Booze, Brands, and Boys: The Politics of Selectivity and Exclusion in an American Sorority

by

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To the women of ABC who graciously invited me into their lives.
And to my real life sister,
Eva, my sorority girl.
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Introduction:
Sisterhood For Some

Everything that you do now, even if it’s on an individual level, I feel like, reflects your organization and the values that your organization has. So I’ve noticed that I’ve been more cautious in the personal choices that I’ve made... I now watch myself a little bit more, not really because I was doing anything wrong in the first place, but I more watch my actions and what I’m doing around campus a little bit more because if one person only knows me then they’ll think my organization is like me.
-Grace

Sometimes you need those nights when you’re not going to parties and you’re just sitting and being fun and having good times with your friends to make you realize like this is why I joined, like I wanted to find these relationships where I can like sit around a fire and sing all night rather than just like go to parties every night.
-Sylvie

In August 2016, blogger Sammie Levin wrote “8 Insider Tips for Sorority Rush” for the upcoming year’s incoming members.1 The article appeared on Her Campus, the self-proclaimed “Collegiette’s Guide to Life,” (emphasis theirs) and filed in “Back to School 2016,” “Sororities,” “Rush,” “Sorority Rush,” and “Sorority Rush 2016” sections.2 Rush, also known as Recruitment, is the process through which potential new sorority members at a college or university attend events at multiple sororities’ chapters, and rank and are ranked by these sororities.3 Eventually,

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3 There are countless terms that sorority and fraternity members use throughout this thesis. All slang terms and all fraternity/sorority specific terms are defined in Appendix A to include the reader and to accurately represent what was written or was said to me.
a potential new member is either cut or selected for one sorority. Levin’s eight tips are:

1. “DON’T talk about how blacked out you got during Welcome Week”
2. “DO say something unique or memorable about yourself”
3. “DON’T mention the guy you went home with last night”
4. “DO look presentable”
5. “DON’T gossip or talk smack about others”
6. “DO act like you want to be there”
7. “DON’T say something negative about another house”
8. “DO be yourself”

To her readership, Levin assures that while she may be unable to “help you with calculus” she has “you covered when it comes to sorority rush.” Her tips are designed to help anxious underclasswomen feel more comfortable trying to join a sorority that she may or may not know much about. I purposefully use “underclasswomen” and “she” here to indicate that predominate membership in traditional sororities, not sororities that have been created in recent years for non-binary, trans, or queer (all iterations: sexual preference-wise and identity-wise) persons. Traditional sororities define their members as women, biologically as socially. This is not to say that non-binary, trans, or queer persons have never joined traditional sororities, but that “sisterhood” as it was originally created, and continues

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5 Ibid.
Unfortunately, I am unable to go in depth into non-traditional Greek-lettered organizations in this thesis, but in recent years more of these social groups have grown and studying how these organizations function and what it means to members of these organizations would be an interesting place of study.
to stand today, is a fusion of sex and gender so that “female” and “woman” read as one. Levin writes for and about this exclusive definition of woman, and in turn throughout this thesis, discussions about “women,” “woman,” and “she” should be understood narrowly and traditionally.

Within her suggestions are overt discussions on the assumed and inevitable straightness of a woman joining a sorority (“DON’T mention the guy you went home with last night”) as well as more subtle discussions on class and race (“DO look presentable”). Levin argues that a potential new member should “look clean and put together” while “avoid[ing] excessive cleavage, barely-there shorts and skirts and flashy (distractingly so) jewelry.”

Embedded in her suggestions are suppositions of what appropriate appearances are, instead of acknowledging that what is deemed appropriate is often linked with whiteness (as a dominant discourse) and wealth (linked closely with whiteness). Throughout this thesis, the terms “white” and “whiteness” will be used as through sociologist Ruth Frankenberg’s definition, as “a location of structural advance, of race privilege” as opposed to an identity.

Whiteness is “dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage.” Levin’s assumption of a singular form of appropriateness lends to this definition. Naturalizing one form of self-presentation or self-expression through clothing normalizes that form, in turn letting dominance and normativity as whiteness reign. Moreover, while whiteness is not entirely married to or synonymous with wealth, they do trickily overlap. To be

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7 Levin, Sammie. "8 Insider Tips for Sorority Rush."
9 Ibid., 236-237.
able to afford the clothing for Rush – Levin writes that “you may be told specific things to wear on each day” – assumes a basic level of financial means for purchasing correct, and many, different outfits. These tips do not explicitly say that they are meant for a specific population, a white, wealthy, straight one, but in their subtleties and confluences, the tips are demographically targeted and narrow.

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This thesis explores Greek Life through lenses of selectivity and exclusion. Greek Life is a wholly American, historically rooted, and omnipresent force on college campuses, and has been since the conception of Phi Beta Kappa in 1776 at William and Mary College in Virginia. In 1825, when men at Union College were denied membership to Phi Beta Kappa, a new fraternal organization was created, thereby beginning the trajectory of selectivity. There are now hundreds of Greek-lettered organizations, some national with satellite chapters on many campuses, some local, and most critically for this thesis, many for women. All select members to join, and many deny other interested persons. Because of the breadth, complexity, and heterogeneity of Greek Life as a whole, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to address all fraternities and sororities. Therefore, to just begin to understand what makes Greek organizations tick, how they are run, and what specific values are held, this thesis will explore one sorority, at one university, during the fall of 2016.

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12 The first fraternity was founded at Union College in Schenectady, New York on November 25, 1825. For more information see about this founding see Syrett, Nicholas L. The Company He Keeps. U of North Carolina P, 2009. Web: 14.
I. Methods and Overview:

With the support of two Wesleyan Grants, the Davenport Study Grant and the Center for the Americas Research Grant, in October 2016, I travelled to a ‘Big State U,’ a large, state research university in the Midwest, to interview students who were involved in Greek-lettered organizations. Much like using the pseudonym ‘Big State U’ all names, sorority affiliations, and identifying information have been changed to protect the identities of the participants and organizations as well as to remain compliant with Wesleyan University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). While scholarly material provides essential theoretical frameworks, the majority of the data presented in this thesis come from raw and analyzed primary material, with secondary sources as supplement. When initially planning this project, to whittle down the topic’s vastness, I elected to travel to one university as opposed to many. In order to be able to speak with students once I arrived, I reached out to peers in my extended networks to ask if anyone knew members of or was affiliated with Greek-lettered organizations. Through this preliminary snowball sampling, a process through which participants are able to suggest other persons who would be similarly interested in partaking in the research, I was able to come in contact with many students involved with Greek Life on many different campuses throughout the United States, eventually selecting one where it seemed as though the students I spoke with were interested in engaging with this research and dedicated to following through. Through snowball sampling once again, at Big State U, over the course of nine days, I spoke with twenty-eight students in six different sororities and fraternities. Twenty were from a sorority I came to call ABC. Two were from two different sororities. Three were
from one fraternity, two were from another fraternity, and one was from a third fraternity. It speaks to the insularity and power of individual Greek organizations that I had to actively seek out students to speak with outside of ABC and that I was unable to speak with any students not involved with Greek Life.

The interviews lasted between 30 to 60 minutes and were loosely structured with open-ended questions offered but opportunity for tangential speech possible depending on the participant’s preference and level of comfort. These interviews took place on park benches, in cafés, in one off-campus house, and in parking lots near Big State U. The interviews were recorded but to remain IRB compliant, the recordings will be destroyed upon the completion of this thesis. Before recording, I read aloud an IRB-approved oral consent script to which all participants I spoke with agreed. Sample questions included, but were not limited to: “what made you choose this sorority over others?” “What was Rush/Recruitment like for you?” “What is a typical Saturday night like?” “What are you looking for in new members?” “What are some of your favorite/least favorite things about being in ABC?” If a participant was uncomfortable with a question, they informed me, and we immediately skipped it and moved on to another. My aim was to ask questions about and listen to the subsequent answers for students’ involvement with Greek-lettered organizations so as to ascertain what participation means for real-life students.

Because of the numerical breakdown of the interviews – twenty accounts from one sorority – this thesis functions as a case study of that organization. While the

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13 A copy of this Oral Consent Script is located in Appendix B.
other interviews substantiate the claims of and offer supporting evidence to what women in ABC said, the clear focus is on being a sister of ABC.

With this in mind, my research diverges from the predominant pattern of Greek Life research because it is primarily a case study on lived women’s experience(s). While there are some wonderful books and articles regarding sororities, some are not scholarly,\(^{14}\) others focus on the history of sororities,\(^{15}\) many focus on alcohol, sexual assault, or hazing,\(^{16}\) others focus on gender, sex, and sexuality,\(^{17}\) and still others focus on student well-being and sense of self.\(^{18}\) There are myriad entry points to studying Greek Life. Yet, even the scholarly material that focuses on lived student experience, especially women’s experiences, can be dense, filled with academic jargon, and to that end, not facilitated by a peer.\(^{19}\) This thesis positions itself as a minority in this research sphere, emerging as a peer-created project. I am a current college student and a woman who experiences some lived similarities with the students I interviewed. While I am not in a sorority, I understand that it means to be in a university, to have competing academic and social drives, and


\(^{15}\) See: Turk, Diana B. *Bound by a Mighty Vow: Sisterhood and Women's Fraternities, 1870-1920*.  


\(^{10}\) For an excellent example of lived women’s experience see: Berbary, Lisbeth A. "“Don’t Be a Whore, That’s Not Ladylike” Discursive Discipline and Sorority Women’s Gendered Subjectivity."
to exist within a contained campus. That being said, I am not and will never be in a sorority and therefore cannot personally speak to or have that point of entry with Greek Life. However, my sister is the third in command of her sorority at a large university, so Greek Life discourse is never far off personally. Because of my similarities in age and current life experience, I was able to speak to students from a space of familiarity and, I hope, trust. I was not a researcher probing for data or a journalist looking for a sexy story, but a peer who was and is seeking to learn more about other college women’s lives.

In the pages that follow, I detail ABC, the sorority in which I spoke with twenty women, whose house I was invited to tour and eat lunch in, and whose members offered to show me around their campus, their homes, their local nature walks, their parties, their bars, and their restaurants. This thesis argues that ABC is comprised of white, wealthy, and straight women. It is Jewish as per its sorority national charter, which places ABC at Big State U and in an intermediary space between its peers’ whiteness and its peers’ anti-Semitism. ABC engages in practices of exclusion that encourage the population to stay the same year after year while simultaneously experiencing analogous exclusionary tactics from some of their white-Greek organization peers. In turn, ABC exists within a milieu that prizes whiteness, wealth, straightness, having fun, being happy, and looking “cool,” thereby placing ABC in a space of always trying to hit these markers and usually falling short. While ABC is comprised of individuals, as a whole organization, it encourages its members to shed individual identity in favor of collective dedication to being in ABC in order to further the institution, its notoriety, and its perceived image around campus. All of
this cumulates in Rush/Recruitment where the intersection of what ABC desires to be, how it truly is, and how it is seen by Greek-lettered peers clash to create a spectacle of advertisement and low-shot attempts at “cool” new members.

This is a study of the intersection of identity, institution, and power. It is not meant to be a critique on individual women or women’s decisions but rather an exploration into how hegemony manifests in social organizations, and how in turn exclusion and normative celebration can ensue. ABC is a brand and an institution within which sisters regulate and are regulated by fellow sisters to promote the sorority. ABC is a continuum of control, a space of normative dissemination, all under the purported drive of “sisters for life.”

II. A Note on Ability:

The roles of the women’s ability or disabilities were never discussed in the interviews and existed wholly in absence. One woman I spoke with was participating in a medical trial (its consequences discussed in further depth in Chapter One) but she did not indicate why and for what this trial entailed and this was the only mention of any sort of ability or disability mental, physical, or otherwise. I am not aware of the specifics of the lives of the individual women. I am therefore unable to discern if any impactful illness or disabilities were part of these women’s lives, and more importantly, no mention of these topics was ever made in any of my interviews, save for the woman mentioned just previously. With that, I cannot make any full arguments with regard to ability because no disclosure or indication means no speaking into the fact. That being said, what I could ascertain, on the surface level, is
that with regard to mental ability, ABC purportedly works because it is a cohesive unit of “happy” sisters, and there were attempts on current and future sisters to be happier and more alike. With regard to physical ability, much of ABC life revolves about having a normatively and visibly able body. ABC women go to the gym; they run; they go on hikes. Their nightlife similarly is inclusive for those with able-bodies who can be in spaces that do not have ramps or elevators, and whose bodies can pack in without pain or discomfort into fraternity basements. Visible ability for ABC existed de facto and as an a priori condition.

How to bring up ability in this thesis has been a question I struggled with. Ultimately, I decided that instead of arguing iterations of analogous arguments throughout every chapter – that ABC accepts visibly able-bodied individuals and that therefore being visibly able-bodied is the norm and what is expected of ABC women – that I would plant the seed early, in the Introduction, so that readers could keep this idea in mind throughout while similarly remembering that disability need not always be visible. Just because we did not speak about physical or mental disability does not mean it was not there; and as a result, I do not think it appropriate to draw conclusions on ability politics as a whole within ABC. That said, I believe it speaks to the power of able-bodiedness that all ABC’s physical spaces were created for persons with one type of ability. I also believe it speaks to the power of able-bodiedness that there existed no discourse about the role of ability in these spaces, both physically like in the sorority and fraternity houses, and metaphorically, like being part of the sisterhood. I encourage future scholars of Greek Life to think critically about the role that ability plays. Perhaps these future pieces can add to the
growing body of scholarship about the marginality of persons with disabilities on college campuses, in cities, and in burgeoning technology.

III: Chapter Outlines:

Chapter One: This chapter explores what it means to be in ABC. It analyzes the background identities of the women involved and puts them in conversation with the rest of the women in the sorority. Because of the demographic uniformity and the push to be wholly dedicated to ABC while shedding other commitments, friends, and even other identities, I argue that ABC blurs the line between one of sociologist Erving Goffman’s “total institutions” and one of sociologist Lewis Coser’s “greedy institutions.” Yet, seeing as ABC must recruit new members every year, it functions not only as an institution but also a brand to be aspired to and bought.

Chapter Two: This chapter puts ABC in context with the greater Greek-lettered “social space,” to borrow from Pierre Bourdieu. This social space prizes whiteness, wealth, and straightness, and in turn puts each organization in a place of anxiety to climb the social hierarchy. ABC, as a Jewish sorority, is “middle tier,” but this space in the tier system encourages the sisters to engage in practices of intra-sister regulation for the greater goal of being perceived as cooler. One of the ways that ABC can become cooler is through “pairing,” a planned party between one or more fraternities and one or more sororities at a fraternity house, with fraternities who are

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in a higher tier. I explore what it means to be at a pair, to have one’s sisters police one’s movements and choices, and to at once toe the line between being a Jewish house and trying to shed Judaism in favor of being seen as higher tier.

Chapter Three: This chapter deals with the question of selection and futurity. The Rush/Recruitment process each year works to replace the graduating seniors with second semester freshman. The women that ABC wishes to attract are “like” them: they are white, wealthy, straight, and Jewish, and therefore in line with their membership population and brand. But ABC also wants women they see as cooler, who would be able to “do something good for the house” as Caroline put it, who would make cooler fraternities want to pair with them and fellow sororities see them as a top tier house rather than a middle tier one. In efforts to realize this desire, ABC puts professionally created Rush/Recruitment videos on YouTube for potential new members (and non-affiliated persons like myself) to see what it looks like to be in ABC and what sisterhood means. What is curious, however, is what the videos hide. Once offers of membership are made, Bid Day/Night occurs, showing the outside world who an ABC sister is and how thrilled she is to be in ABC, as well as initially marking each new sister with their nascent ABC identity.

