, the idea of appealing to men is outdated. In the early 20th century, it was acceptable to explicitly instruct sorority women on how to be attractive to "desirable" fraternity men, but that is no

longer the case (Freeman 2018). In fact, women who want to be members of sororities, especially top-tier sororities, now must downplay their interest in the many heterosocializing opportunities that Greek life offers (Ispa-Landa 2020). It seems that appealing to men has been rebranded as a "new cultural ideal for race- and class-privileged femininity—that of the outspoken, driven, career- committed woman who downplays her own interest and investment in appealing to elite men" (Ispa-Landa 2020:905).

It is overwhelmingly evident across the literature that physical attractiveness is the key to becoming a member of top-tier sorority (Hess 2022, Ispa-Landa 2020, Kilanski 2017, Krendl 2011, Risman 1982, Freeman 2018). As aforementioned, reputation regulates access to resources – in this case, primarily men (Hess 2006). During the sorority recruitment process, women are essentially evaluated on how they will affect the sorority's reputation, and a large part of this is physical attractiveness (Hess 2022). Physical attractiveness is somewhat subjective, but Ispa-Landa refers to the type of appearance that is considered physically attractive in this system as "white, class-privileged beauty" (2020:904) Key aspects of this kind of beauty include being blonde, tall, and thin (Ispa-Landa 2020, Risman 1982, DeSantis 2007) as well as having fashionable and name brand clothing (Ispa-Landa 2020).

The stereotype that sorority girls are pretty is often considered superficial, but physical attractiveness indicates exactly what the word suggests – they attract men – and that means they have a direct advantage in accessing the most valuable resource in this system. The deeper significance of physical attractiveness is that it serves as an indicator that a woman has access to resources. Resources can be material, such as food, water, or status symbols, like certain types of clothing, but also more abstract forms of capital, such as beauty and dress techniques, fertility indicators, cultural capital, and charm (Hess 2006). Thus, top-tier sororities are exclusive to

women who are physically attractive or have some other indicator that they have access to resources because their status quite literally depends on the reputation they are given by men.

Heterosocializing and Status

Heterosocialization remains a primary aim of sororities because of the power that fraternity men have in controlling the social structure and thus a woman's status. Fraternity men largely control the social scene, so they get to decide which women have access to high-status men by deciding who has access to a major heterosocializing event – parties. Again, women's power is institutionally limited by rules around hosting their own parties in Greek housing, so if they want to engage in the social scene, they must try to secure invitations from fraternity men. Often, whether a woman is invited into a party or not depends upon her sorority affiliation (DeSantis 2007, Ispa-Landa 2020, Harris and Schmalz 2016). Parties serve as an important link between heterosocialization and status because status determines a woman's heterosocialization opportunities. Due to their exclusivity, being invited to these events is considered high status (Harris and Schmalz 2016). When a fraternity man grants a woman entrance to the party, usually based upon her reputation of appealing to men, he is essentially deeming her high status enough to socialize with the men at the party. Thus, women's heterosocialization opportunities are determines primarily by male-determined status. Further, a hierarchy also exists within the fraternity system, with top tier chapters having more high-status, "elite" men and lower-tier chapters that have less status. Thus, not all heterosocialization opportunities are equal, and mingling with higher status "elite" men is more influential in increasing a woman's status in the social system (Kilanski 2017).

As aforementioned, since their early days, these white National Panhellenic Conference sororities have focused on helping women attract these "desirable" fraternity men. These women were in college, but school didn't take priority nor did their academic performance define their worth – men did. A 1961 sorority guidebook explicitly emphasized that "dating is one of the concerns uppermost in every girl's mind," with many guides suggesting that dating was a virtually mandatory part of these women's college experience (Freeman 2018). Traditionally, white women were socialized to correlate finding a man with financial security, so securing a husband was a major accomplishment. It is no surprise, then, that sororities center most of their social events around interactions with men and celebrate relationship milestones for women such as engagement (Berkowitz 1999).

There has been research that explores the informal hierarchy that exists within the Greek system as well as the idea that it is based upon women's appeal to men. In my analysis, though, I consider how a woman's position in this hierarchy directly affects her access to a network of men. I explore how the function of sororities has essentially remained the same as its original intent – to preserve traditional white, heterosexual, middle- to upper-class womanhood and prepare women to be good wives and mothers. It is clear in previous literature that a woman's place in the hierarchy is determined by how well she appeals to men, but my analysis extends this to explore why it is so important, which is that it determines their heterosocialization prospects and thus their access to the most valuable resource in the system – men. Specifically, I will address the following research questions in the context of sorority life at Mississippi State University:

1) What kind of reputation appeals to men?
2) How does a sorority woman's reputation affect her status within the hierarchy?

3) How does a sorority woman's status affect her heterosocialization opportunities?

Methods and Positionality

There 8 National Panhellenic Conference Sororities on Mississippi State Universities Campus as well as 17 Inter-Fraternity Council fraternities. There groups are both primarily white. There are also 9 National Panhellenic Council historically Black Greek-letter organizations. In this analysis, I focus on the National Panhellenic Conference Sororities and the Inter-Fraternity Council fraternities when I refer to the "Greek system" because they operate in a different system than the National Panhellenic Council as well as my focus on how white women operate within the white male-dominated heteropatriarchy. However, it would be valuable to extend further studies to the National Panhellenic Council and analyze historical black Greek organizations in the context of the heteropatriarchy.

Additionally, I want to provide context for my positionality in the Greek system and at Mississippi State University. I have attended Mississippi State University for the past four years and will graduate in the summer of 2022. I also was previously a member of a National Panhellenic Conference sorority during my freshman and sophomore years. Participating in the Greek system as a white women and attending heterosocialization events played a role in the development of this research topic. Because I am familiar with the system, I was able to take a more deductive approach and use my own experiences to motivate my hypothesis and research questions and narrow my focus during the early stages of development. However, when I began my analysis of the data and developed my findings, I was intentional about separating my own experiences from the data. I went in with as much of a blank slate as possible and tried to establish these reputations purely based upon what these women said rather than my own

experiences as former sorority member and Mississippi State University student. Of course, it is impossible to completely ignore my own experiences, but I was careful not to let preconceived notions affect my analysis but rather let my familiarity with the system help me draw deeper conclusions because I understand the nuances of Greek life.

Data for this analysis were accessed through an existing dataset created by a Sociology faculty member and senior undergraduate honors Sociology student. They conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 19 women who were members of the 8 National Panhellenic Conference Sororities at Mississippi State University, as well as a Greek Life university administrator. The student was trained in interviewing methods, received IRB approval, and conducted 8 of these interviews during the fall semester of 2018. The faculty member conducted 11 of these interviews during the same time period and interviewed the administrator in January of 2019. These interviews were broadly focused on why these women joined sororities and the impact sororities had on their college experience, including a specific focus on the recruitment process after realizing how significant it was to these women. The sample size was determined by a range of factors including depth of data and data saturation. Additionally, at least one woman was included from each of the 8 National Panhellenic Conference sororities at Mississippi State University. Data saturation was achieved quickly due to the similarities within the group in factors such as class, age, race, and educational standing. Participants were cisgender women between the ages of 18 and 21. All participants except for one, who identified and white and Native American, were white. Participants also had a range of majors, encompassing areas of study from biochemistry to child development to accounting. To keep the identity of the participants confidential, all names of participants presented here are pseudonyms.

Participants were recruited through both snowball sampling and through emails sent by faculty members to various humanities and social science classes. Participants were also incentivized through by being entered into a raffle for 5 $10 Visa gift cards that took place after the data was collected. Interviews were conducted in private or semi-private locations such as faculty offices or study rooms in the library on campus. Interviews were loosely structured based on a collaboratively developed guide. This guide included questions about the participant's family and high school background, their motivations for joining a sorority, their experiences in the Greek system, sorority activities, benefits and challenges of being in a sorority, their relationships with other members, and their plans for the future. The guide was also revised as the researchers learned about what participants thought was significant. The interview guide for the administrator was developed by the faculty member based on what the sorority women said in their interviews. The research focus had also evolved to the recruitment process, so this interview concentrated on the university's role in Rush week and the interviewee's role in the process and experiences as an administrator.

I accessed the transcripts of these interviews with permission and uploaded them into MAXQDA2020 software for analysis. I used Deterding and Waters' (2021) "flexible" method of data analysis that combines deductive and inductive approaches. I began with a specific focus on status and networking within the system but also employed an inductive approach by focusing on the participants' subjective experiences, discovering their focus on the topic of dating. Deterding and Waters (2021) suggest first creating an index corresponding to the primary topics of the interview guide which I revised according to my own research focus in the first step of my coding process. I used a "lumper" coding method to apply these index codes to all the data, organizing it for later, more detailed round of coding (Saldaña 2013). In my second phase of

analysis, I identified the index codes that were most relevant to my research questions and constructed and applied even more descriptive and narrow codes within the index codes. At this point I also wrote memos within these categories detailing relationships between codes, reflecting on the potential answers to my research questions, and identifying larger patterns. Below, I have used this narrative and specific points of data from this study to develop the findings that answer my research questions.

Results

An Overview of the Sorority Hierarchy at Mississippi State University

As the previous literature on sororities suggests, reports of house reputation and rankings are surprisingly consistent no matter the interviewee and her own house affiliation (Hess 2006, Ispa-Landa 2020, Kilanski 2017, Risman 1982). This suggests that reputation and ranking are pretty frequently discussed and thus at least somewhat significant in the system. When asked about house reputation, 18 out of the 19 women gave a response indicating that there are sororities that have good reputation and those that do not, and they were overwhelmingly consistent in their rankings. A few women gave more vague generalities without disclosing house names, but most were open about which house fell where in the rankings, so I will begin with a brief description of the hierarchy of the 8 houses as described by these girls.

As previously mentioned, this analysis focuses on the primarily white, National Panhellenic Conference Sororoties and does not include the historically black Greek organizations on Mississippi State University's campus. It was overwhelmingly clear that Chi Omega (Chi O) was the "top house" (Daphne, Tri Delt) and "known as being the best" (Cassie, Zeta). They also had a very strong reputation of being "smart" (Daphne, Tri Delt; Melissa, ADPi;

Kim, Phi Mu; Gabrielle, DG) and "good girls" (Christine, Chi O). Kappa Delta (KD), was also described as a "top house" (Daphne, Tri Delt) though not discussed nearly as often as Chi O. KD was called a "pretty girls' sorority" (Amelia, ADPI) and the girls were also described as "athletic" (Melissa, ADPI; Piper, Pi Phi; Daphne, Tri Delt) Phi Mu also had a reputation of being a "pretty house" (Cassie, Zeta) and was often grouped with KD. Nicole, an ADPi, commented that "everybody here wants to be either a Phi Mu or a KD because they look really good on Instagram," suggesting that appearance may play a role in these sororities' placement in the top-tier. These three sororities seemed to make up the "top tier," though Chi O had a distinct place as the very top house.

There was then a middle tier of three sororities that didn't seem to have distinctly "good" or "bad" reputations, or even reputations at all. Delta Gamma (DG) and Tri Delta (Tri Delt) appeared to have the most neutral reputation of them all. There were very few comments about DG and Tri Delt, and those that were made were generally short and vague statements that didn't establish a clear reputation. Gabrielle, a DG, gave the description of "average," placing them again in a neutral category. She said, "And then Tri Delt, I feel like everybody's like, "They're average."" Pi Phi was also in this middle category, though they did have a more established reputation as "chill girls" (Christine, Chi O). When asked about the reputation of her sorority, Piper, a Pi Phi, described what others think as, "Y'all are just there, y'all are cool, y'all don't do anything wrong." In this study, I will not go into further depth regarding this middle category primarily due to the fact that they were not mentioned frequently enough to draw substantial findings.