Ultimately, I explore the strategies of whiteness and privilege that are neither unique to nor created solely in Greek organizations, but that proliferate in ABC and their social space. I question what role, if any, Greek Life should play on our universities’ campuses. If Greek-lettered organizations are to stay, my hope is that conversations about selection and exclusion on the basis of race, class, gender, sex, ability, ethnicity, sexual orientation and/or preferences, and more, become common
place and imbue how current Greek Life stands, what it values, and how it wishes to be in the future.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{22} An iteration of this thesis was presented at the Engaged Scholarship and Social Justice Undergraduate Research Conference on April 8, 2017 at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.
Chapter One:

Who’s Who in ABC

Introduction

All 200 women in ABC experience the same lifecycle. Sisters join the second semester of their freshman year. Sophomore year, sisters live in the house and may or may not attempt to hold a leadership position. Junior year is similar to sophomore year. In senior year, sisters move out of the house, become less involved, and eventually graduate. While the bonds of sisterhood are purportedly enduring, the collegiate experience is ephemeral. Every year approximately 50 new women join and every year approximately 50 women leave. And yet, despite this transience, ABC, as an entity, remains similar each year. Riley, one sister, said, “I haven’t really seen anything change too much since I’ve been here.” Carmen, another sister, situated this permanence further back, arguing that certain women tend to join the same sororities over and over again, and what Greek community members think about each sorority “started most likely with age.” Of course, ABC has been at Big State U for over 50 years, times change, and aspects of the sorority follow suit. But as Carmen insinuated, ultimately the sororities are preserved institutions, their social beliefs, perceptions, and milieu standings changing slightly, if at all.

What is curious therefore, is putting the women’s individual four-year impermanence in conversation with the sluggishness of the institution. As Carmen detailed, there are certain women who tend to join certain sororities. For ABC, these women tend to be white, wealthy, straight, and most importantly Jewish.
Greek-lettered students of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not Jewish. In fact, many of the early Greek organizations explicitly prohibited Jewish members. From the late-nineteenth through mid-twentieth centuries, some Jewish members who were discovered to be Jewish were kicked out. At the same time of this exclusion, Jewish students began founding their own Greek organizations. The first Jewish fraternity was founded in 1895 and the first Jewish sorority was founded in 1903. Up until the early 1960s, these Jewish Greek organizations had their own social system, entirely separate from the white Greek system. Since these early organizations, at least five national Jewish sororities were chartered, with four still functioning. ABC is a Jewish sorority, in name and in founding, but demographics alone do not make ABC women. An ABC “girl” is “happy” as Regina told me, “nice” as Jordan said, and “genuine” as multiple women detailed. As per her national organization, she stands for nebulous Jewish values. Beyond these baseline identifiers, an ABC woman is devoted to her sorority. She wants her sorority to be the best because she loves her sisters and she believes in the chapter. Membership in ABC means being and subscribing to these things, but not only. To have a dominant membership-background – white, wealthy, straight, and Jewish – means exclusion of those who lack these identifiers. However, ABC does not engage with open forms of exclusion. Members would never explicitly prohibit a woman who was not white, not wealthy, not straight, or not Jewish from joining. There are members, albeit few, who

24 Ibid., 40.
25 Ibid., 13-14.
26 Ibid., 274-275.
27 Ibid., 14.
do not meet those criteria. But exclusion, on the macro level, on the level of the institution, does not need to be overt to exist. Just because ABC may have some non-white, non-wealthy, non-straight, and non-Jewish members does not mean that it is a diverse or welcoming place. The members are predominantly white. They are predominantly Jewish. They are predominantly straight. They are predominantly wealthy. Their demographic similarity renders ABC a monolithic institution into which like-members opt in and dissimilar persons cannot.

This monolith is checked by the fact that many of the women expressed that there are divisions in the house, in that it is impossible to be close to or even have a relationship with 200 other women. That being said, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to describe or discuss individual personalities and in-group intricacies, which are both undeniably rich and complex. My goal is to analyze the institution, not the individual. Moreover, as psychologists George A. Quattrone and Edward E. Jones explained, “people perceive more variability within in-groups, social categories of which they are members, than within out-groups, social categories of which they are not members.” In such, while the “variability” of the women in ABC is true, and they perceive it to be true, what is more important for this thesis is not how the women see themselves within the sorority but how the sorority, a collective, functions as an institution into which individuals unite and at times coalesce.

With these ideas in mind, this chapter will first show who an ABC sister is and what it means to be a sister. Then, I will explain how ABC membership toes the line of being all-absorbing, both mentally and physically, so that sisterhood resembles

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one of Erving Goffman’s “total institutions” as well as one of Lewis Coser’s “greedy institutions.” But these terms are decades old, and therefore cannot wholly take into account how total and greedy institutions function in the modern era. Even though ABC may not have changed much in terms of whom it attracts and what it is thought to be about, it has grown with cultural ideology to embrace neoliberalism. In turn, ABC not only regulates its members from within but also becomes a brand to be desired, aspired to, and acquired.

The Women, The Organization

Avery said she was not entirely sure whether there had ever been a non-white member of ABC. I use the term “non-white” to first remind of structural advantages that whiteness and persons with whiteness hold by placing “white” in the term, and to also recognize all identities of all persons who have been systemically stripped of privilege, as opposed to my (perhaps wrongly) characterizing a multitude of ethnic or racial background. There certainly had not been in her three+ years as a sister but she assured me that non-white women looking for membership would be welcome, should they opt to join. She wondered if non-white students were not joining because ABC is rooted in “Jewish Values.” Very few women were able to answer what this term meant, dancing around the topic by saying, “I’m a Jewish girl” or that the house hosts a Pink Shabbat or that their philanthropy events support Jewish foundations. Avery’s conflation of Judaism with Whiteness reflects the space that
Jewish people have been “assigned” for the past decades in the United States. After World War II, Jews in America transitioned from spaces of historic subordination to positions of mainstream power. In other words, they became white. Like how Ruth Frankenberg describes, “whiteness” is not an innate characteristic but a “relational” weapon, contingent on time and place, that dictates who is assigned privilege and who is not. However, this designation is less fluid at Big State U, with anti-Semitism (such as calling ABC girls “JAPs” (“Jewish American Princesses”) and there being Nazi symbolism around campus and the surrounding city) not being unexpected. Like all the Panhellenic sororities (more on these in Chapter Two), ABC is predominately comprised of white, wealthy, straight women. But what separates ABC from the rest of the Panhellenic sororities is its Jewishness. And yet, even though overt anti-Semitism sometimes manifests at Big State U, ABC is still considered white in its participation in the Panhellenic Council/Panhellenic Association, the historically white sorority council. In theory then, ABC ought to experience the same privileges on campus (and beyond) that all historically-white institutions with societal advantages hold. Therefore, to state that women who do not identify in these ways – i.e., non-white women – opt not to join is to obfuscate the power that being assigned whiteness holds. As art theorist Russell Ferguson explains,

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I deliberately use the term “assign” here in the same way that Brodkin does to suggest the ideological dissimilarity between societally understood “classifications” and individually or group held identities. “Assignments” are how those with power ascribe inclusion/exclusion to individuals or groups culturally and economically. In this case, whether or not the Jews are white. However, “identity” is a different albeit related category that is constructed within the self, but similarly “within the context of ethnoracial assignment” (3).

real power comes from a “hidden place.” When inquiring into who holds power and where that power is, the power always seems to be “somewhere else.” In this sense, blaming ’the other’ for not joining is an attempt at anti-racist innocence. Defining ABC as Jewish and (therefore) white strategically limits how comfortable potential members who fall outside of these delineations may feel, were they ever to join. ABC erases its calculated power and structural privileges that its whiteness brings in alleging such. Writer Lawrence Ross calls this erasure, “intentional delusion” and states that declaring anti-racism as a white person is, by and large, a falsity.33

Even if ABC were to take a non-white member or if Avery’s memory faulted her and non-white women had actually been ABC sisters previously, ABC’s institutional whiteness would not change. Education scholar Angelina Castagno argues, “whiteness maintains power and privilege by perpetuating and legitimating the status quo while simultaneously maintaining a veneer of neutrality, equality, and compassions.” Putting this in conversation with psychologist Michelle Fine, who argues, “seemingly race-neutral policies/practices work to insure white privilege,” regardless of whether there are some, or never have been, non-white women in ABC, ABC is a White Institution. Perhaps it was not so originally, as ABC was founded in a time of overt Jewish exclusion from other houses, but as Jews became white, and ABC was accepted as a White-Jewish house, the “seemingly race-neutral

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32 Ibid.
policies/practices” become solidified. Grace, a sophomore, said that she “unfortunately” knew of sororities that would select “token African-American or token Asian” women during Rush but that she thinks that “minorities on campus don’t tend to rush Panhellenic associations as much because we have really strong other councils.” And yet, regardless of the strength of the multicultural and historically black councils and chapters, saying that the reason that non-white students select non-white houses reifies Castagno’s “veneer of neutrality, equality, and compassions.” It is not that the non-white councils are not strong; it is that the white students who are in organizations within the white councils can say that those councils are strong so that there is no self-blame for why ABC and similar organizations are all white. ABC says it is welcoming through its purported neutrality, when in fact, as Castagno and Fine argue, these claims just bolster their institutionalized power. Taking a “token” sister automatically creates separation between that woman and her so-called sisters because she was selected for what her white sisters perceived as her difference. Beyond being racist, this action permits that sorority to pat itself on the back, claim diversity, while primarily fetishizing and making a spectacle of this one sister thereby reinforcing the organization’s whiteness. Grace claimed that ABC would not take a “token” sister, and she talked about this process with disdain. She also said that she had attended a “Greek Leadership Conference” recently, and had been told that Big State U had the most “diverse,” what she equated with race-based difference, Panhellenic organizations at what she

36 Jewish organizations began to be accepted into the White-Greek system around when WW2 ended. This process was slow and perhaps has never been complete. For more information see: Sanua, Marianne R. *Going Greek: Jewish College Fraternities in the United States, 1895-1945*: pp. 269-283.

believed to be about 9% non-white. While this percentage is statistically quite low, making “diversity” synonymous with non-white persons actually bolsters whiteness. Most obviously, it subordinates the multitude of human differences that exist to assume that race is the primary difference between persons. In this vein, to assume that race is the primary difference is to assume a normalcy to whatever race acts as the dominant race, with all other races being the “difference” or “unlikeness” as the Oxford English Dictionary defines “diversity,” to the dominant race. Therefore, whiteness is the norm, the likeness, with non-whiteness as the “unlikeness.” Grace was shocked at how low the percentage of non-white persons was in Panhellenic because she said Big State U has “so much diversity.” She acknowledged that the sororities could be better. Regardless, there are still no non-white women in ABC.

The addendum to ABC’s Whiteness, as previously alluded to, is its Jewishness. Nevertheless, its culture is not conducive to an orthodox conceptualization of Judaism. The house does not require the women to keep kosher; members regularly attend parties on both Friday nights and Saturday mornings/afternoons (the Jewish Shabbos); and the majority of the members engage in hook-up culture (defined loosely) and have pre-marital sex. That being said, many of the women I spoke with came into Big State U knowing that they wanted a Jewish house. Kelsey, for example, comes from a small community in the South where very few of her peers were Jewish and she therefore felt isolated. Riley

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39 Hook-up culture is not the focus point of this thesis and I did not inquire into the women’s personal lives in this way. Moreover, “hooking up” and the discourse surrounding it is largely amorphous and means different things to different scholars, participants, and onlookers. For more information on how there is little consensus on what the term means see: Epstein, Marina, et al. "‘Anything from Making out to Having Sex’: Men’s Negotiations of Hooking up and Friends with Benefits Scripts." *Journal of Sex Research.* 46.5 (2009): 414-24. Web.
explained that she knows Jewish women in non-Jewish houses who are not as happy as she is because they are just friends with the few other Jewish women in their houses. This isolation is mitigated through joining a Jewish sorority, but hostility on campus is not. Kate explained that a lot of people think the ABC women can be “bitchy, materialistic, and Jewish” ideas more in line with “Jewish American Princesses” (“JAP”) than just Jewish. A “JAP” is a 1970s pejorative term that suggests an innate materialism, laziness, and selfishness in Jewish women. As Judaic scholar Riv Ellen-Prell explains, the JAP “attends to the needs of no one else, expending great energy on herself instead… her body is a surface to decorate, its adornment financed by the sweat of others.” Implicit therefore in the term JAP is a discourse on class, nationality, and gender roles. The JAP must be straight, as she is financially needy of a man. She is therefore also wealthy, although the wealth belongs to someone else and she is taking it. In this sense, she is financially unproductive and in turn not economically useful: her selfishness precludes her from historically-valued women’s roles, what historian Karen Blair calls the “natural qualities of domesticity and morality” that a “guardian of [the] home,” someone who decides not to work, would hold. The JAP is assigned whiteness, though not fully Americaness, as the distinction is clear through identifying the JAP primarily as Jewish and secondarily as American. There is a difference between Jewish American and just American. She exists in an in-between space of privilege on the one hand and societal disapproval on the other. While some of the ABC sisters perchance fit

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the “bitchy, materialistic” designation, this is not unique to ABC nor is it unique to Jewish women. The term shields non-Jewish women from stigma, enabling them to be materialistic and separate themselves from Jewish women who similarly engage in a culture driven by consumption and materialism.

The JAP designation is thus not one that the ABC women identify with themselves, but a position into which they have been forced. Like Kate’s argument that not every sister is “bitchy” or “materialistic,” Riley similarly argued that if she were to change one thing about the Greek System as a whole she would want to change the “negative stereotypes” about the houses, where instead of ABC being known as “the Jewish girls” they could just be known in more “positive” terms. The ABC women have been pushed into an anti-Semitic corner whereby the confines of their own identities have been created for them, through “perception,” a term a lot of the women used to describe how others view their peers. The ABC house is “jappy” because the other Greek Life members see it that way, not because of how its members self-identify. They just identify as Jewish and congregate in part because they are excluded from other houses (more on Panhellenic exclusion in Chapter Two). In general, the creation of any stock character is to reify the characteristics that therefore fall within the trope. Pierre Bourdieu argues, “to institute, to give a social definition, an identity, is also to impose boundaries.”42 The establishment of an ethnoracial trope, specifically, is to limit the societal confines within which a member of the ethnoracial group may move. “JAP” therefore, is a ready-made term that can be easily disseminated and administered as a mechanism of narrowing the positions

42 Bourdieu, Pierre. Language and Symbolic Power: 120, emphasis his.
of Jewish women. This understanding of Jewish women not only excludes them from non-Jewish houses but also forces them to create their own majority spaces that in turn exclude people who are similarly not white and wealthy. An ABC woman is a Jewish woman, not only because she opts in but because she has to opt in. As Grace explained, “people know” that ABC is a Jewish sorority; it is where the “Jewish girls” go.

Another central position that all ABC women hold is wealth. Nearly all of the 200 18-22 year old ABC members have a car at Big State U, an overt and largely American symbol of wealth. Moreover, there are only a handful of women who are from outside Big State U’s State, and therefore these women’s tuitions are approximately 3x the amount of an in-state tuition, at just under $35,000. The campus itself is nearly 50% out-of-state, and therefore the ABC’s women’s residence did not greatly separate themselves from their peers. Practically, I only spoke with four in-state students out of twenty-eight interviews, and do not as a consequence feel it appropriate to draw conclusions about how living in or out of state factors into experience. I can conclude, though, that it renders them wealthy – within which financial class was unclear – but to the extent that they could pay ABC’s yearly dues, which for initiated members in 2016-2017 were $12,326. There is no financial aid for the potential members who could not pay. These dues cover payment to the national organization, food and laundry fees, insurance, room and board, among other costs.