Zeta Tau Alpha (Zeta) was consistently reported by these women to be "the party house" (Melissa, ADPI) and the women is the sorority were known for "getting around with guys"

(Kim, Phi Mu). The reputation of partying was not a positive one, as Cassie, a Zeta, reported that she was "unhappy" when she learned that her sorority had a reputation for partying. Finally, Alpha Delta Pi (ADPi) was clearly the lowest-ranked house, as they "didn't have the greatest reputation in the world" (Katie, ADPi). In the words of Christine, a Chi O, "AD Pi is like the irrelevant. You're there, but are you?" It was also mentioned that they were "not the prettiest girls on the row" (Amelia, ADPI), a contrast to the top-tier houses. These two sororities made up the reported bottom-tier of the hierarchy. The comments, however, were not all negative. ADPi was also reported to be "genuine" (Laura, ADPI; Melissa, ADPI; Laura, ADPI) and a "strong sisterhood" (Melissa, ADPI) The women also tended to follow-up after sharing these negative reputations with some sort of disclaimer that this was just the reputation that they commonly heard and that it was not necessarily true nor did they always believe it, maybe even mentioning friends they had in these sororities.

The Top Tier

The houses in the top-tier had a good reputation, but what does a "good" reputation mean in the context of sororities – and who decides this definition of "good"? In a somewhat obvious way, a "good" reputation is about being "good." Sage said that the reputation of Chi O, her sorority, was "good girls that have good morals and values and have good grades." Christine, another Chi O, said that they were known as "goody-two shoes." Women repeatedly pointed out that Chi O has the highest GPA of all the sororities and that they were known for being "the good sorority." The form of femininity that Chi O has established as their reputation is the kind that appeals under the heteropatriarchy – being a "good girl."

Sage, a Chi O, said, “One of our things is like to be womanly always, so like just to always be like well-rounded and just kind of like show yourself in a good way and you know, don't ever kind of let yourself be a bad image of Chi O.” Later, after talking about how some other sororities are known for partying, Sage said, “Not saying that Chi Os don’t do it, just we don’t put that on social media, we don’t put that out there, we don’t want that to be our reputation.” This concept of being a "good girl" is constructed against the idea of what is considered “bad” – being a “party girl.” In this sense, being "good" means not drinking excessively or appearing to be out of control or "too" sexually available.

Christine, another Chi O, echoed Sage in the importance of maintaining this image of being womanly. She said, “People know that you're a member of Chi O and so you want to present the best possible version of that when you go just because we don’t want people thinking we’re a bunch of party girls that don't care about education.” Sage and Christine made it clear here that being womanly isn’t necessarily about *being* good, but about *appearing* good, so it makes sense that controlling their reputation is so important to these top-tier sororities. In fact, Sage went on to talk about how strict Chi O is in their rules and standards. She said, “I know as Chi Os, if we are holding a cup in a Snapchat story, we get in trouble. Like we’ll have a meeting and they’ll be like that is unbecoming of Chi Omega, like you can’t do that.”

Recalling Freeman’s work on the history of white sororities, their original intent was to “help women develop the habits and characteristics of white, middle-class womanhood, which required that they maintain a feminine appearance and aspire to be good housewives and nurturing mothers for the next generation” (Freeman 2018:115). Chi O’s “good girl” femininity and “womanly always” reputation nearly perfectly reflect this goal. Members are held to a high standard to maintain the image of what a modern man wants in a wife – smart, good morals and

values, well-rounded, and womanly always. Claudia said that Chi Os are "the perfect cookie cutter girls," implying that they fit this mold of what a traditional woman should be. Piper, a Pi Phi, summed it up well: "They're considered the wife material." The fact that the top sorority had the reputation of being "wife material," aligned with their deeply gendered and traditional reputation, is an indicator that sorority hierarchy is rooted in appeal to men and access to status and resources in the heteropatriarchy.

KD was sometimes grouped together with Chi O in their reputation, as they were also regarded as top tier. Daphne, a Tri Delt, said, "I think people would think the top houses were KD and Chi O." After talking about the idea of Chi O being "womanly always," Sage also noted that KD had a similar reputation. She pointed out, "I think the KDs are very ladylike, I think KD's are very similar to us, have good morals and stuff, very big on grades and don't have a bad reputation or anything." Thus, another sorority at the top of the hierarchy has these characteristics that have been previously established as those that attract men - "wife material."

The aspect of KD's reputation that stood out most, however, was the women's physical appearance. Consistent across previous literature is the idea that physical attractiveness is a key feature of these top sororities (Hess 2022, Ispa-Landa 2020, Kilanski 2017, Krendl 2011, Risman 1982, Freeman 2018). As Hess suggested, attractiveness indicates status and access to resources, and these attracts men (2006). Additionally, attractiveness within the Greek system is based upon racialized and classed standards, consistent with the idea that attractiveness indicates access to resources and capitol (Ispa-Landa 2020). The hierarchy is determined by these men, so a key aspect of where a sorority fall is whether they have "pretty girls." Amelia, an ADPi, discussed how difficult it was for her lower-tier sorority to compete with top-tier sororities that had this reputation of attractiveness. She said, "We were competing with the big houses. Girls came there

on Pref [Preference Night during Rush] and were between ADPI and KD, which is a really pretty girls' sorority and stuff like that." Amelia suggested that KD having pretty girls was the reason that potential members would choose KD over ADPi, again emphasizing just how important appearance is for reputation and ranking.