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43 All of these data come from Big State U’s websites. To protect the identity of the women, organizations, and university involved, I am unable to directly cite.
44 On the Big State U Panhellenic website there is an open data sheet for public download that details the live-in room and board fees, the live-out dues, the security deposits, and the extraneous fees for both initiated members and new members. To protect the identity of the women I spoke with I am unable to give the direct citation to the spreadsheet. However, ABC’s total charges per year are the most of any other live-in or live-out Panhellenic sorority at Big State U with the next most expensive sorority costing $10,800 per year.
expenses. For women not living in the house, the fees are $1,506 to cover all expenses but a room. Unlike university financial aid that could support room and board (which is about $10,000), sorority financial aid cannot be covered by Big State U. Instead, the onus of payment is placed on the individual member, or perhaps more accurately her parents, for how many 18-22 year-olds have $12,326 to spare. ABC membership is therefore intrinsically linked to (family) wealth, which makes ABC sisters rich sisters.

The women’s wealth is shown through subtle means as well. ABC’s sorority house is a mansion, as it must be to house hundreds of students. The house itself is one of the reasons that students join Greek Life. Rebecca wondered whether she would have continued with Rush if she had ended up with options that were un-housed during the final rounds. Grace talked about friends who dropped out of Rush when un-housed sororities became their only options. In such, the house, rather than simply being a place to live, can be read a form of capital. Pierre Bourdieu argues that “cultural capital” is a subtle form of capital that, unlike economic capital, can indirectly indicate status and hierarchy within a milieu. There are countless forms of capital – social, symbolic, etc. – but cultural capital is understated, relational, and should an individual or group hold cultural capital, other members of their similarly-valued milieu will be cognizant of the individual or group. Simply, the sorority house, for the Greek System milieu, is a form of cultural capital, and to have a house means to be in a desirable sorority. Consequently, it comes as no surprise then that

the cornerstone of ABC life is the sorority house. Even linguistically, there was a consistent conflation between being in “ABC,” being in a “chapter,” and being in the “house.” “House” was used as a synonym for being in “ABC” as well as a means of identifying other fraternities and sororities, i.e., “we only pair with houses on our tier” like Grace said, or “I really wanted a different house but I slept with the wrong person” like Riley said.

In terms of lived experience, the sorority house is where the sisters live, hold meetings, get ready for parties, eat, sleep, study, and sometimes even have class. Kelly explained that she was taking an online class so she “sit[s] in the house” to take it, instead of “going somewhere” to learn. The house is the center of ABC life and a physical representation of how the sorority regulates itself. All approximately 100 sophomores and juniors share bathroom spaces, showers, singles, doubles, four-person rooms, etc., and a new “16-girl,” which houses sixteen women in eight bunk beds to accommodate the growing number of women joining the sorority. The house is overcrowded, Avery explained, and cannot comfortably hold this many women. Only one sister out of all sophomores and juniors (who are on campus and not abroad) does not live in the house. For the first semester of her sophomore year, when I spoke with her, Grace was participating in a medical trial that prohibited her from living in the sorority house. She planned on moving into the house as soon as the study ended. Even though she did not live in the house at the time of our interview, she said she frequently “bed hop[s]” from sister to sister’s bed some nights and still spends “a lot, a lot of time there.” But regardless of this bed-hopping and spending time, one of her sisters forgot that there was a “Grace” in ABC. As a result
of living out, Grace says she “miss[es] out” on “little things.” Notably, “I don’t drink as much” living out of the house. ABC has strict rules from its national chapter: no drinking inside the sorority house and no men staying the night, but these practices occur regardless. ABC lets men upstairs during the day, which most other sororities do not allow. Grace also said she sometimes will not receive communication about what the sisters are all “wearing to go out in.” She gave the example of after a football game when she had been told to dress casually and when she showed up at the sorority house later “everyone else” was dressed more formally to go to a party. Immediately and visibly, Grace was separated from the sisters for the rest of that night. In such, Grace, as an ABC sister who does not live in the house, is not fully immersed. Being in ABC means living in ABC. Without the 24-hour commitment, sisters are left out.

Because of the insularity of living in the house – one eats, sleeps, spends time during the day there – outside relationships, or even relationships with live-out sisters, are difficult to foster. Kelly said, “it’s harder to get together” with her friends outside of ABC. Caroline added that her outside-the-house friends are in sororities where each “fit[s].” Arguing that each woman somehow belongs or “fit[s]” in a different sorority reifies perceived differences between houses as though there are specific characteristics that each house attracts and abides. Sylvie said, “each house has different personalities.” It naturalizes divisions both between individual women as well as between sorority houses, as monolithic and separate entities in and of themselves. Indeed, Caroline’s, Kelly’s, Sylvie’s, and the other ABC women’s outside-the-house peers are “friends” whereas the ABC women are “sisters.”
If being in a house sorority is a form of cultural capital, then wanting to spend too much time outside of the sorority would lessen desirability of being in ABC. In this sense, the house acts a physical barrier to the world outside of ABC and a way of keeping the women in. There are pulls to staying within the sorority house like having friends at one’s fingertips and having all of one’s meals pre-cooked and right downstairs — the women’s meal plan is linked to the sorority. Assuredly, members join for these exact forms of sisterhood engagements; after all, it is a social organization primarily. But sisterhood is also a mechanism of control, even in the quotidian and the minutiae. If they want to eat or sleep, they have to do so in ABC. Right upstairs from the spaces where sisters are at one’s fingertips and where meals are enjoyed is the “16-girl” room. It is kept dark, quiet, and cold, to respect any woman who at any time might be sleeping. Directly next to the 16-girl is the 16-girl sick room, a small single-person room created to quarantine any woman in the 16-girl who gets ill and could infect the other 15 women. Across from the 16-girl is their storage room, where all the women who sleep in the 16-girl keep their clothing and other personal belongings. Two years ago, when Avery was a sophomore, she said that the 16-girl slept 6 women, but since ABC has been taking larger pledge classes each year, the sorority must adapt to its growing population. A direct result of taking more women is squeezing current and future ABC members into smaller spaces without privacy and in the name of sisterhood. As Michel Foucault explained in “Docile Bodies” in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, “infinitesimal power over the active body” is gained through “subtle coercion, of obtaining holds upon it at the level of the mechanism itself – movements, gestures, attitudes,
rapidity.”46 The ABC women living in the 16-girl, and the other women in the house who must share rooms and adapt to the growing population as well, must learn to not take up too much space, must “watch what you’re doing,” as Grace said to be respectful to the other sisters, and must become comfortable with things they previously would not have been – Kelly gave the example of how the 16-girl can get dirty with popcorn bags and other trash, and that instead of getting mad she has learned to clean the room without hostility toward the other 15 women who dirty it. “The same two people end up cleaning the room every time, and it’s usually me,” she said. “So I have to be like, ok this isn’t a big deal; it’s just a popcorn bag; we can go on.” Through learning to take up less space, adapting to a dark room, being watchful of sisters’ behavior and their own behavior, and adjusting preferences in the name of sisterhood, the women register as Foucaultian docile bodies. An argument could be made that this is an exercise in learning to compromise, but more than altruism it is a naturalization of docility and bodily regulation. Foucault explains that the “disciplines” were not one-off controls but “constant subjection.”47 This “subjection” to docility, to submitting to an exterior institutionalized demand for more sorority sisters despite valuing “personal space” as Rebecca, one of the women in the 16-girl said, resembles “constant subjection” to a larger institution. The house, a symbol of wealth and the embodiment of ABC sisterhood, asks women to check personal preference in the name of an all-encompassing collective, from wake through sleep.

Indeed, regulation in the name of the sorority is a core component to being in ABC. Culture and Media scholar Alison Winch argues that the “girlfriend gaze” is


47 Ibid.,
both “eroticized and de-libidinized [sic]” so that woman-on-woman friendship can remain “exclusiv[ly]” straight, as “homosexual desire” would threaten the very fabric of the “girlfriends’ intimacy.”48 I use the term “straight” here, as opposed to heterosexual, because of how it was used with me during interviews. As a result, it makes sense that every single ABC sister outwardly identifies as straight. Avery explained that while there are no non-straight members, nor have there ever been in her three+ years as a sister, that women who were would be welcomed. In an analogous sense to innocently claiming that non-white women would be welcomed, ABC’s structural practices are similarly as hostile to non-straight members. At the linguistic level, the term “sister” is a familial designation and therefore de-eroticized. Sisterhood connotes a wholly asexual, affective set of relationships. A sister could never see a fellow sister in a sexual capacity: that would be incestuous. As American Studies scholar Diana Turk writes, when sororities were first founded in the mid-nineteenth century, the term “sister” was adopted for the organizations in lieu of “friend” or “companion,” or “associate,” etc., to suggest the “mystic” and enduring bonds between women.49 Because there were originally so few women on college campuses, the women who were enrolled felt as though a women’s “collective” would help them to gain social, academic, and intellectual parity with their male peers, who were largely unaccepting.50 In turn, the sisters saw themselves as “link[s]” in the “chain” of “sisterhood,” which was seen as far more potent and infallible than mere camaraderie.51 The collective was only as strong as the weakest “link” and if

50 Ibid., 3.
51 Ibid., 4.
the women were to survive on campus, they needed to be closer than friends. These circumstances led to the permission of women’s organizations to have the authority to take care of, and even regulate the behavior of, each other. After all, they were family. To survive meant to be the most unified collective and to be the most unified collective, the nineteenth century sorority women needed to police behavior from within.

With this historical permission to regulate, it makes sense that Kate, a sophomore living in a four-person room, encouraged her privately bisexual roommate to keep her sexual preferences mum, because Kate assumed that many of the other ABC sisters would not accept the roommate’s sexuality. Much like “straight,” I use “bisexual” unlike a more encompassing term like “queer,” to remain within Kate’s vernacular and to be more accurate in what was said to me. Kate said that ABC sisters were already gossiping and speculating. She also said that she personally “didn’t care” but that she was just worried about her roommate because the Greek System in general was not welcoming to non-straight people. This is certainly true but I would also argue that Kate’s encouragement for her roommate’s secrecy comes from a place of asserting ABC’s straightness than mere support for her friend. Kate is straight, white, Jewish, and wealthy, as the majority of other ABC women are. The roommate, on the other hand, is white, Jewish, and wealthy, but with divergent sexual preferences, and therefore not fully in line with her sisters. Because social life is rallied around men, through parties and social events, not being straight would be obvious and difficult to hide. These social events (discussed in more detail in Chapter Two) and even the basic fixtures of socializing outside the sorority place men
and sexual relationships with men at the center of social and residential ABC life. Sylvie said that when her peers “don’t hook up with a guy” it is somewhat of a “failed night” and “they think they’re doing something wrong to the point of ‘why does no one want to hook up with me?’” To this end, in conjunction with the fact that men are prohibited from sleeping over at the ABC house, although this happens surreptitiously, assumes the women’s straightness. Not being straight is met with encouraging hiding the fact. Breaking actual rules with men’s sleeping over is met with turning a blind eye. ABC women permit for a breach in regulation in favor of core characteristics, like being straight, but quash deviation of a personal preference that has nothing to do with the organization’s law. Being straight is therefore more important than ABC’s rules. Because of institutional practices and regulations, ABC women, even from an assumption, are straight women. The roommate’s bisexuality was a demerit to her normativity, and Kate, as her sister, had therefore been tasked with her regulation. Avery similarly explained that she had a friend from home whose sorority had one non-straight member in it, and much like Kate’s discussion of her roommate, Avery explained that she had no problem with this, in theory, but instead worried about how a non-straight woman would fit in within the ABC scene. Many ABC women were aware of, and discussed the Greek System’s heteronormativity, and yet, ABC remains comprised of straight women. Avery’s worry functions as a subtle tactic of exclusion, much like Kate’s. As gender scholar Mimi Schippers writes, “pariah femininities” like being “a lesbian, a ‘slut,’ a shrew or ‘cock-teaser,’ a bitch,” symbolically mimic idealized masculinities.52 Schippers

argues, “to guarantee men’s exclusive access to these characteristics” – she gives the examples of “desire for the feminine object, physical strength, and authority” – then “other configurations of feminine characteristics must be defined as deviant and stigmatized.” In other words, because hegemonic masculinities are in relationship with hegemonic femininities to dominate in the name of maleness and masculinity over femaleness and femininity (with no identities seen as falling in between or outside these binaries), then similarly there must be a hierarchy of hegemonic femininities to ensure this gendered order. Avery’s and Kate’s assertion of being comfortable with queerness but simultaneously regulating it or wondering what its place would be within ABC solidifies hierarchy of straightness over “pariah femininities” and keeps ABC seen as hegemonically feminine in an acceptable way.

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The sisters fit the mold of ABC as much as they create it. This reciprocal relationship helps keep the population in the house constant, with white, wealthy, straight, Jewish women being the norm. And yet, just hitting these criteria is not enough to be a full ABC sister; one must be utterly devoted to the house, should live in the house, should watch oneself in the name of sisterhood while simultaneously regulating one’s sisters, and should have more contact and interactions with one’s sisters than one’s friends. In these criteria, ABC sisterhood is not merely an exclusionary organization but an institution that demands all-encompassing devotion. In other words, ABC sisterhood mimics both Erving Goffman’s “total institutions” and Lewis Coser’s “greedy institutions.”

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53 Ibid., 94-95.
Total and Greedy Institutions

A “total institution,” a term coined by sociologist Erving Goffman in 1961 in his book *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* is a “place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life.”

Examples of total institutions are boarding schools or monasteries. Goffman identifies four core elements to total institutions, the first that “sleep, play, and work” coalesce into one space, which happens in the ABC house. The second is that one’s daily schedule reflects that of other members of the institution, which similarly occurs in the ABC schedule in that the sisters eat together, attend parties together, and study together, although this regiment is not ordained, but socially supported. The third element is that there is a “single rational plan” that is supposed to “fulfill the official aims of the institution” and all activities are for this main goal, which for ABC women is (regulation in the name of) sisterhood.

Where ABC deviates from being a total institution is that Goffman argues that members of these institutions’ days tend to be tightly scheduled and that there generally exists a system of regulations and daily activities created by officials who are separate from the members of the institution. While there is an “Executive Board” in ABC, comprised of sisters who cycle in and out of leadership positions every year or semester, the sisters “slate” for positions; they indicate which positions they would be interested in and older members decide who, out of who is interested, would be the best fit. This is not democratically

55 Ibid., 5.
56 Ibid., 6.
elected but the sisters in power remain purportedly social equals to the sisters without leadership positions, and there is no separation physically or relationship-wise, between those with and those without positions of power. Unlike Goffman’s understanding of a “body of officials,” who are separated from the general population without option for movement between those in power and those without, the Executive Board is internally selected and a representative government.57

While ABC mirrors a “total institution” in its physical separation and entire devotion to an institutional goal, the fact that sisters are technically still in ABC if they do not live in the house (or if they are freshwomen, seniors, or even alumni) and the fact that ABC asks for one’s primary devotion to be to the sorority means that ABC also reads like one of sociologist Lewis Coser’s “greedy institutions,” coined in his 1974 book, Greedy Institutions: Patterns of Undivided Commitment. Coser acknowledges the similarities between his term and Goffman’s. But whereas Goffman focuses on physical delineation, “greedy institutions…seek exclusive and undivided loyalty and they attempt to reduce the claims of competing roles and status positions on those they wish to encompass within their boundaries.”58 He gives the examples of a priesthood or “utopian communit[y].”59 Greedy institutions, unlike total institutions, need not be separated physically, but nevertheless “erect symbolic boundaries” to separate she who is inside and she who is outside.60 Coser argues that greedy institutions do not coerce their members into joining, but “rely on voluntary

57 Ibid.
59 Ibid., 5.
60 Ibid., 6.
compliance” that make them seem “highly desirable to the participants.”61 These participants originally had commitments to other institutions, but who, through joining the greedy institution, loosen their affiliations with external groups. Of course, joining ABC is a choice, and the women who choose to join ABC either do so because they wanted to be in ABC, or they wanted to be in a sorority and were left with ABC (more on Rush, selection, and futurity in Chapter Three). However, what underlie both choices is a desire to join and a desire to have one’s collegiate experience imbued by ABC. Caroline said, “Becoming a member of ABC really changed my college experience. Best thing I’ve ever done in my life. I can say that as a fact.” Independent women join ABC and are made into sisters. These women could have perhaps joined another sorority, or if they were dissatisfied could have disaffiliated, but their commitment (regardless of the pressures that ABC puts on them to regulate their behavior or to undo personal preferences or to dress in certain ways when going to parties) shows the desirability of being in ABC at Big State U. Caroline’s experience, much like the experience of many of her sisters, mirrors a voluntary commitment to an institution that greedily asks members to shed other identities in favor of ABC. There is no coercion, there is just sisterhood.

In terms of ABC’s day-to-day, Kelsey explained that if she is not in class or at the gym, then she is inside the ABC house, as are most of the other sisters. That is not to say that some sisters are not engaging in other spaces. Carmen and Sylvie volunteer once a week in an elementary school. Many sisters work with Big State U’s Dance Marathon, a philanthropy event to raise money for the local children’s

61 Ibid.
hospital, but this event is hosted and danced by fraternity and sorority members and each house tends to send participants. Involvement in other arenas rarely comes entirely divorced from being in ABC, and if women do have outside-the-house commitments, they tend to be in conjunction with either another ABC sister or with Big State U’s Greek Life.

Lillie, however, joined Mock Trial to the contempt of her sisters. Being in Mock Trial, Lillie explained, meant that she is unable to attend every house meeting and has to skip other chapter programming. Lillie explained that she has the lowest number of House Points out of any other sister because she has to skip events to go to Mock Trial meetings. House points are doled out for “good” behavior, for going to events that are not required, for example, and the sisters with the most points get first pick for which rooms they live in the following semesters. “Bad” behavior, like skipping required weekly chapter meetings or not having high enough grades, is brought to the attention of a Standards Committee, comprising of sisters in the house, who adjudicate this behavior and can distribute penalties. Such sanctions can include being the sober monitor at a Date Party. The Standards Committee functions to enforce ABC conformity and entire identity devotion. There is no shrouding the purpose of the committee; it is in place to make sure that the ABC women adhere to the selected values; that they are white, wealthy, straight, and Jewish is not enough to be part of ABC. The women must be present at all meetings, must put ABC before other activities like Mock Trial, or their membership becomes provisional and they

62 On the “Frequently Asked Questions” page of the Dance Marathon website for Big State U, one of the questions is whether a student is permitted to be involved if they are not part of Greek Life and if so, whether they will get “less” out of the experience. Answer: anyone is welcome and there are some (but not many) dancers that are not part of Greek Life.
are not permitted to engage as fully as other sisters. And yet, on the other hand, if the women do not have high enough grades, if they are attending too much to ABC at the expense of academics, they are similarly sanctioned. Each woman is stuck in a continuum of regulation. Lillie joined Mock Trial to supplement her Pre-Law major. However, the system of rewards and demerits encourages total and greedy membership to ABC, with outside interests labeled less important. Lillie must be an ABC sister first and a Pre-Law student second to be able to live where she wants to in the house and to evade punishment from the Standards Committee.

The argument that sororities are “greedy” is not new. In Paying for the Party: How College Maintains Inequality, sociologists Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Laura T. Hamilton argue that being in some sororities require “demands on students’ time, commitment, and efforts [to] limit their abilities to study, work, sustain romantic relationships, or form friendships outside of the Greek system.”63 And while this is true, I am not just arguing that ABC “demands” student time but that it demands ideological and identity fusion in the name of sorority. Yes, the women must be devoted to the house, but not just. It is not simply that their only engagement should be in ABC but that their identity must in turn become that of ABC. Coser argues that in greedy institutions, because members find themselves ideologically and emblematically, or for Goffman physically, separated from a general population, there are few competitors for “social identity” and therefore members “find their identity anchored to the symbolic universe of the restricted role-set of the greedy

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institution.” For ABC sisters, regulation means a privileging of collective ABC identity over external identities. Melissa, a senior, said that sorority women “use their sorority as a way to identify themselves.” It is not just a time commitment or an attempt to limit outside engagements but a mechanism of control and fusion of identity in the name of sisterhood.

Alison Winch explains this woman-on-woman policing. She argues that “girlfriendship” or neoliberal postfeminist friendships in the digital age, are “strategic” relationships that look to strengthen each “girlfriend’s” “feminine normativity” by placing her at once in competition with her fellow girlfriends and in a position of support. Each girlfriend is a policing entity, aimed at improving specific (and chosen) “dominant femininities,” (diametrically opposed to Schippers’ “pariah femininities”) through the “gynaeoptic” gaze whereby every girlfriend watches every other girlfriend. Extrapolated from Michel Foucault’s “Panopticon,” which explains how the few can watch the many and the many then internalize this regulation to self-police, the “gynaeptic” diverges in its use of disseminated and supposedly equal regulating power. In the gynaeopticon, the many watch the many. The gynaeopticon is your set of friends, your clique, your sisters. The gynaeopticon is friend and foe, and under the fallacious neologism of ‘being for your own good.’ Girlfrind culture, sorority culture, unsurprisingly is set up to strengthen each

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64 Coser, Lewis A. Greedy Institutions: Patterns of Undivided Commitment: 8.
65 Winch, Alison. Girlfriends and Postfeminist Sisterhood: 3.
66 Ibid., 178, 21; Schippers, Mimi. "Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony." 95; Winch, Alison. Girlfriends and Postfeminist Sisterhood.
woman’s whiteness, straightness, and wealthy identities. Noticeably absent from girlfriend culture are people of color, queer people, non-binary people, and people from low-income backgrounds. Noticeably absent from ABC are people are color, queer people, non-binary people, and people from low-income backgrounds.

This type of regulation has implications that reach beyond policing. What makes sororities especially curious, is that they are not just regulating for the sake of regulation, like a total or greedy institution would to hold power over its constituents, but also to the end of being perceived as cooler than their peers and to gather a new pledge class. Every year ABC must pull in approximately 50 new sisters because approximately 50 sisters graduate. ABC is not just a total and greedy institution, but an institution into which sisters must buy and eventually sell. ABC markets, advertises, and competes for new sisters. ABC is not just a sisterhood then, but a brand.

The ABC Brand

David Harvey’s definition of neoliberalism takes into account both economic theories and how economic and financial ideology seep into “a hegemonic mode of discourse” socially, culturally, and intellectually. Harvey, an anthropologist and geographer, argues that neoliberalism, on a basic level, is a

theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.

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68 See Winch, Alison. *Girlfriends and Postfeminist Sisterhood*: 6
69 See Ibid., 3.
71 Ibid.
In terms of discourse, he argues that neoliberalism “has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world.” 72 This aspect of neoliberalism, in terms of how lives are lived and the world constructed, relates most closely to how ABC is not merely an organization that women at Big State U opt to join but a neoliberal brand, within which women identify. Communication scholar Sarah Banet-Weiser zeros into the idea of how a brand and a person can intertwine. She defines the “brand” as the intersection between “marketing, a product, and consumers,” which for ABC, means the intersection between what ABC puts forward to non-members as what its sisterhood is, what sisterhood actually means, and how the rest of the campus, including potential new members, engage with ABC. 73 Banet-Weiser argues that whereas previously brands were used as “an economic tool” with social or cultural implications in order to make a commodity stick with a consumer, in contemporary times, brands pertain to “culture as much as they are about economics,” and the experience of the brand is “a story told to the consumer.” 74 This story is beyond just acknowledging the brand; this story is “familiar, intimate, personal, a story with unique history…The brand is the essence of what will be experienced; the brand is a promise as much as a practicality.” 75 She gives the examples of people not just opting for but more critically identifying with Coke instead of Pepsi (“I drink Coke, not Pepsi”) or Macs instead of PCs (“I’m a Mac

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72 Ibid., 3.
74 Ibid., 4, emphasis hers.
75 Ibid.
user”). She also explains that not only products but also previously un-commodifi able entities, such as a “melody” or a “racial identity,” can become a brand. Brands impact “the way we understand who we are, how we organize ourselves in the world, [and] what stories we tell ourselves about ourselves.” ABC therefore exists not as just an organization, but as a brand. It is not just the promise of sisterhood but the interplay between ABC, as an entity and an idea(l), and the women who participate. Recall that Sylvie explained that “each house has different personalities” and each is known for certain things. For ABC, the branded identity is women who “go out” on the weekends as Grace explained and are “polite” at fraternity parties as Caroline explained if they do not want to get scolded by their Executive Board (more on this in Chapter Two); ABC is a sisterhood of women who are devoted to ABC while subordinating outside-the-sorority engagements and who are so dedicated they hold facsimilied ABC identities. Hannah explained that when choosing a house, finding women “like me” meant “everything.” She explained, “from the way we dressed, the way we talked, to the things we’re interested in, and the things we value, and also religion obviously” ABC’s women were similar. I am not arguing that the women in ABC are a monolith. That is not true and just from speaking with each woman for 30 to 60 minutes their individual differences were apparent. What I am arguing is that ABC, as an institution in the neoliberal age that exists within a milieu where each house has “personalities,” means that the women within are marked by certain characteristics that bind them together as ABC. These mean the demographic basics like whiteness and Jewishness, but it also means having

76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., 5.
people think they are “the cool girls…who are down to have a good time” as Riley explained, or the “really sweet, the smart girls, the smart partiers, the studious girls” as she also said. This branding happens both for in-group cohesion, as a sense of identity making, and because ABC’s population is ever-changing with a quarter of its members leaving each year and therefore the need for another 50+ women to buy into the brand of ABC each year, when there are twenty-two other Panhellenic sororities from which to choose. As Banet-Weiser argues, the brand is the intersection of “marketing, a product, and consumers” and therefore how others perceive ABC changes sisterhood immensely, especially in terms of how women behave at fraternities and how and which women are selected.\footnote{Ibid., 3.} It is not just a product to be bought but an ideal to buy into.

Similarly, if the ABC sorority did not fit its brand, if its members lackadaisically participated or were not white, wealthy, straight, and Jewish, than their role within the Greek community would (f)alter. If ABC’s brand is that of women who love the house, who spend all their time there, who are not visibly different from the Greek ideals (more on these ideals in Chapter Two), then deviation must be diminished. Cultural and social capital rises when normativity rises, and, in turn, the ABC brand must be less of merely an organization and more of a “story” into which the women weave themselves.\footnote{Ibid., 4.} ABC, as a brand, is maintained by and promoted through the women who are within it. In this sense, the ABC members contribute to creating the brand just as much as they are controlled by the confines of what the brand demands. It is an insidious dance of control. For the sisters, the ABC
brand is “familiar, intimate, [and] personal;” it is the narrative within which women live. This state of gynaeoptic neoliberal policing, whereby the women market a sorority-brand that demands total and greedy identification and de-prioritization of other personal identities in favor of meeting it, works to keep ABC sisters unified, to let outsiders have an understanding of who and what ABC is, and to attract potential new sisters. The gynaeopticon functions as the invisible hand of the ABC brand. It ensures that ABC remains a certain way. As Grace explained, “I now watch myself a little bit more…because if one person only knows me then they’ll think my organization is like me.”

81 Ibid.
ABC’s Sisterhood

Demographic Uniformity + Dedication to ABC = Total Institution and Greedy Institution

Total Institution and Greedy Institution + Marketing to potential new members = ABC, The Brand

Figure 1: Equations to show how being in ABC means total and greedy involvement, but not only. Needing to market to 50+ women each year makes ABC a brand as much as a product.
Chapter Two:

ABC Within the Greek Community

Introduction

Although ABC exists, in theory, as a singular sororal entity, it is a part of a larger white Greek Community, comprised of the Panhellenic Association/Panhellenic Council, the central governing body of sororities that are, in all by name, historically white. Nationally, Panhellenic sororities are part of the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC). Because sorority national identity is not the focus on this thesis, I will use “Panhellenic” to refer to the committee of white (in everything by name) sororities at Big State U because day-to-day engagements trump national affiliations. The non-white organizations, both sororities and fraternities, are part of two other councils, the National Multicultural Greek Council (MCGC) that supports Latinx, Asian, and multicultural sororities and fraternities, and the National Pan-Hellenic Council, Inc., (NPHC), which represents the “Divine Nine,” or nine historically black sororities and fraternities. There are other organizations that lie outside of all national councils. The other (historically white in everything but name) fraternities are represented through the North-American Interfraternity Conference, with the day-to-day regulation called the Interfraternity Council (IFC). Much like the use of “Panhellenic,” I will refer to the committee of white (in everything but name) fraternities as the “IFC” because the quotidian matters more than national brotherhood for this thesis.
Panhellenic creates overarching laws for its sorority members. Each chapter sends an ambassador to represent its house in the association. While there exists a council that engages all fraternity and sorority members, regardless of gender/sex and regardless of race, more regulations for ABC come from the more immediate council, Panhellenic. This year, for example, Panhellenic made a rule that all its sororities must take 55 new members. Every Panhellenic sorority must comply. Much like how “bad” behavior gets punished within ABC, “bad” behavior gets punished within Panhellenic as well in the form of chapter probation, suspension, or even expulsion.82

Considering the push to remain wholly devoted to one’s chapter, it makes sense that overarching regulations would come from a council of analogous groups (i.e., Panhellenic white sororities for ABC) as opposed to an overarching disparate one. Still, the majority of ABC rules come from ABC, both internally and nationally. Part of the appeal of Greek organizations, from their conception, was that they were and continue to be largely self-regulated institutions, free from substantial external oversight.83 Stemming from this drive at insularity, in the contemporary era, organizations with predominate white membership have been historically white. Although the Panhellenic sororities and IFC fraternities do not now identify as white, up until the 1960s when the 1964 Civil Rights Act made overt exclusion illegal and the federal government threatened to cut off funding to universities, many of these organizations had race-based restrictive laws in their Constitutions.84 These

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82 Expulsion, and even suspension, is less common for sororities than for fraternities. Fraternities regularly cycle through suspension and even expulsion, mostly because of hazing rituals (that sororities do not engage with to the same extent) and for party related infractions (and women are not allowed to host parties).
83 Turk, Diana B. Bound by a Mighty Vow: Sisterhood and Women's Fraternities, 1870-1920: 2.
restrictions were designed to exclude Jews, non-Christians, Catholics, black students, Asian students, Latinx students, etc., who did not fit the “Aryan blood” requirement that some organizations required. After these clauses were (sometimes forcibly) removed, some chapters continued the discrimination in other forms, like asking for pictures of the potential new members or giving preference to legacy students.