In fact, the most notable reputations for both KD and Phi Mu both seemed to be their appearances, and they were often grouped together in those. Nicole, an ADPi, also echoed this idea that potential members want to be part of these top houses because of how they look. Referring to her earlier quote, she brough up how they "look really good on Instagram." Social media makes it easy for the attractiveness of a sororities' members to be quickly accessed and assessed with a quick scroll through an Instagram page. But what, specifically, is considered "pretty" in the context of sororities? ADPI member Amelia put it simply: "KD and Phi Mu were the skinny blonde girls." Comments about Phi Mu's reputation specifically consistently focused on this definition of attractiveness for a sorority girl. Cassie, a Zeta, said, "And then Phi Mu, they're known as being a pretty house, they have all the blondes." Gabrielle, a DG, summed up her comments about Phi Mu as "Blondes, basically." Melissa, an ADPi, said, "I don't think I know anything about Phi Mu except that they like wearing pink". Thus, the reputation of being "pretty" for these women was based upon definitions of white, affluent femininity – skinny, blonde, and dressed in pink.

The Bottom-Tier

ADPi's reputation is a strong indicator that there is link between status and exclusivity. There was a consistent idea that they "take everyone" (Piper, Pi Phi) – that anyone who wants to be a member of ADPi is accepted. Melissa, an ADPi herself, said, "Since we were first on

campus no one really wanted to be at ADPi because you were like, 'That's the new one. They're just looking for members, they're not selective. They're just trying to grow.'" Because exclusivity is the foundation of the Greek system, these women made it clear that having a reputation of accepting everyone is the worst reputation a sorority could have. That reputation affects how the women in the sorority are seen as well. Piper, a Pi Phi, matter-of-factly termed members of ADPi "the leftovers" – and made it clear that any other reputation is better than that. She said, "I did not, for the life of me, want to be labeled the leftovers. I would take zits, tits, and ass or anything over that any day." Earlier, Piper had summarized the reputation of Zeta as "zits, tits, and ass, because it's Z-T-A." Zeta, which I will discuss more in-depth in the following paragraphs, has a reputation for partying and being overly sexual, and Piper made it clear here that that reputation is better than being in a sorority without exclusivity. Mara, a KD, emphasized this idea when she pointed out that "Nobody really wants to be a sorority that takes everybody." The value of exclusivity emphasized here suggests that the system is deeply rooted in one's level of status.

ADPi has less control over their reputation primarily because they are not able to be as exclusive as other chapters. It is evident from my earlier analysis of the top houses that there are certain characteristics that are desired and celebrated by the Greek system, such as physical attractiveness, traditional femininity, and being a "good girl." Again, the attractiveness of the members is important for reputation, and ADPi is not able to select members that meet the traditional expectations of beauty in the Greek system. Amelia, an ADPi, talked about her sorority "having that stigma of some girls just really don't want to be with us because we're not the prettiest girls on the row and stuff like that." This is indicative of a circular relationship between a chapter's reputation and its membership. A chapter's reputation affects who it is able

to attract during Rush, and then its membership solidifies its reputation. In this case, ADPi has members who do not meet the traditional standards of beauty, so they are not able to attract conventionally attractive women, which means that their membership continues to be "less attractive". Piper echoed this importance of how the members look, saying, "This will sound really stereotypical, but the girls are little sketchy. To me, they don't look put together." Earlier, Chi O was called the "perfect cookie cutter girls," and those who don't fit this mold of the ideal sorority girl are the "leftovers." They are deemed "weird" and only able to join these lower-tier sororities as a result. Kim, a Phi Mu, said that "everyone says they're just weird girls." The very idea that they are bottom tier isn't just an idea, but it is verbalized. Katie, an ADPI, said, "I don't know, people just, you know, like, 'You're lower tier. You're a bottom-tier sorority.'"

Nearly every description of Zeta's reputation given included some mention of partying. Melissa, an ADPi, said that Zeta is known as the "party house." In fact, the reputation is so strong that it may be a reason that potential members choose to be part of Zeta. Nicole, an ADPi, said, "If you wanted to be party girls you go with Zeta." Christine, a Chi O, said that they were known as "redneck party crazy." Girls that are members of Zeta do recognize not only that partying is their reputation, but they also suggest that it reflects negatively upon them. Cassie, a Zeta, said that her sorority is known as the "party sorority." Cassie mentioned earlier during the interview that she was unhappy at first that Zeta was the sorority she was left with at the end of the recruitment process. When she was later asked whether her sorority was known for partying, she said, "Yes, and that's why I was so unhappy at first." Cassie implied here that she knew even as a new member that the reputation of her sorority was important and she knew that a reputation for partying wasn't a good thing. Claudia, another Zeta, plainly said that members of her sorority are "huge partiers" and don't care about their grades. She then added a disclaimer, saying, "So,

we do have that reputation and it's just like we're working on it." Being known for partying, then, isn't something that these girls are celebrating, but rather it is something that they see as a problem that needs to be fixed.

Amelia, an ADPi, said, "The Zeta Tau Alphas, they're pretty but party a lot." In this phrase, she suggests that partying devalues a sorority, but why is that? Partying is seen as negative because it communicates qualities disliked by men such as excessive sexual availability - the opposite of a "good girl". Gabrielle, a DG, spoke of her friendships with members of Zeta, , but followed it up by mentioning, "But a lot of people will be like, 'Oh, they're sluts.'" Again, partying is related to sexual promiscuity. Referring to Piper's earlier reference to Zeta as "zits, tits, and ass, because it's Z-T-A", these women are again clearly sexualized by men. It's not Zeta members who call themselves this or even other sorority women, but rather it is a phrase that women have heard from men. The use of this saying by men to categorize women in this sorority is evidence of men's power in ranking women's chapters.

Reputation vs. Reality

However, "partying" isn't a simple reputation. There are distinct ways to party in the Greek system that have varying degrees of acceptance as well as how the sorority manages partying. Piper, a Pi Phi, spoke about how ADPI's are known as partiers. She went on, though, to say that even though Zeta parties as well, they have a better reputation because of the way that they party. She said, "And then Zeta's, they party, too. But I feel I don't know a lot of Zeta's that well, so I feel like they're more classier about their partying [than ADPI], same for Tri Delt's." Thus, there's a way to party that's "classy" – still fulfilling the expectations of these women to be "ladylike" or "womanly." In fact, every sorority parties, and it is primarily the way that they

manage how it affects their reputation that differs. Daphne, a Tri Delt, said that "every sorority has their party girls. It's just that some are better hiding it then the other ones are."