At Big State U, while the overt discrimination has ended, the more subtle politics have proliferated. At the most basic, whiteness becomes invisible through the omission of identifying the IFC and Panhellenic organizations as historically white organizations, despite the fact that the vast majority of members always have been and continue to be white. Linguistically therefore, IFC, Panhellenic, and the sororities and fraternities within become deemed inclusive and innocent, organizations for all. What is curious then, is that ABC functions within the Panhellenic governing body. It is not that the other sororities stand for Christian values - most actually claim secularism - but that they do not celebrate “Jewish values” as ABC does. The MCGC, NPHC, and unaffiliated sororities reside (metaphorically and literally) within entirely separate milieus with separate practices, policies, ideologies, spaces, and values. While the MCGC and NPHC organizations are fertile locations for academic exploration, the focus of this thesis is on a case-study of ABC within the Greek community. ABC is a Panhellenic sorority and therefore most of the inquiry throughout this chapter will similarly be so. Moreover,

85 See Ibid., especially in reference to Ross’ discussion about the Phi Delta Theta’s (a fraternity) constitution that permitted “only white persons of full Aryan blood, not less than sixteen years of age” to join. See also Syrett, Nicholas L. The Company He Keeps: 69 for a discussion about how exclusion worked in fraternities specifically. Lastly, see Turk, Diana B. Bound by a Mighty Vow: Sisterhood and Women's Fraternities, 1870-1920: 161-163 for sorority exclusion.
86 Ross, Lawrence C. Blackballed: The Black and White Politics of Race on America's Campuses: 46.
the fact that the vast majority of women I spoke with were in the same sorority, and it took concerted effort to interview other students, speaks to the demands of participation that ABC asks and how strong of a pull it has to keeping its members insular. As previously mentioned, the interviews were conducted through snowball sampling, a process which inherently limits those sampled to others within similar or tangential social networks. All of the students I spoke with were members of Panhellenic or IFC organizations. Only one woman talked about a good friend of hers in a non-Panhellenic sorority. Yet, I recognize that this is one of the limitations of this project. Regardless, as will be explored in this chapter, ABC exists as a “middle tier” Panhellenic sorority, not the coolest or the most regarded within Big State U’s Greek System, but not in the “bottom tier” of the 23 Panhellenic-recognized sororities.

How “cool” or “not cool” ABC and other organizations are vary by school depending on that system’s values and therefore I am not arguing that ABC is a middle tier sorority at every university nor that the tenets of coolness at Big State U are the same for other universities. I can only discuss Big State U’s tier system. Their tier system is a constructed mechanism of social control, amorphous and nebulous, participated in on a de facto and involuntarily basis. Being a Panhellenic sorority means being ranked in the tier system. The tier system places chapters in conversation and competition with one another, at once forcing the chapter to assert the chapter-brand and to continuously attempt to become higher tier. ABC bolsters and promulgates this ideology, reaps the social rewards when it succeeds in performing “coolness” but remains restrained with campus anti-Semitism. As is
detailed in the following pages, the tier system places ABC (and the other Panhellenic sororities in turn) in a space of never arriving at their goals but regardless always striving.

*The Tier System*

“Fetishism of commodities,” or Commodity Fetish, as put coined by Karl Marx, describes the way in which the labor that goes into producing a product is erased in favor of seeing the commodity as a good in and of itself.\(^{87}\) He describes that this in turn makes us see the value in or a price of a good as objective, as opposed to subjective. By attributing this mystical power of value to the commodity, we ascribe naturalism to that which has been subjectively created.\(^{88}\)

The Greek tier system at Big State U functions within such a theory. Within the Panhellenic and IFC organizations, social value is assigned to all houses in the form of a three-tiered social system. Top tier includes the “best” houses, middle tier the “average” ones, and bottom tier the “worst” ones. When I inquired into how the tier system was created, no interviewee could fully explain. Some thought that it had always been in place; some thought it was the way things organically unfolded, and some thought that the tier system was “ridiculous” but just part of being in Greek Life. For the purpose of this thesis, the history of the tier system is unimportant, but what is necessary are the implications of its potency and purported objectivity.

Perhaps the most crucial, and the most obvious, fact about the tier system is that it exists solely within Panhellenic and IFC “social spaces.” I use the term in the same way that Pierre Bourdieu does in *Language and Symbolic Power* to describe the (multi-dimensional) space constructed on the basis of principles of differentiation or distribution constituted by the set of properties active in the social universe under consideration, that is, able to confer force or power on their possessor in that universe. Agents and groups of agents are thus defined by their *relative positions* in this space.89

In this sense, in conjunction with Marx’s idea, the Greek system at Big State U is a social space where that which is aspired to has become fallaciously naturalized, and those who occupy the space control the tenets of this aspiration. There is nothing truly better about certain groups or anything truly “middle tier” about ABC as these are attributes created through the multiplicity of social interactions and constructed values. It is not as though one sorority has stronger sisterhood or does more philanthropy but that each sorority, regardless of its efforts or real-life engagements, is socially ranked. While of course there are some substantial differences between each Panhellenic organization, overall the sororities are more or less homologous: each stands for sisterhood, each participates in philanthropy, each parties with IFC fraternities, 19 of the 23 have live-in chapter houses, each tries to recruit the “best” pledge class, etc.90 A good analogy would be between green apples versus yellow apples versus red ones. What stands true to this analogy, as with the ranking of the sororities at Big State U, is that there is nothing natural about their value, despite the

90 For the 2017-2018 school year, and perhaps beyond, two un-housed sororities will take over two fraternity houses that have been asked to leave Big State U’s campus. One sorority has been asked to leave as well for the upcoming year, and perhaps beyond.
fact that some are fetishized, in a Marxian sense, and some are demonized. As such, the Greek members must create the internalized rankings.

Avery firmly believes that the fraternities create the tier system. She explains, “when you text them [the fraternities] the ball is in their court and they can say no” to a potential pairing. A “pairing” is a planned party between one sorority and one fraternity, within Panhellenic and IFC. Virginia, who had been ABC’s Social Chair and therefore in charge of ABC’s calendar throughout the year, planning which fraternity the sorority would be at throughout each week/weekend, spent a substantial amount of time cold-reaching out to fraternities’ Social Chairs. Virginia had a list of all the fraternities’ Social Chairs’ numbers and in order to make sure that ABC’s social calendar was booked, meaning Tuesday through Saturday, although this schedule may be interrupted during football season for tailgates during Saturday morning/afternoon, she would reach out to fraternities to see if they wanted to pair with ABC. Grace explained that one time ABC’s Social Chair tried to plan an event – dinner and bowling, not a pair – with a NPHC fraternity (a historically black fraternity) but that no one from her house wanted to go.

No one really knew what they were going to get themselves into. No one really knew if they’d talk to us; I’m sure they thought the exact same thing. I’m sure everyone thought that we’d all be there but be very polarized and only talk to each other, like ‘what are we doing here this is so dumb’ and they’d be doing the same thing.

She said that the event ended up being very “segregated.” This segregation is so socially powerful, to the extent that ABC would never pair with a non-IFC fraternity. This was an event, not a party. All social hierarchy for ABC’s “social space” is held within the IFC fraternities and the Panhellenic sororities. The MCGC
and NPHC sororities and fraternities are not pitted against members of the Panhellenic or IFC councils, nor are IFC fraternities valued against Panhellenic sororities in any form. The IFC and Panhellenic tiers run parallel so top tier IFC fraternities tend to pair with top tier Panhellenic sororities, middle tier with middle tier, etc. The tier system is entirely stratified by sex and race but invisibilizes the latter distinction in that all members of the Panhellenic tier system are white. To not recognize whiteness is to attempt to erase its constructed power.91 Grace’s rationale that the non-IFC fraternity would be just as unenthusiastic ignores the asymmetry of power between white organizations and non-white organizations. While the fraternity surely might not have been excited, the entire interaction stinks of gawking and apocryphal white victimhood. ABC’s critical take away was discomfort for itself; a house that is already socially in a position of power with regard to this NPHC chapter. Whiteness becomes that which is normalized and expected with those without whiteness not even being considered on the tier scale. White organizations try to socially bury both the non-white organizations and their own structural power. While the tier system has amorphous tenets that no single interviewee could describe, one of the major values that I could ascertain through how interviewees spoke about social life is how there is a drive for whiteness, being white, and yet making whiteness invisible.

In terms of gender/sex-based ranking (defined here as synonymous, because that was how it was defined for me in the interviews), not taking into account non-

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white, multicultural, and women of color sororities into the tier system further precludes these organizations and women from social inclusion. This actually works to further relegate these women and organizations into social obscurity, solely on the basis of race and ethnicity. Although including MCGC and NPHC sororities in the tier system would be just an act of further hierarchical regulation of women, the act of invizibilizing these organizations, of sequestering them outside of that which is ranked, acts to place these women in what I will call the definitive bottom tier. They are entirely outside the Panhellenic and IFC social schema. They are wholly overlooked. Grace thought it would be “cool” if “someone” from a non-IFC fraternity (non-white fraternity) “were to come and talk to our chapter like during Chapter even if its two minutes and be like ‘hey this is what we’re about. See us around campus, come say hi’ or something.” While in no way should a non-white house have to explain “what we’re about” to an entire white sorority, moreover, this just shows the true lack of understanding and social rifts that are rooted in race and race privilege. In this sense, even the “bottom tier” Panhellenic sororities hold more social and cultural capital than non-white sororities, purely in that they are acknowledged.

As a corollary, pairings would also never happen between two Panhellenic sororities. There are some four-organization parties where two sororities and one fraternity attend a party at another fraternity’s house, or six-organization parties with three sororities and three fraternities, etc., but the sororities do not have co-sponsored parties. Part of the reason for this is that most national sororities, including ABC, as per their charter, are not permitted to drink alcohol in their homes. Almost
definitionally, the parties revolve around alcohol (more later in this chapter). Rebecca commented that the sororities could in theory do events together, she gave the example of an ice cream social, but they do not. In this sense the sororities remain as isolated entities and the pairings remain exclusively male-oriented and heterosexually dominated. Ice cream social versus alcohol-filled party is quite different in its goals, with innocuous sugar highs for the former and alcohol-and-drug laden “hooking up” for the latter. There would not be a pairing with two sororities because pairings are for “meet[ing] guys” as Caroline explained. Not only are ABC members expected to be exclusively devoted to ABC, as was explained in the last chapter, but they are socially separated from the other sorority women because of the culture of pairing. Each sorority is an isolated domain within a system that is supposedly designed as a Panhellenic community. Grace said that it is “awkward” to go into another sorority’s house. She explained that not many of the sisters have friends in other houses. It is “uncomfortable” and “not an accepted thing to do.” This isolation creates even greater pressure to engage with ABC because it becomes the only space in which an ABC woman can function.

Curiously then, is that even without social interaction, the Panhellenic sororities still vie for spots in the tier system. Although they do not exist utterly inharmoniously, they are in hierarchical competition with each other. Alison Winch argues, “Neoliberal postfeminist culture prizes a competitive edge. It encourages loops of comparison, feedback, and aggression among women in order to normalize the drive for hypervisibility.”92 The women in ABC are aware of this competition.

Melissa, a senior, described the women in top-tier houses as believing the “inevitable, ‘I’m better than you; I’m cooler.’ They use their sorority as a way to identify themselves so of course people are going to use that to their advantage.” This “advantage” is the perpetual assertion of “coolness” as through Bourdieu’s idea of cultural capital. Within the Panhellenic social space, each house’s economic capital is, for the most part, homogeneous. Each house has money from alumni and each member pays yearly dues (with some margin of difference). However, cultural capital exists within the tier system in terms of being normatively white and being “fun.” Virginia described the members of top tier organizations as “really beautiful and hot guys, really athletic looking, you know what I mean, just like the stereotypical college experience. Always going out...Really beautiful girls, skinny, [that] kind of thing.” Beauty is a topic that Bourdieu notes in his discussion of “visible” and “invisible” capital. He argued that the “petit-bourgeois woman” values beauty both for its “aesthetic” significance and for its “moral” significance. He notes, “beauty can thus be simultaneously a gift of nature and a conquest of merit.” For the Panhellenic women, beauty and the strive to be beautiful is rooted in the organizations’ attempts to invisibilize class and race. To be beautiful in this social space is to be white, which is taken for granted because the only women involved are white women. Further, the way Virginia explained beauty to me – “you know what I mean” – assumed that there is a collective narrative of what beauty is as opposed to a subjectivity largely rooted in normativity and ascribed power. Similarly, to be beautiful in this space is to be “skinny,” which, while some women are naturally,

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others spend much of their time and energy becoming. As Kelsey explained, if she is not at the house or in class, she is at the gym. And yet, to only spend time at the gym, to not hold an on-campus job, to have the funds to participate in a social space that demands and prizes skinniness is to similarly invisibilize the class that these women come from. They are white and they are wealthy, but not because it is something they are confronted with but because it is normalized and understood.

However, the case of ABC is curious because while they are a Panhellenic sorority, and have been assigned whiteness, they are committed to Judaism. Avery talked about a Jewish fraternity that many of the women in the house have friends in but that “wouldn’t pair with us because we’re not top tier [but] they’re Jewish too.” Riley agreed that there are houses that would not even consider pairing with ABC because it is a Jewish house. Grace added, “we only pair with houses on our tier.” Considering the fact that the sororities are like comparing green apples to yellow apples to red apples, the definition of ABC as “middle tier” has to do, therefore, entirely, with its Jewishness. Top tier houses will not pair with ABC because it is middle tier and it is middle tier because it is Jewish.
Figure 2: This chart shows how ABC functions within the social tier system at Big State U that places ABC in a nebulous social space with regards to privilege and whiteness and further sequesters and places at the definitive bottom non-white houses. Not including non-white houses in the tier system, works to further relegate these women and organizations into social obscurity, only with regard to race and ethnicity.
This is not to say that ABC does not sometimes pair “higher.” Leah explained, “the top tier girls will pair with the top tier guys, so for us, we aren’t top tier, so if we pair with a really cool frat it’d be like ‘oh my gosh’…it would rarely happen again or they’d drop us.” Pairing with better fraternities bolsters ABC’s tier status in the eyes of their peers, as much of the tier system has to do with what many ABC women call “perception,” meaning how others perceive and what they believe about ABC as a house. If capital is held in whiteness, in “fun” and “beauty,” and in mystical “coolness,” then having better-tiered fraternities want to pair with ABC suggests to the white Greek system that ABC is more desirable and maybe should be assigned a higher tier than previously assumed. Perhaps the top tier fraternity’s value rubs off on ABC or perhaps their “fun” can palliate their Jewishness. However, because cross-tier pairings rarely happen, it would most likely be a status blow to the more revered group and greeted tepidly by that organization.

This is also not to say that ABC does not try to become higher tier. ABC attempts to jump tiers through seeking a “better” pledge class (more in Chapter Three) and performing certain behaviors at the pairs while quashing others (more in the next section). Briefly, in terms of the former, Riley explained that she wished prospective members would choose ABC as their first choice sorority, not a third option during Rush. She wants women who see ABC in the way that she does now, although she admitted that the lure of “better” houses is quite strong and she was enchanted with them as well. ABC, therefore, is in a continuous state of “status anxiety,” defined by writer Alain de Botton as a “worry…that we are in danger of failing to conform to the ideals of success laid down by our society,” in this case the
white Greek System, “and that we may as a result be stripped of dignity and respect” in this case, a dropped tier.\textsuperscript{94} He argues, “our position on the [social] ladder is a matter of such concern….because our self-conception is so dependent upon what others make of us.”\textsuperscript{95} ABC is middle tier because they and their peers believe them to be such. There is nothing natural about their designation, but only certain groups through subjective means – “pretty” and more “fun” groups – have been deemed “cooler” á la Commodity Fetish. And yet, ABC will always have “status anxiety” because it will never, despite its best efforts, be top tier. It is too Jewish and exists firmly within a politic that celebrates whiteness (purely), wealth, a lack of diversity or inclusion, and normative beauty as per Virginia’s description, as its tenets of hierarchy.

The tier system works because everyone knows who is in what tier but neither those perceived at the bottom nor at the top can achieve true premiere status. Although it is less understood how the tier system originated, it is institutionalized, and as such, hard to fluidly maneuver. The drive to be “cooler” is too strong and strategies to be “in” and “out” too esoteric. It is merely accepted social narrative. This subtle acknowledgement also works to keep the tiers solidified, as collective acceptance of ideology helps to facilitate the furthering of the ideology. If everyone believes it, it becomes fact.

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 4.
The Pairings

While half of the tier system seems to be rooted in whiteness, the other cultural capital lies in who pairs with whom and the pairings’ social media outcomes. As aforementioned, a pair(ing) is a planned party between one sorority and one fraternity. The Social Chair of the sorority, for example Virginia, texts the Social Chair of specific fraternities, inquiring about the fraternities’ Tuesday through Saturday schedules for the semester and asking whether one or more days would work for these parties. Virginia explained that while some of the fraternities would claim that they were busy, she could never know whether they were lying because of ABC’s tier status relative to their own or whether they were truly busy. Avery summarized this by saying, “the ball is in their court and they can say no.” And yet, in this system of cold-texting, while the fraternities do obviously have more power and therefore ability to dictate social life, the sorority women are choosing to engage with the fraternities; they are not being forced. The women hold agency; they can opt to reach out to certain fraternities and decide not to for others. While the entire system of planning parties does put “the ball” in the fraternities’ court, the sorority women are not wholly victims. Though, on the other hand, the decision to pair is not necessarily the same as the choice to do so. If the process of pairing is naturalized, if it is what is socially accepted/expected by being in a Panhellenic sorority, then there is little option not to pair. Especially if ABC wishes to remain socially engaged with the IFC fraternities and socially relevant with the Panhellenic sororities, there is no option to opt out entirely. There is only movement within the system with electing not to pair leading to social obscurity. As such, Grace called pairs the “social norm,”
acknowledging that it is “accepted by both sides,” meaning sororities and fraternities. She said that even though some of “the guys” in the fraternity chapters are “jackasses” or “rude,” pairing is and will continue to be the ways that ABC and other sororities/fraternities will interact. She said, “It’s kind of sad but it is what it is and I don’t know how to change that unless you change the thought process of every single person in Greek Life, which is over 8,000 students, which is never going to happen.”

As for the actual parties themselves, they happen on fraternity “party floors” or in basements maintained specifically for parties. Sometimes if there is a formal event or a Date Party, parties will be at external venues, but never in the sororities. Regardless, Hannah explained her nights out to me by beginning with, “when we have a party…” This ownership is utterly false. Beyond ABC’s being prohibited from throwing parties in the house as per national mandate, the pairings are entirely planned by and financially supported through fraternities. They pay for the decorations; they pay for the alcohol; they pay for the gas in the cars that “pledges,” new fraternity members, drive to pick up the sisters when they are ready to come over (called “pledge rides”). Chad, one of the few men I spoke with who is in a Jewish fraternity, described the party spaces as “grimy” and “dark” and that there is “something fun” about being in a place where everyone is trying to “hook-up.”

96 As mentioned in the previous chapter, hook-up culture is a ripe place for contemporary research but it is not the primary topic of this thesis and therefore will not be explored in significant depth. Those looking for more information should read: Bogle, Kathleen A. Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus. 2008. Web. Garcia, Justin R., et al. "Sexual Hookup Culture: A Review." Review of General Psychology. 16.2 (2012): 161-76. Web. The actual “hooking-up” usually happens at the fraternity as well, as men are not allowed upstairs in the sororities, as per national regulation, although this does happen. Sometimes the men sleep 100 per room, called a “cold dorm,” or in other words, the entire live-in fraternity sleeps in the same room, thereby queering the space of the private and the public, the intimate and the social, and the sexual and the ascetic.
ABC women also described the pairings positively, commending, as Caroline did, the “ratio between boys and girls” and the fact that it is “not repetitive” because the vibrant social calendar ensures that she is “able to meet guys.”

A night with a pair that ABC is excited about looks like this: the ABC women begin in their chapter house by getting dressed, in styles that often are selected for all sisters to wear, putting on makeup, all the while “pre-gaming” (drinking before the party even though they are not allowed to have the alcohol in the house), and eventually texting fraternity members to send the pledge rides to pick them up and drive them to the fraternity. Once the women arrive at the fraternity they check in with their sober monitors, sisters who have been designated not to drink that night and in turn be tasked with the well being of their drunk counterparts, as well as signing in with the fraternity. Then, the men and the women mingle, dance, maybe go upstairs (though the ABC sober monitors prefer that the sisters stay in the main party space where they can keep track of them), and take pictures for Instagram, until midnight, when the women can choose to check-out with their sober monitor and with the fraternity and leave the house, or choose to stay at the party later.

When the ABC women are not excited about the fraternity pair for that night, generally if they think that the men are in a lower tier, or if they have not paired with them before and do not know anyone in the house, the same routine as the above ensues, except that the women tend to pre-game more so as to be drunker upon arrival; they will not mingle and will instead divide to opposite sides of the party space by gender, the sisters still taking pictures, but not going upstairs as much because they do not know the men in the house, again until midnight, when the
women choose to leave, sometimes lining up to do so, and opting to go to another pairing that has similarly “opened up” at midnight.

While alcohol is ubiquitous in the pairs, the topic of alcohol use in Greek Life scholarship has been heavily covered. Rather, for this thesis that looks at the intersection of identity, institution, and power, what is curious about the pairings is that the ABC sisters regulate fellow sisters’ behaviors more than the men regulate theirs. Although pairings are, almost definitionally, heterosexual spaces, they are not wholly unequal spaces. Yes, from the moment that the sorority Social Chair reaches out to the fraternity Social Chair to the moment that the final girl leaves the house, the pairs are phallocentric, in that sorority women are brought to fraternity houses with the aim, for the fraternity, of sex – as James noted, his fraternity always tries to pair with “hotter, wilder girls” who are more likely to “party, drink, smoke, do coke” and ultimately hook-up (defined in any iteration). But the women actively engage in pre-game culture with just their sisters, thereby creating a women-oriented social space in a male-oriented landscape, and have some agency over when they choose to go and for how long. The biggest regulation of individual sisters’ decisions comes not from men but from fellow ABC sisters.

Under the guise of being “vigilant” for “risk-management,” as Grace explained, ABC makes sure that there are multiple sober sisters, called “sobers” or “sober monitors” who note down when each sister arrives, who walk around the party

97 For more information see: Brown-Rice, Kathleen A., Susan Furr, and Maribeth Jorgensen. “Analyzing Greek Members Alcohol Consumption by Gender and the Impact of Alcohol Education Interventions.” Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education. 59.1 (2015): 19-38. Web. This study noted that noted that students involved in Greek-lettered organizations are more likely to have “riskier” drinking habits than students in college who were not Greek-affiliated.

98 For more information on how the space of the fraternity (both physical and ideological) becomes a normalizing factor in sexual assault and sexual coercion, see: Sanday, Peggy Reeves. Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus. 2nd ed: New York UP, 2007. Print.
to check in on the sisters, and who track down the remaining sisters after 85% of the house has left the fraternity (at which point the sober can leave) to inquire whether the sisters are staying at the party or whether they are ready to go. While from a strict safety perspective, having a non-inebriated onlooker may be helpful, from a control perspective, the sober functions to regulate other sisters’ movements. In Michel Foucault’s discussion of panoptic power, one central body watches individually enclosed persons (prisoners or deviants in his examples) who have no access to each other but who can never tell whether the central body is watching them or another person.99 However power works here through “visib[ility]” and “unverifiab[ility]” because the individual always is aware of the central power but never knows whether they or another individual is the focus.100 This permits (self-) regulatory power to be continuous, not episodic or only when an individual is caught. For the sisters, although they technically know who the sober is each time, they are drunk, and ABC has a policy whereby the sobers do not wear shirts that say “I’m too sober for this” or “SOBER” like some other houses do, but instead gives the sober a different cup from which to drink (water). Grace explained that this was so that sisters would forget who the sobers were because it would be hard to tell unless you remembered that they had a different cup and would consequently not actively avoid them. Sobers, therefore, function through panoptic regulation: the sisters always know that they could be watched at that moment and therefore be sent home. The hope then is that the drunk sister will not remember who the sober sister is, and therefore self-police her behavior according to fear of being watched. The sober has

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99 For a full explanation see: Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*: 200
100 Ibid., 201.
the executive power to make decisions for the sisters at the pair; there is no arguing with her and what she says automatically goes. If the drunk sister does not comply with the sober sister’s demands, she will be sent to testify before the Standards Committee. Sometimes, even if the drunk sister does comply, she will be sanctioned.

The day that I arrived at Big State U, ABC was hosting one of their Date Parties at a local bar. When I spoke with women the following day, many alluded to the previous nights antics, stating that one sister was sent to the hospital, and that others had to go home sick. These members were set to go in front of the Standards Committee. I was not at Big State U long enough to hear out these trials but the act of being sent to Standards is not a democratic process. To be sent is to be in violation of “good” behavior and therefore the question is not whether the women will be held accountable to their personal decisions that were against ABC protocol but how will they be punished.

Where this panoptic regulation diverges from Foucault is that the sisters are not in separate cages – the fraternity parties are not prisons – and they therefore have the ability to interact with each other, the reciprocal – a prison-esque situation – being central to Foucault’s Panopticon. However, the women’s inebriation prohibits normal functioning and therefore any collective action against the sober would be improbable. Further, the function of the pair is to socialize with the fraternity men, not with the sorority sisters, and therefore their interaction with each other is supposed to be kept to a minimum. Still, while there are not cages, there is overarching and definitive central governance.
Another point of divergence from Foucault is in the form of older women’s encouraging younger women to go to the pairs and punishing them for abstaining or for leaving too early. Seniors do not normally attend the pairings, they go to the bars because they are over 21, but that is not to say that they, and the other upperclasswomen, are uninvolved in the pairings. The older women are still participatory members of the sorority and therefore their social image is contingent on the sorority’s doing well and the younger women’s being present and fun at pairs. In such, while the pairings are purportedly social events, in actuality, they are assertions of ABC’s brand. Riley, a senior, explained that when the younger sisters do not attend pairings or if they go and are on their phones too much or are not talking to the fraternity brothers, they will get “scolded” in chapter for not making an effort and for not being “happy.” She said, “if you’re not going to represent a happy girl in ABC whose not happy to be paired, then you shouldn’t be there anyways because we’re gonna look bad.” This happens regardless of the fraternity’s tier. The sisters are supposed to go, and then when they arrive look like they are having a good time regardless of whether they want to be there. If they do not, the fraternity brothers report the ABC women’s behavior to members of the sorority, and if the brothers are not happy, the older women are similarly not. This reporting is not an institutionalized procedure, like the position of Social Chair is, but an ad hoc, informal complaint. In this sense, the power is not panoptic, but visible, and not just for the control of bodies but also for a political play. Foucault did write that in disciplinary societies, those with panoptic regulation, “the body is reduced as a ‘political’ force…and maximized as a useful force,” and for the older sisters, having
younger sisters at the pairings looking like they are having fun and being happy is a political assertion of ABC’s status.\textsuperscript{101} ABC sisters’ bodies are therefore tools of branding and forces of increasing cultural capital. If the sisters “look” good for the brothers like what Riley discussed, then the brothers will want to pair with them again. If the brothers want to pair with them again then both ABC’s pairing options expand and their reputation and subsequent tier status could improve.

On a macro level, hypervisibility is another way of what sociologists Rashawn Ray and Jason A. Rosow call “do[ing] privilege,” or how privilege is tangibly expressed or performed.\textsuperscript{102} Making sure that ABC attends parties, happily, is another way of re-doing the power that Panhellenic sororities hold over non-white, multicultural, and student of color sororities. ABC, unlike the non-white sororities, goes to parties hosted in white male organizations’ mansions. The MCGC and NPHC organizations do not have central and huge houses like the white men and women do, although some have smaller houses. Rather, because of a history of university and fraternity discrimination, many MCGC and NPHC chapters do not even have houses.\textsuperscript{103} Therefore, to be “happy” at a white fraternity house, to want white fraternity brothers to want you back is to validate your whiteness, your tier status, and hence is to “do privilege.” ABC’s contrived happiness at pairs not only strengthens

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 221.
\textsuperscript{103} For more information on the difference between and intersections of ideology, housing, and institution see: Brown, Tamara L., Gregory Parks, and Clarendra M. Phillips. \textit{African American Fraternities and Sororities: The Legacy and the Vision}. UP of Kentucky, 2005. Print;
their brand within the white-sorority and white-fraternity social space as a sorority that is “fun,” but also cements their whiteness and privilege in the general milieu.

Even while “doing privilege,” the ABC women remain Jewish. Carmen said that both of the Jewish fraternities that ABC is used to pairing with have recently refused to pair or have begrudgingly paired with them. Carmen said that she overheard one of the brothers say,

Yeah, we’re on the rise. We’re picking kids who like on a Friday night don’t want to call a girl to come over and chill, just like hang out in their room. We want guys who will call multiple girls to come over and like get drunk and like have a party.

Carmen identified this statement as “ridiculous” but she still said that the men in these fraternities are her and her sisters’ closest male friends. Being “on the rise” has to do with leaving ABC, a Jewish sorority, in the dust, while attempting to pair with “elite” sororities, as Carmen called them. She also said, “that’s not going to happen” but even in attempting to do so, they try to shed their Jewishness and ABC’s Jewishness. Their aspirations for higher tier pairs affirm the tier system’s commitment to (purity in) whiteness. Carmen argued, ABC is at a “standstill for where we are in the tier system,” especially because its Jewish, male peers are trying to separate themselves from the women and their Jewishness. But despite disassociating with these statements, the ABC women similarly try to underplay their Jewishness.

Grace explained,

It seems like after everyone that we pair with, they’re like ‘oh you guys were so fun, like we didn’t know you would be like that, we thought you’d be the stuck-up Jewish girls, we thought you would be different…we want to pair with you more.’ We’ve expanded a little bit through that.
Here, “expand[ing]” means to have more, and better, pairs. Despite the fact that fraternity men assume that the ABC women are JAPs (Jewish American Princesses) in saying that they are both “stuck-up” and “Jewish,” the ABC women continue to pair and to actively seek out pairs. Regardless of the anti-Semitic statements directed at the women, ABC is able to “expand” through having its peers perceive it as less Jewish. All sisters must promote these ideals in order to expand as the fraternity brothers perceive ABC, not individual women. Thus, harkening back to sister-on-sister control, regulation must not just come from a few sisters, but from all. Therefore, even sisters without positions on the Executive Board or who are older have internalized the need to push forward the brand and have similarly policed their own behavior. Caroline, a sophomore, explained,

“We’re very polite toward them. We say thank you. When we leave we always say ‘thank you, thank you for having us.’ It helps build good relationships with them too. If ABC girls are really respectful to this frat we’ll pair with them again. If we were really disrespectful, why would they want to pair with us again?"