Participants report that top sororities have girls that engage in the same behavior that the lower tier sororities do, but it is perceived and managed differently. Chi O is "known for being the not crazy sorority" according to Christine, a Chi O. However, Cassie, a Zeta, told a different story, suggesting that reputation is not reality. She said, "The thing with Chi O is they're the best, but whenever they have parties it's just embarrassing because like one year, because their house is right next to ours, after their formal, their President has to go through with a hose because everyone's throwing up all over the place, all over their sidewalk and we don't do that but we're the party sorority." Sage, a Chi O, confirmed that women in her sorority do party, but that "Chi O is just stricter because like I told you, we're known as the good sorority." She claimed that other sororities are labeled as "partiers" because they don't "get in trouble for it". She gave the example that a Phi Mu wouldn't be punished for having alcohol in their hand in a social media post while a Chi O would.

These women were directly asked to share their perceptions of the reputations of the sororities, and many were quick to make it clear that these were not their own opinions. After sharing a negative reputation, especially, the women were quick to add disclaimers like "which I think is stupid" (Amelia, ADPI) or "that's what people say" (Kim, Phi Mu). Some of the reputations are rooted in truth simply because of how the Greek system operates. The women in the top-tier houses are able to be more selective with the women that they recruit, so the idea that some houses have differently levels of exclusivity is true. This also means that the top-tier houses may in fact have more traditionally attractive women or women who perform better academically because they have greater ability to choose. However, all of the sororities have

traditionally attractive women and women who perform well academically just as all of the sororities have women who attend parties frequently or even drink too much at these parties. Reese, a KD, said, "So yes, I think that there are those stereotypes, but I choose not to believe them because I'm just like, 'That's dumb.' There are so many different types of girls in every sorority."

The women often mentioned that they have friends in other chapters and that the stereotypes don't affect their friendship choices. Essentially, there is an aspect of sisterhood even between women of different houses. Melissa, an ADPi, commented that the only time she really hears other women talk about reputation is during competitions, such as Derby Days or Limelight, which are dance competitions, or intramural sports where chapters play each other, but that it doesn't affect their friendships. She said, "But, otherwise, we're not, 'Oh, I don't want to be friends with her because she's in Zeta and she parties a lot.' Like, no." Amelia, also an ADPi, mentioned that she knows her sorority has a "weird reputation," but that she never feels like other sorority women judge her for it. In fact, she suggested that there is a sisterhood that exists across all sororities in the Greek system, not just separately within each house. She said, "They don't care I'm in ADPI. We're Pan-Hellenic sisters even if we're not sorority sisters, but in the outside world they bring the judgment to us." She suggested that the judgment based on reputation is something that happens outside of other sorority women.

Reputation Matters to White Fraternity Men

If women generally do not care about or believe in the salience of sorority reputations, these reputations must originate from another source and for a different audience. Gossip is not something that would generally be associated with fraternity men, but these women report that

the reputations not only primarily originate with men, but also that the men care about them and use them to judge how they associate with women from different sororities. When I talk about men in this analysis, I am referring to white fraternity men who are members of the primarily white Inter-Fraternity Council organizations. These fraternity men are characterized as "elite" men because they may have more symbolic and structural privileges in the system of power that characterizes heteropatriarchy, gender roles, and white dominance in places like Mississippi. Further, there are also more elite fraternity men, which is a topic that I will explore further later in the analysis. Essentially, though, there are also more high-status houses in the fraternity system as well, and I argue that this is primarily based upon their adherence to the standards of the heteropatriarchy as well.

According to Katie, an ADPi, "I mean, the guys always like to talk about like, "Well this house has the slutty girls." Or like, whatever. Guys are the ones that like to like make reputations more than anybody else. Which is ridiculous, because like, you know, one girl that did one thing, and you know one girl that drunk too much once, and now they're the drunk sorority. I mean like girls talk crap about each other, but it's mostly guys that like to start that stuff." Katie also implied here that there is a difference between women "talking crap," like the talk that Melissa suggested earlier takes place in competitions and perpetuating a reputation about girls in a sorority and judging them based on it. Melissa, an ADPi, shared the reputation that girls in Zeta "sleep around," but she added a disclaimer that the source of her information was a fraternity man, so it may not be trustworthy. She said, "They all go sleep around but that's just because my freshman year, that frat guy told me that a Zeta girl that he knew slept with four different guys in one night. So, is it true or not? I don't know."

Participants say that these white fraternity men also interact differently with women depending on these reputations. Christine, a Chi O, claimed that "boys believe in the stereotypes of sororities way more than they lead on to." Amelia, an ADPi, made it clear that this belief in reputations affects how fraternity men treat women in different sororities. She said, "So, one of the fraternities will only talk to certain girls from certain houses type of thing." Daphne, a Tri Delt, didn't feel particularly positively about how the fraternities treat her, even reporting that some directly told her they only talk to girls from the top-tier sororities. She said, "…I don't really fit in that well and some of them are stuck up like, 'We only hang out with Chi Os and KDs' and so I'm, like, 'Okay, see you…'" Chi O and KD are the "top" sororities that are known for most closely meeting traditional expectations of women to be "womanly" or "ladylike," so this is again evidence that the sorority rankings and reputations are based on the value that fraternity men assign them.