The “sense of self” as anthropologist Peggy Reeves Sanday explains, or the sense of collective self, the neoliberal sorority brand as I would argue, is created through continuous “personal engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance to one’s daily life.”\textsuperscript{104} Group “subjectivity” (i.e., group sense of self) is cultivated not only through the collective identity that ABC holds, nor just the brand that it aims to promote, but also through the ways in which others engage with the brand and therefore engage with the sisters.\textsuperscript{105} Considering what Grace said, the individual ABC sister is judged through, and then internalizes,

\textsuperscript{104} Sanday, Peggy Reeves. \textit{Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus}: 63.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
what is understood about, the perception regarding, the brand of, her sorority. In this sense, for Caroline to want to be polite is to want the men to understand that ABC is polite. It is not just individual identity that fuses with ABC, but that ABC’s social movement is dictated by what others think about the house, not about individual women. For Caroline to desire politeness so that the sorority, cumulatively, gets invited back, is to bolster the ideas of the ABC monolith and of ABC as desirable.

Beyond the male-centered or even phallocentric nature of the pairs whereby the women have to be polite because the fraternity men have the power, this type of obsequiousness reflects a “society of control.” Defined by philosopher Gilles Deleuze, a “society of control” is a continuum whereby the subject or subjects within the society is/are “never finished” being controlled by themselves and by their fellow citizens and the mechanisms of control are never as definite or delineated.106 Deleuze positions “societies of control” as the (technological and neoliberal) evolution of Michel Foucault’s “disciplinary societies.”107 Whereas in disciplinary societies individuals move from one enclosed environment to another, each with its own set of rules and regulations on/over the individual (for example from the family, to school, to the factory), in societies of control, systems/institutions are open and power is not enclosed to a specific institution but pervasive, ubiquitous, and overlapping. Indeed ABC and the Greek System oscillate between both disciplinary societies and societies of control. Deleuze argues,

Control is not discipline. You do not confine people with a highway. But by making highways, you multiply the means of control. I am not saying this is

107 Ibid., 3.
the only aim of highways, but people can travel infinitely and ‘freely’ without being confined while being perfectly controlled.\textsuperscript{108}

I would argue that Caroline’s value in acting deferential operates in a similar modality so as to make her and her sisters unaware of yet fully participatory in the power and pull of the Greek System. Control is pervasive and exists as an essence. It is intangible but omnipresent. Part of being in a society of control is to internalize the ideology of the society under the guise of freedom or personal-choice. Here, Caroline is not directly controlled by the overarching governing body in ABC, or even by the Greek System, but by her own idea of personal volition within this social space, and has therefore promulgated the same ideals of the sorority as set by the Executive Board, the Greek System, and even Big State U for supporting the Greek System. Especially because she said “we’ll pair with them again,” even though the power rests in the hands of the fraternity to say “no” or “yes” to a pair because it is in their house, with their funding, and their alcohol, Caroline ignores the true crux of power in lieu of a false belief that she, and ABC, have equity in the matter. Even though some of the ABC women recognize that planning the pairs are unequal – recall that Avery said “the ball is in their court” – none of the women mentioned that the actual pairings are unequal. But this is how societies of control function, in the minutiae and under the belief of liberation and fairness. One is never finished being controlled because ideology of the control becomes one’s own. Recall that Sanday argues that “sense of self,” how one sees oneself, is a cause of “personal engagement in the practices,

discourses, and institutions that lend significance to one’s daily life.”\textsuperscript{109} Therefore, regulating the self’s movements in the name of sisterhood, and to do so happily and without critique, is to internalize and to believe a false sense of freedom within a domineering and externally controlled environment. Control is exercised over Caroline in the deficit of understanding that being in the Greek System means giving up power (to men). For ABC, being in a society of control means that Greek System ideology becomes the women’s ideology without an acknowledgment of the fact, and while remaining “happy” sisters. Perhaps, even, it is the State’s ideology, the larger society of control that ABC finds itself within, because Big State U sponsors the Greek system by letting it exist. In this sense, even the Greek system society of control is a State control. Control is not a spot-treatment or just at the pairs, but continuous, undelineated, and hard to pin down. Control is the mirage of choice. Yet, it comes from outside and becomes one’s own. Control, and not sisterhood, is the narrative of false liberation within which the ABC women think and live.

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The pairing does not stop when the pair physically ends but exists indefinitely in the cyber sphere, specifically on Instagram. Riley explained that “a lot of perception comes from social media” because you see women posting pictures of parties, of bid day (more in Chapter Three) and of tailgates. Taking Instagram pictures at parties works to inform the IFC and Panhellenic sororities about both where ABC is that night (and whether it is a better house) and about how much fun the sisters are having. It functions to bolster ABC’s cultural capital in terms of being

\textsuperscript{109} Sanday, Peggy Reeves. \emph{Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus}: 63.
“fun,” “cool,” and desirable. Media scholar Alison Hearn calls “outer-directed self-presentation” a “trade” of “lived experience in the service of promotion and profit.” These pictures are contrived, located in a specific moment, and in order to take the picture, time must be spent away from the actual activity with energy directed toward the image. The “profit” that ABC seeks is not economic but social, and the “trade” is spending time with the men in favor of letting others know that they are with the men and having fun. The more people that see the ABC women on Instagram, the more visible the sisters and ABC become, which helps boost the brand. No longer is it regarded what people think about an individual but what people believe about ABC. Especially because the biggest drawback to ABC’s tier status is its Jewishness, that which it cannot change, to bolster that which it has more control over, how much “fun” the ABC women appear to be having, becomes a machine for bolstered perception.

Much like how the sisters’ actions are policed in real life, Instagram is also a space that is hyper-regulated. Kate, who is under 21, discussed an image she posted on her “Finstagram” that suggested her being drunk. “Finstagram” or “Finsta” is short for “fake-Instagram.” It is a controlled account that only select people are permitted to follow at the discretion of the account owner. Generally the material on a “Finsta” is more invasive, more personal, less likely to be appropriate for the general Instagram audience, and perhaps includes illegal activity or nudity. Users with a “Finsta” generally also have another account with images associated more with socially acceptable Instagram posts, and less about images an individual would like to

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hide. In Kate’s “bio,” the section that permits users to give a short description of themselves or of the account, Kate included ABC’s letters. One of the older women on the Executive Board contacted Kate shortly after she posted this image requesting that she take it down, for having a drunk image associated with ABC, even on a “Finsta,” a secret account, makes ABC look “bad” and could put them at “risk.” Kate said that she did not know how the older sister found out about the post, as she did not follow her on “Finsta.” This level of control, at the most personal (think of a Finsta as a locked blog or a password-based website), discredits Kate’s personal posts in favor of what the sorority-brand demands. It asks Kate’s entire presence online to represent ABC, to market the brand, even at her most private moments. Kate’s Finsta, in this sense, defies the true usage of the Finsta, which is for expression that is less acceptable on the general web. Asking Kate to remove the photo undermines her ability to engage with a Finsta in the same way that her peers do and functions as a minute level of control, perhaps a even a panoptic one, and one that upholds neoliberal postfeminist sisterhood as a brand above the sisters within. Kate is therefore associated with ABC in every space. She is to be consumed entirely by putting ABC in the best light, including on secret, cyber spaces, that have no open connection with the sorority.

On a theoretical level, Instagram posting of the pairs lies at the crossroads of Karl Marx’s idea of commodity fetish and economist Thorstein Veblen’s idea of

111 For more information about that which individuals choose to share on social media see Thompson, John B. The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media. Stanford UP, 1995. Print, especially Chapter Four.
“Conspicuous Consumption.”112 This latter idea postulates that people, specifically the “nouveau riche” spend money on luxury goods, not because they are necessarily of better quality but as displays of personal wealth and therefore weapons of sociopolitical and economic centrality. However, Veblen’s argument is from 1899, and therefore assumes that those who view the excess do so either by word of mouth or through direct observation. Hyper-visibility, as it is enabled through social media, Instagram in particular, expands the breadth and reach of this declaration of status (or economic prowess) and therefore more easily enables widely disseminated assertions. Instagram, in other words, is an offensive apparatus for conspicuous consumption whereby the individual who is attempting to assert his/her status can readily do so to her cyber “followers.” Being at certain fraternities boosts ABC’s cultural capital in that some are considered better than other fraternities thereby affirming Marx’s idea of commodity fetish. Consequently, posting an image in the party space or with the fraternity men, having fun and being happy, can indicate something about the women: that they too are fun, that they are top tier, and that they are pretty and happy. The ultimate hope, therefore, is not to actually have fun, although this may happen by accident. The ultimate hope is to first make the men feel as though they are throwing a good party and to take Instagram photos so that the greater Greek-lettered white system sees ABC performing “fun.”

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Conclusion

When ABC women become seniors, or juniors if they turn 21 early, instead of going to pairings they go to the bars. There are two main bars that the older sisters attend, alternating each bar depending on the day. Unlike the pairings that are planned for weeks beforehand, people just “know” which bar to go to on which night, Avery explained. While one of the bars, Bar A, is integrated, the other bar, Bar B, is separated into the general area of Bar B and “Jew Bar” at Bar B. Unlike the pairings that are surreptitiously predicated on normativity within a discourse of popularity and rhetoric like “it is how it is,” the physical delineations of “Jew Bar” and the other space at Bar B visibly puts forward the values that the white Greek system holds. Even in name, the Jewish students are separated at Bar B, with the other space not receiving an ethnoracial or religious tagline. Based on the segregation between the Panhellenic/IFC organizations and the MCGC and NPHC organizations, it should go without saying that the bars are white spaces. What is interesting about Jew Bar is that even though the Jewish fraternities try to minimize their pairing with ABC because they see the women as beneath them in their Jewishness, at Bar B they are lumped together by their primary separator from the rest of the white Greeks. In short, the tier system and the pairings are mechanisms of whiteness and normativity, and this does not stop when students leave the confines of the fraternity houses and go to purportedly equal spaces at the bar.

The social hierarchy exists through exclusionary competition, forcing ABC to constantly strive to improve its standing whilst grappling with its Jewishness. Because pairings occur in tiered gendered parallels, with the quantity of cultural
capital dictating what that parallel relationship is, it becomes a means of naturalizing hierarchy, white dominance, and exacerbating continuous intra-sorority regulation. ABC is a branded body of middle tier Panhellenic Jewish women; it is so because of which fraternities it pairs with and it pairs with certain fraternities because of who it is. There is no escape.
Chapter Three:
Futurity and Fallacious Choice: The Rush/Recruitment Process

Introduction

Each year during second semester, ABC takes new members. The IFC fraternities hold two rounds of recruitment – one in the fall and one in the spring. Rush/Recruitment is the process through which new members are marketed sorority/fraternity houses before ultimately selecting and being selected by one house, the offer of membership being called a “bid.” The terms “Rush” and “Recruitment” will be used interchangeably as the terminology fluctuated depending on which interviewee I was speaking with to mean the same process. One man I spoke with, Kyle, bemoaned the trajectory of fraternity recruitment. He argued that whereas fraternity rush used to have no formal events or process, now it resembles sorority rush in its push for a more egalitarian and formal process. Kyle said, “I would call sorority rush fake.” He explained that he believed that the relationships created during formal Rush were not as potent as the ones he believed to occur during informal fraternity Rush, even though he has never gone through formal recruitment. Now, Kyle refuses to be involved in his fraternity’s recruitment or selection because of the newfound formality of the process.

The Panhellenic sororities, on the other hand, hold one round of formal recruitment in the spring. There are two informal recruitment stages during the fall for sophomores and older, and after the formal recruitment in the spring for freshman and older. These tend to be for students who did not previously join a sorority. They are small processes and do not matriculate the same percentages of sisters as the
formal process. For the purposes of this chapter, focus will be given to formal recruitment, the official process in the spring run through Panhellenic because most of ABC’s new members are selected in this process. All of the women I spoke with were selected through the formal process. In formal recruitment, each Potential New Member (PNM) who signs up for recruitment must pay a non-refundable fee of $82.113 Additionally, each PNM must have above a B- average, be enrolled full-time, and able to come back to campus before school starts, during Winter Break.114 While the requirements of GPA and full-time enrollment are presumably for the student’s enrichment, the cost and the need to return early function as preliminary mechanisms of excluding non-wealthy members, even before Rush begins. There are more women who rush than there are spots. Unfortunately, it was not made clear to me in the interviews or in relevant material how many students rushed compared to how many were offered membership. But because women are often excluded, sometimes new sororities are created; this year there are 23, up from 22 last year. Panhellenic sometimes also mandates that each sorority take larger pledge classes; this year ABC must take 55 new members. These stipulations are intended for more equity, so that all women who want to join can be selected. Nevertheless, for some, the initial fee does not bring any return.

While more focus will be given in this thesis to the practices and narratives of ABC as an institution, it is imperative to understand how the process works from the

113 To protect the identity of the university and therefore to remain IRB compliant, I am unable to link to Big State U’s Panhellenic website where the requirements to go through Recruitment are listed.
114 While Big State U’s student data website claims that Greek-letter affiliated students consistently earn higher grades than the average of all undergraduate students, Mayhew, Matthew J., et al. How College Affects Students: 21st Century Evidence That Higher Education Works. Vol. 3: John Wiley and Sons, Inc, 2016. Web: 80 suggests otherwise. There are inconsistent data showing GPA achievement and Greek-letter affiliation. Some studies point to higher GPAs, some to lower, some to inconsequential data.
PNM’s side as well. Every woman who signs up for Rush at Big State U must visit
every sorority. For 2017 Rush, that means 23 chapters – 19 with houses and four
without. This is not to say that some women have certain houses that they are more
inclined toward, even before meeting the sisters or that the sisters in the houses do not
already have certain women that they refuse to take or certain ones they desire.
However, this practice is hush-hush and supposedly each PNM begins Rush with a
blank slate. The first round, called 23 Party, includes visiting every chapter. After
meeting with members from every sorority for about 30 minutes each, each PNM
must choose maximum 16 houses to put down as the ones she enjoyed. She may put
down fewer but this limits her chances of being invited back to any house. The
chapters also list the PNMs they would like to invite back and if there is a match, the
woman advances to the next round. At the second round (called 16 Party), a PNM
may have at maximum 16 houses to re-visit and at minimum none, in which case she
is cut. The same process continues through nine houses (9 Party) and three houses (3
Party) with increasing time spent at each house in the subsequent rounds. After the
fourth round (maximum three houses, minimum being cut), the PNM ranks her
remaining sororities per order of preference and signs an agreement that states that
she is committed to accepting any of the sororities she listed (she is permitted to list
none if she feels as though she no longer wishes to join any of her remaining houses,
she can also “suicide” and only put down one house). If she breaks this contract after
being matched with a sorority (if a sorority selects her), she becomes ineligible for
any sorority membership at Big State U for one year from the signed date of the
contract. If a sorority selects her, she ranked the sorority, and she chooses to join, she
becomes a New Member during Bid Night. These visits are intended to introduce women to each sorority. No alcohol, no parties, and no men are part of each round.

The Rush/Recruitment Party System

Figure 3: A visual representation of how selection through Rush/Recruitment occurs. Potential New Members can be cut at any point.

Exploring the thoughts and goals of PNMs would be a valuable place of inquiry, but what is most curious for this thesis is how ABC positions, markets, participates, acts, performs, caters to, engages with, and ultimately selects and rejects
new sisters. Further, although Riley suggested that I speak with freshwomen because “everyone has an idea of like what houses they want, why, which they don’t want, which ones are good, which ones they think are bad in their head,” she admitted that “they’d probably be even nervous to open their mouths” for fear of being automatically denied from sororities for speaking about the process. A PNM’s selection process is shrouded in secrecy and a false sense of equality in the belief that she selects the sorority as much as the sorority selects her. Women must stay mum, because if a sorority gets a whiff that a PNM has been speaking about her experience at their house or if a PNM missteps then that PNM could be excluded. Recall that Riley was “blacklisted,” completely institutionally and socially ostracized from a particular sorority on the basis of pre-Rush behavior (which is not allowed to be taken into account in sorority selection but occurs regardless) from her top-choice sorority because she had sex with her ex-boyfriend, who at the time was “hooking up” with a member of that sorority. Because of this “nervous[ness],” I was unable to speak with any freshwomen and cannot comment on their process of going through Rush. However, every sister I spoke with went through Rush, remembers what it was like, and has taken this experience combined with her experience of being in ABC to construct what she wants in new members and how to get them in the sorority.