Heterosocializing

Swaps

Social events within the Greek system are a notable avenue not only for heterosocialization generally within the Greek system, but with specific focus on the heterosocialization of top-tier sorority women. There are two major types of social events for sorority women: swaps and date parties. Swaps are social events held either between a sorority and a fraternity or two sororities and two fraternities. Jessica, a Chi O, said that a swap is "pretty much a dance." Laura, an ADPi, described it a bit more in-depth, pointing out that women do not bring a date to these events but simply mingle with the members of the fraternities or the other sorority women present. She said, "But when we have swaps you go to a neutral location so like,

skating or Little Dooey. Only the members of the sororities and frat can go, you can't bring a date it is only you guys go and you mingle and interact."

The women did not give too many details about swaps and they were not a major interview topic, but they do imply that the top-tier sororities tend to pair up for these swaps both with each other and with top-tier fraternities. Sage, a Chi O, described a recent swap, noting that her sorority paired up with KD and two fraternities, Kappa Sigma (Kappa Sig) and Sigma Chi for the event. She said that the members "just like basically all hung out together." A few other girls mentioned swaps with this same group of sororities and fraternities. Bethany, a KD, also talked about her sorority having a swap with Kappa Sig, but she went on point out the important heterosocialization that happens at these events. She said, "KD will have a swap with Kappa Sig. One of my friends actually met a guy at a swap and they're getting married. That's common. And then you meet one guy and he introduces you to all his fraternity brothers." This makes heterosocialization a much more complex topic than sorority women "hanging out" with fraternity men. If women are dating or getting married to the men that they meet at these events, which Bethany said is "common," then the hierarchy that fraternity men have created for these women based on their heterosexual appeal actually has implications that affect their status both during and beyond college.

Date Parties

The other major social event for sorority women is the date party. A date party is an event where only that sorority's members and an opposite-gender date of their choosing are able to attend. The date doesn't necessarily have to be the woman's boyfriend and can even just be a friend, but it is an opportunity for these women to spend time with men – and who those men are

matters in the Greek world of exclusivity and status. So how do the women select a date? It generally relies upon social capital and the network that these women have created between their sorority and certain fraternities. It doesn't seem to be a "big deal" to invite someone to a date party in the sense that it isn't so much a romantic connection as much as it is a social connection. Amelia, an ADPI, suggested that asking fraternity men to these date parties is common because it's a social norm within the Greek system and they understand this idea that being asked to a date party might be purely social. Amelia explained, "You find dates through friends of friends or a lot of fraternity boys which sounds stupid but it's kind of helpful because they have date parties as well, so they understand why they would be invited. Asking someone to a date party isn't a big deal."

Considering how much the participants say that sorority reputations and rankings matter to these men, though, it is not as simple as one big social network within the Greek system within which dates are found. As I established earlier, the women report sorority reputations affect the way that fraternity men relate to sorority women, and some of the major ways that fraternity and sorority members relate to each other are in dating and social events. The reputation and ranking of a sorority depends upon how its members appeal to men, according to the women. Thus, if more fraternity men are relating more positively to sorority women in the top-tier sororities, then those women will have an increasingly better reputation. Reputation regulates access to the more elite men by granting social capital, so women in top-tier sororities will then have the social capital to heterosocialize with these men, such as having them as a date to a social function.

Sage, a Chi O, provided an example that describes explicitly how the social network is formed and maintained. Sigma Chi is certainly one of the top fraternity houses as well, making

them an indicator of "elite men" – white men who have increased value within the heteropatriarchy. In fact, another Chi O, Kaylin, said that her sorority "has definitely looked out for the fraternities that have the better reputation," which she identified as Sigma Chi and Kappa Sig. Unsurprisingly, Sigma Chi and Kappa Sig were mentioned as the fraternities that Chi O and KD had a swap with recently. Women in Chi O have a good reputation among fraternity men, so they have access to dating the more high-status men - Sigma Chis. Then, women in Chi O have the social capital to form this network between their sorority and Sigma Chi where the members heterosocialize – which only leads to more heterosocialization as the network strengthens. Sage explained, "So like when Chi O has a date party and people are asking people and if someone's like oh, I don't have a date then they can be like oh, well my boyfriend's a Sigma Chi, let me text him and see if anybody wants to go and then more Sigma Chis get asked to the function. Do you see what I'm saying? And so like I think when you're in a fraternity and in a sorority, you just know more people and so you kind of go to more functions together and you hang out with more people and that's kind of how those relationships are formed."

Christine, a Chi O, went more in depth about how it "means something" to have a date from a certain fraternity. She suggested that the Greek affiliation of a woman's date indicates her status and that other women in the sorority care about that. Considering that the status that men give women is what regulates their access to men, women would want others in their sorority to associate with high-status men because it helps their reputation and thus their own access to high status men. Referring to Sage's example in the previous paragraph, if a woman has a fraternity man as her date, it is likely that her friends will also benefit from this social connection by having his friends as their dates. Christine said that, "it's a big deal if you get a Sigma Chi to go to a date party with you or that I got to have the BYX (A Christian fraternity on campus)

president as my date to the date party. That means something among your friends." Even though the men are not directly gatekeeping who has access to these social events, the hierarchy that they have placed these women into based on their sorority functions in the same way. The interviewees say that reputation dictates the way that men interact with women in different sororities, so women in bottom-tier sororities are not going to "get" a Sigma Chi to be their date. Thus, fraternity men are still controlling the social scene and who can heterosocialize with them.

Christine discussed how fraternity men have date parties as well and that the ranking of a woman's sorority matters especially regarding who men take to these parties. In fact, she claimed that women from certain sororities would "never" get asked to a Sigma Chi or Kappa Sig date party, suggesting that there is some exclusivity to accessing those men in those fraternities. This is a concrete manifestation of the idea that women's reputation regulates access to the resource in this environment - men. She said, "There were some guys who were surprised that I was a Chi O just because that means something to fraternities on campus. Yes, it happens in dating relationships, but it way more happens if you look at who gets asked to date parties. There are some sororities who guys will never invite to a Sigma Chi date party or to a Kappa Sig date party solely based on the fact that they're in a specific sorority or not in some sororities, you know, which again sounds super terrible."

Women in lower-tier sororities report heterosocializing similarly in the sense that they do find dates through mutual friends. Katie, an ADPi, said, "So, like, I dated the president of a fraternity for four years, so any time someone needed a date I was like, 'Hi. I need three guys that want to go to this.'" However, the networks are less rigid and extend outside of Greek life. While the top tier sororities seem more particular about the fraternities that they socialize with, only mentioning Kappa Sig and Sigma Chi when they talk about fraternities, the lower-tier

sororities generally do not seem to partner with any particular fraternities. In fact, it seems to matter less which fraternity they are paired up with for social events like swaps. Laura, another ADPi, said, "A lot of other schools or sororities they partner with frat, brother sis type of thing. But ADPi does not, we are not affiliated with a frat, but we have swaps or date parties with them." In fact, another ADPi even reported that she deliberately brings dates who are outside of the Greek system in order to allow others into the social system – a fascinating contrast to the way that women in top-tier sororities talked about Greek social events. Nicole said, "Then usually if I have a date party, I'll try to take someone who's not Greek. To give them that experience because I feel like it's unfair when you only have just a whole bunch of Greeks in one place when it's an event where you can invite anyone."

Discussion

Drawing on in-depth interviews with 19 women affiliated with 8 National Panhellenic Conference sororities at Mississippi State University, I examine how a woman's reputation, status, and access to heterosocialization in the Greek system is still dependent on her appeal to fraternity men. I find that the reputation that appeals to men is one that the top-tier chapters have perfected – "good girls" who embody traditional femininity and attractiveness. I also note that this reputation is developed by men and for men, as reported by these women, in that men are the ones who determine the hierarchy within the Greek system. Thus, a woman's reputation certainly affects her status within the Greek system because her reputation affects how men rank her house within the hierarchy. Heterosocialization, which has historically been and remains a major function of sororities, is dependent upon one's status. Many fraternity men are reported by these

women to interact socially only with women from top-tier houses. This means that these women also have increased access to the source of status – men.

I argue that these results are significant in the discussion of modern femininity because sororities today often present themselves as an empowering space for young women in college, touting values like sisterhood and confidence. This analysis is not to say that those things are not true nor to undermine the positive experiences that sorority women may have within the Greek system. My findings, though, reflect a much larger problem within the Greek system - women are constantly reminded that their value is determined by men. The ranking system may be informal, but it is both incredibly consistent and well-known. The women in lower-tier sororities know that they have a reputation of being "a bottom-tier sorority" (Katie, ADPi). Likewise, they know that this standing affects how men look at them. One woman even recounted how she has been told by fraternity men, "We only hang out with Chi Os and KDs" (Daphne, Tri Delt). Sororities may explicitly teach women positive values or encourage academic success, but the actual experiences that women have within the system show them that what actually earns them status – who actually gives them value – is appealing to fraternity men.

If women are socialized to think that they must meet standards set by men in order to gain value within the Greek system, I argue that this also informs how women operate post-graduation. There is a wealth of literature that suggests that conventional attractiveness gives women power. Not only are they more successful in romantic pursuits, but also in the professional world, earning more money and being promoted more often (Weitz 2001, Jackson 1992, Sullivan 2001). Waitresses who dye their hair blonde are even shown make more tip money (Jiang and Galm 2014). Are sororities yet another example of women being rewarded with status for appealing to men? Considering the numerous references to women in the top

sororities being pretty, blonde, and skinny, it seems probable. Perhaps more importantly, though, sororities are made up of young women, often ranging from ages 18 to 22. These women are learning quite early in their adult lives that men determine their status, so the potential is great for long-term adherence to the traditional model of womanhood they learn as ideal. Sororities are setting women up for a lifetime of feeling that their status is dependent upon men.

Not only are these sorority women being taught they need to appeal to men, but for many, the standards that are being imposed upon them are simply impossible to meet. Sure, a woman can dye her hair blonde, but there conventical attractiveness encompasses much more than that. In fact, as one woman says, the sororities in the top tier are full of "cookie cutter girls." A woman's status in the system depends on how well they appeal to men, and the only way to gain status is to appeal to these men, so it's essentially a circle. One can only imagine how frustrating that would be for a woman who isn't a cookie cutter girl – who isn't blonde, skinny, or whatever it means to be "good." Speaking further on rhetoric of "good", the morality that is assigned to the actions of these women seems particularly gendered. "Good" girls, in this context, often means those who do not party or engage with men sexually and maintain the highest grades. This is yet another example of disproportionally policing women's behavior. A man would not be shamed for participating in these same activities that women are shamed for, yet men are the ones who determine whether a woman is "wife material" based upon whether they are "good" girls.

The importance placed on heterosocialization in these white Panhellenic Conference sororities promotes the idea to these women that they must be married to be successful women. Marriage is an essential part of traditional womanhood. As aforementioned, sororities were founding upon preserving traditional white womanhood, which included being a good mother and housewife. Thus, it was important for these organizations to promote the idea that women

were still marriageable even though they were getting a college education (Freeman 2018). My findings echo similar rhetoric, revealed the reputation of women in the top chapter as "wife material." The fact that the women in the top chapter, whose reputation perfectly meets the modern definition of womanhood, are known as "wife material" suggests that being marriageable is an aspect of ideal womanhood. Essentially, being marriageable is correlated with being womanly, and both of those things are associated with being at the top of the hierarchy – status. Further, women in top-tier sororities have more access to heterosocialization opportunities with men in top-tier fraternities, meaning they have exclusive access to mingle with potential partners. Overall, the ideal sorority woman is one who is "wife material," which signifies that marriage is correlated with success in achieving traditional womanhood.

An important conclusion reflected in this study that must be balanced with these more critical conclusions is the idea of sisterhood. Women were almost always reluctant to share negative reputations about other sororities, especially those in the lower tier. They were quick to discount them as just something they had heard and didn't personally believe – often clarifying that the source of the information was men. Now, this is also relative, considering that it is self-reported by women that the repuations come from men. However, the bottom line is that these women report that they do not really care about reputation, hierarchy, or status in their relationships with other women. In fact, many pointed out their friendships with women in other chapters and the fact that chapter reputation doesn't matter in those friendships. The negative aspects mentioned previously are certainly important to consider in evaluating the impact of sororities. Women are explicitly ranked in a hierarchical system by men based upon how well they meet standards of attractiveness and femininity. Further, women must engage in a constant cycle of appealing to men so that they can have the status to heterosocialize with men. None of

these aspects are mentally healthy for a young woman and can have long-term effects in how women think of their position in the world, especially related to men. However, despite this, these women build strong bonds within their own houses and with women in other houses. Ultimately, it comes down to balance: Is the sisterhood that these women build within the Greek system worth being constantly reminded that their status within the system depends on the value that they are given by men?

The high-status network between created within the Greek system between top-tier women and men has implication beyond Greek life and post-graduation. In college, membership in this network grants access to other high-status networks. Interviewees pointed out that the student body president is nearly always a member of one of the top houses and that it is easy for those students to gain leadership positions and membership into other exclusive organizations on campus, meaning that these students can mingle with other high-status people outside of the Greek system. Post-graduation, status matters in the social order, and status is shown to be even more significant than other advantages like wealth or power (Ridgeway 2014). Status influences access to resources, power, wealth, and ultimately success, and even something as seemingly insignificant as heterosocialization patterns within the Greek system can provide key findings as to how these high-status networks function to maintain status inequality (Rivera 2010).

This analysis does have limits in that the data is limited, yet it still provides valuable insight about the definitions of femininity that sororities promote and the importance of men in women's status positions. The data was drawn from one single university, Mississippi State University. The group of women is relatively small, so it does not represent every woman's experience. Certainly, there are outliers - women in top-tier sororities who do not meet these definitions of femininity and those in the bottom-tier who do. There are surely women in top-tier

sororities who do not engage in heterosocialization opportunities and women in the bottom-tier who attend functions with or date fraternity men. However, these findings establish a fairly consistent narrative across interviewees of the reputations of different houses and the structure of the status hierarchy as well as their heterosocialization experiences. While my findings hint that these experiences socialize how women to think that they must appeal to men for status, future research could further evaluate this possibility.

References:

Armstrong, Elizabeth A., and Laura T. Hamilton. 2013. *Paying for the Party: How College Maintains Inequality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Arvin, Maile, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill. 2013. "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy." *Feminist Formations* 25, 1: 8–34.

Berkowitz, Alexandra, and Irene Padavic. 1999. "Getting a Man or Getting Ahead: A Comparison of White and Black Sororities." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 27, 4: 530-557.

Collins, Gail. 2014. *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present.* New York: Little, Brown and Company.

DeSantis, Alan D. 2007. *Inside Greek U: Fraternities, Sororities, and the Pursuit of Pleasure, Power, and Prestige.* University of Kentucky Press.

Deterding, Nicole M., and Mary C. Waters. 2021. "Flexible Coding of In-Depth Interviews: A Twenty-First Century Approach." *Sociological Methods & Research* 50, 2: 708-739.

Freeman, Margaret L. 2018. "Instruction in Living Beautifully: Social Education and Heterosocializing in White College Sororities." Pp. 115-139 in *Rethinking Campus Life: New Perspectives on the History of College Students in the United States,* edited by Christine A. Ogren and Marc A. VanOverbeke. Palgrave Macmillan.

Harris, Brandon Scott, and Dorothy Schmalz. 2016. ""Cool" Party, Bro: The Fraternity Use of Party Structure as a Mechanism for Control Over Female Status on Campus." *Deviant Behavior* 37, 11: 1227-1238.

Hess, Nicole H. 2022. "Friendship, Mating, and Reputation in U.S. College Sororities: Exploring

Female Intrasexual Competition and Cooperation." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* DOI.

Hess, Nicole H. 2006. "Informational warfare: Female friendship and the coalitional manipulation of reputation." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, CA.

Ispa-Landa, Simone, and Mariana Oliver. 2020. "Hybrid Femininities: Making Sense of Sorority Rankings and Reputation." *Gender & Society* DOI: 10.1177/0891243220968882.

Jiang, Cao, and Melissa Galm. 2014. "The Economic Benefit of Being Blonde: A Study of Waitress Tip Earnings Based on Their Hair Color in a Prominent Restaurant Chain." *Journal of Behavioral Studies in Business* 7: 1-6

Kilanski, Kristine M., and David McLendon. 2017. "Dating Across and Hooking 'Up': Status and Relationship Formation at an Elite Liberal Arts University." *Demographic Research* 37: 1917-1932.

Krendl, Anne C., Nicole S. Magoon, Jay G. Hull, and Todd F. Heatherton. 2011. "Judging A Book by Its Cover: The Differential Impact of Attractiveness on Predicting One's Acceptance to High- or Low-Status Social Groups." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 41, 10: 2538-2550.

Plath, Sylvia. 1963. *The Bell Jar*. London, England: Faber & Faber.

Ridgeway, Cecilia L. 2014. "Why Status Matters for Inequality." *American Sociological Review* 79, 1: 1-16.

Risman, Barbara J. 1982. "College Women and Sororities: The Social Construction and Reaffirmation of Gender Roles." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 11, 2: 231-252.

Rivera, Lauren A. 2010. "Status Distinctions in Interaction: Social Selection and Exclusion at an Elite Nightclub." *Qualitative Sociology* 33: 229-255.

Saldaña, Johnny. 2013. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 2nd edition. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

Weitz, Rose. 2001. "Women and Their Hair: Seeking Power through Resistance and Accommodation." *Gender & Society* 15, 5: 667–86.