The Rush process is not equitable. Every woman going in does not have the same shot regardless of the push for more houses and larger pledge classes, and the ABC women at once attempt to garner the greatest amount of interest while simultaneously engaging in practices of exclusion. Rush, ultimately, is not a few weeks of events but a fantastical spectacle of which there are few real-world parallels.
and in which ideals and values congeal to make overt what ABC is, what ABC stands for, and what ABC desires to become.

Recruitment Videos

Even before Rush begins during second semester, Rush Videos are uploaded to YouTube. These videos tend to be professionally made and fall within their own genre. Rush Videos are generally set to contemporary music with sisters dancing, jumping, flipping hair, laughing, showing off Greek Letters, their house, their school, throwing glitter, blowing bubbles, pantomiming their finger symbols (each sorority has finger shapes that are meant to look like their Greek letters), eating, and wrapping arms around each other. Not every video has all the aforementioned qualities but the videos exist within an aesthetic defined by depicting the sorority in a chosen fashion. Rather than to be an exhaustive media review of the genre, this is to simply introduce purposes and practices of the short video (the length of the song played, approximately two to four minutes). ABC’s videos do not show every occurrence in the sorority: they do not show the sisters while they sleep or use the bathroom or when they disagree or even when they have a conversation. Instead, specific moments are depicted to relay specific information about what ABC wants its PNMs to know about ABC sisterhood. The videos do not give an accurate representation of what being an ABC sister means, but only that which is selected to be known.

Michel Foucault identifies four “technologies” utilized by persons and entities in power, by peers, and by the self, to “modify” and “train” both “skills” and

115 To view a Rush video, visit www.Youtube.com and search “sorority rush videos”
“attitudes.”¹¹⁶ These technologies need not be actually technological, in a gadget sense, but can be symbolic. Rush Videos work through some of these technologies, specifically within “technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things” and “technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification” as tools to market ABC.¹¹⁷ Rush is a practice that has existed since women’s roles on campus became secure, and the sororities’ focus turned away from communal all-female-on-campus sisterhood and toward inter-group differentiation.¹¹⁸ But Rush Videos are new, and are only able to be facilitated through modern technology – YouTube, cameras, video, and sound editing, for example – which function as Foucaltian “technologies of production.” They permit Rush to exist beyond the event of Rush. Instead of women entering into Rush with perhaps some pre-conceived ideas about the sororities based on campus hearsay or who they knew from high school – Riley said, “Just because one cool girl from high school, let’s say, was in one house, then they [PNMs] probably think it’s a great house. Or a girl they hated in high school got ABC, then they’d be like ‘Oh my god, ABC is the worst,’” – now women enter with actual images, directly from the sorority, about what being a sister in that sorority means. There are strong rules against PNMs’ speaking with sisters about their house and about Rush before Rush happens. It is wholly unacceptable and can even result in rejection from the organization. But while this is not permitted, Rush Videos, an intermediary between the sisters and the PNMs, is now not only accepted but also expected. Because of

¹¹⁷ Ibid.
¹¹⁸ Turk, Diana B. Bound by a Mighty Vow: Sisterhood and Women's Fraternities, 1870-1920: 5.
“technology of production,” the sorority is able to alter attitudes about the sisters going in before they even rush.

Moreover, the video incarnates the sorority with that which it desires to show, on the Internet, to reach an even broader audience. While what a non-Big State U member believes as a result of seeing the ABC video may not matter in terms of ABC’s quotidian, other members of Big State U can see these videos, can digest what the sorority aims to say, and can then perceive ABC in the way that it aspires. Whereas before these technologies, Rush was only visible to the PNMs and not members of other sororities, fraternities, or unaffiliated students, the birth of the Rush Video changes the entire landscape in which ABC can promote itself. As Pierre Bourdieu explains, “a class is defined as much by its being-perceived as by its being” and through Rush Videos, ABC is able to extend its breadth of promotion beyond just new member marketing to Big State U’s Greek milieu.119

In terms of the second Foucaultian “technology” that the Rush Video engages with, the images it chooses to include act as “signs, meanings, symbols, or signification” of the sisterhood.120 Most of the images are of the sisters. For ABC’s Rush Video 2017, the viewer sees white women wearing similar clothing (jeans, Ugg Boots, tank tops, etc.,) with similar hair styles (straight or wavy and always very long), and similar jewelry (lots of rings and small necklaces), hugging and laughing. Because the women do not talk in the video, the women’s bodies, and the interactions of the bodies are solely what a PNM understands about the sorority. The bodies


become mechanisms for marketing and greater attention is paid to the corporeal as opposed to the mental or emotional. While there are moments in the video when the sisters are shown most likely speaking with one another, there is music dubbed over their conversations. The friendship shown is body-oriented in its verbal silence, and thus a PNM understands ABC sisterhood physically. The Rush Video focuses on two key themes – 1) a great amount of time is dedicated to the sisters’ eating sweets and 2) a great amount of time is shown of the sisters’ engaging intimately yet non-sexually.

In terms of the former, in the 1:54 minute video, the women eat marshmallows, ice cream sandwiches, s’mores, cake, an apple (perhaps to remind that they do not only eat unhealthily), and multiple ice cream cones. When put in conversation with the women’s visibly slim bodies, this presents what gender theorist Susan Bordo calls a “double bind, in which the self is torn in two mutually incompatible directions.” The first direction is one of (over)indulgence with the desire to seek extreme satiation as a product of the contemporary “consuming passion” that conditions consumers away from moderation and toward maximums. Bordo argues that we have been “conditioned to lose control at the mere sight of desirable products.” The second direction is one of slenderness and the drive to be thin and and therefore beautiful. Since the late 1800s with the emergence of the middle class, fatness, and not the desire to consume or one’s appetite in and of itself,

122 Ibid., 201.
123 Ibid.
became associated with evilness.\textsuperscript{124} In the contemporary era, when there are supposedly so many ways that one can control the body’s potential for expanding—the gym, running, yoga, barre class, spinning, etc.,—fatness becomes associated with a lower-class that cannot afford to buy workout clothing or pay for the fitness classes or have the leisure time to invest in the self and the self’s image. Thinness becomes a “symbol of a correct attitude; it means that one ‘cares’ about oneself and how one appears to others, suggesting willpower, energy, control over infantile impulse, the ability to ‘shape your life.’”\textsuperscript{125} On the flip side, fatness becomes equated with a deficit in “moral qualities” such as “laziness, lack of discipline, unwillingness to conform, and absence of all those ‘managerial’ abilities that, according to the dominant ideology, confer upward mobility.”\textsuperscript{126} The ABC women’s bodies can be read not as women who happen to be thin but as assertions of the members’ class in general. The women subtly appear to have the financial means to “indulge their desires as consumers”—they eat the sweets—but there is an invisible suggestion based off of their thin bodies that they are able to control themselves.\textsuperscript{127} Multiple thin bodies eating sweets indicates a classed mentality of control, regulation, and “good” morals. Almost consequently, the bodies are read as white, which standardizes whiteness as the ABC norm and similarly homogenizes their potential new member pull for who would feel comfortable and could see themselves within the sorority.

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 185
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 195, emphasis hers.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 199.
Figure 4: ABC women eating cake to celebrate the anniversary/birthday of ABC's conception.

Figure 5: An ABC woman feeding herself cake with her hands. Her face has been blurred to protect her identity.
Figure 6: An ABC woman eating an ice cream cone. Her face has been blurred to protect her identity.

Figure 7: ABC women roasting marshmallows.
However, were the women to indulge in eating all these sweets, their thinness would most likely turn toward fatness; ABC’s image having to change. Assuming that the women do eat the sweets, further “technologies” such as gym equipment, or running shoes, or a scale for weighing oneself, or even a sports bra, help physically mold the individual. I was assured multiple times that ABC, unlike other sororities, does not require its members to go to the gym but as Kelsey explained, if she is not at class or in the house then she is at the gym, and she was not atypical in her commitment to fitness. When I met Caroline for the first time, she had just gone to the gym with Avery and when I went on a tour of the house, I saw Regina coming back from the gym. Even though ABC does not force its members to go, the fact that the typical ABC body is a thin one, as through the practice of exercising and through the images that are marketed as what ABC is, thinness, and the technologies that
enable it, act as technologies for social control. Pierre Bourdieu explains, “The probability of experiencing the body with unease, embarrassment, timidity grows with the disparity between the ideal body and the real body, the dream body and the ‘looking-glass self’ reflected in the reactions of others.”¹²⁸ In such, the disparity between the thin, ABC body and one that is heavier, either for a sister within or for a PNM, becomes apparent. Thinness is uniform, deviation is visibly obvious even without verbal enforcement, and the gym becomes an (un-)required technology of (self-)control. From the perspective of a PNM, perceiving thinness works to keep potential fat members from feeling as though they could see themselves in ABC.

Alternatively, assuming that the women did not eat the sweets, the brand then puts forward a lie about what being a member means. In this sense it aims for new sisters who are not actually like the girls within. This, then, seeks to gain more normative women, women who ascribe to Bordo’s “double bind,” who both have the ability and desire to consume but also the self-control and attitude to maintain slenderness. To market these sweets without eating is to tell a tasty lie that new members can “have it all” if they join ABC – they too can (over)indulge but can still have the willpower and care for their own body that maintains their activeness, productivity, discipline, and conformity, thereby asserting a certain social class classification.¹²⁹ The sweets are a solidification of ABC’s class status; their sisterhood in the social space that prizes slender bodies. To consume and to be thin, to conquer and yet subscribe to the “double bind,” is to assert ABC normativity,

status, and prowess. To join therefore is to similarly exist within the “double bind” in body and mental control.

Modern technology, both literally and through Foucaultian discourse, enables Rush to begin before the designated week, and therefore makes it a spectacle of marketing and a space of aggressive normative branding more than just an admissions event. However, because more women rush than there are spots, the sororities, despite the video, hold more power than the PNMs. And yet, the ABC women insisted that selection is about a “good fit” and that a PNM chooses a house just as much as a sorority chooses a PNM. This rift is facilitated through the hyper-visibility of the Rush Video. Sociologist John Thompson pointed out in Media and Modernity that contemporary media endows “those who exercise power, rather than those over whom power is exercised” with “a certain kind of visibility.”

In pre-Rush, the PNMs view the information provided from the sororities but the sororities have no information about the PNMs. This reifies the divide between those who are in and those who are not. Those who are in are hyper-visible and are to be emulated and desired. Those who consume the video are invisible, disregarded, impersonal, and in the time of viewing irrelevant. The Rush Video works to aggressively tell what PNMs should be and want to be if they were an/in ABC and explicitly makes the power relationship between a PNM and a sorority skewed. It tells a PNM that if she were to join ABC, then she too could hold visible and social power over rushees. The Rush Videos facilitate one-sided initial contact between a PNM and the sorority; a

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false interaction more about fitting a mold in the future than about genuine and individualized interest.

While what is shown helps a PNM understand a contrived ABC, I am similarly intrigued by what the videos hide. The women shown in the video are exclusively members of ABC. No woman depicted is a member of another sorority nor is any other sorority represented. This makes sense because of how ABC demands its members to engage, but the video skews ABC’s social reality. The video has multiple shots of the campus and university insignias, which make it seem like the sorority is central to Big State U writ large, which is simply not true because there are tens of thousands of students. Moreover, it seems as though ABC exists without the rest of the Greek system, which is also not true considering its relationships with the other organizations, both literally and within power relations. The video does not acknowledge the pairs or the inter-sorority competition. Noticeably absent from the videos are men. Especially considering the large amount of time spent in the pairs and plotting them, the focus on just sisterhood is a lie.

But this lie works to assert ABC as a sisterhood of straight sisters. The women hug and feed each other, all the while laughing and giggling, not sexualizing the acts, but making them innocuous and friendly. The video paints the women as friends, not lovers with each other (and therefore as a corollary, not lovers of other women), but it also does not overtly depict acts of heterosexuality. The women are still intimate and touchy; they engage with acts such as stroking, jumping on each other’s backs, and feeding one another, but because they do so with sisters, these acts are not sexual acts but acts of familial love. In turn, this strengthens every woman’s
straightness, even though heterosexuality is not overtly depicted nor are the women shown to have specific sexual tendencies or pulls or preferences whatsoever. The video does not show women who abhor sexual or intimate actions; in fact, the women are permitted to engage intimately with fellow women specifically because of their presumed heterosexuality. A woman with questionable sexual preferences and orientations could not innocently feed another woman in this video because that would make ABC seem queer. Instead, the actions are read as actions of closeness, familiarity, and true friendship through invisibilizing men and anything not purely straight. It is not that the women are heterosexual through the conventional definition of sexual preference for members of the opposite sex, but that they are shown intimately, in friendship, with other women, therefore marking them as straight through deduction. It is the assumption of straightness that pervades, not the overtness.

Figure 9: Two ABC women feeding each other in the 2017 Rush Video. Faces have been blurred to protect identity.
Figure 10: Six ABC women jumping on each other in front of a wall at Big State U. Both the women's faces and the wall have been blurred to protect identity and location.

Figure 11: Two ABC women hugging each other. Both women's faces and the composite photo in the background have been blurred to protect identity.
Judaism is similarly hidden. The video shows a close-up shot of the name of one of ABC’s philanthropic partners, a Jewish organization, but unless a PNM had previous knowledge of the organization – it is not a famous organization like The Red Cross or Habitat for Humanity, etc., – or looked it up after viewing, there would be no indication of the organization’s dedication to Judaism. Moreover, the video shows the image of the Jewish philanthropy for one second in the entire 114 second Rush Video, in other words less than 1% of the video. There is a scene at an ABC philanthropy event, but most of the shot shows the sisters enjoying the philanthropy event rather than the cause of the philanthropy or the charitable-affiliated Judaism. Yes, the sorority is nationally known as a Jewish house, so if a PNM knew about the house, or about Greek Life, she would understand ABC’s affiliation. But not mentioning Judaism because it is a large part of ABC identity seems, much like hiding men, to be a skewing of the truth. The video enables ABC to paint itself
however it pleases in contrast to ongoing engagements with the Greek system. In in-person cases, ABC can make decisions about how they engage but not full choices about what aspects of their sorority are presented or perceived. The video blurs this dynamic, permitting ABC to depict itself in a frozen way. Hiding Judaism, therefore, can be a choice made in the video but not one made in in-person social spaces. Especially because ABC’s space in the social hierarchy is slated on its Jewishness, hiding this fact helps cast a wider PNM net. However hiding men is different from hiding Jewishness because the former is a social commitment whereas the latter is a fact of the house. ABC women decide to pair whereas Judaism is innate to their national organization.

Further, Judaism is core to some of the women’s identities, in that many sisters who selected ABC did so because it is Jewish. Sylvie, for one, said, “I liked the Jewish population.” Therefore, downplaying its Jewishness is not to say that ABC wishes not to be understood as a Jewish house, but just that this video acts as a neutralizer of the organization, making ABC more available to PNMs. There are non-Jewish members of the organization, although very few – Grace assumed around four or five – and to re-cast themselves in a light whereby fun, sister-loving, class-based indulgences are put centrally, with Judaism less central, could facilitate broader reach of PNMs. The pledge class will ultimately consist of predominantly Jewish women, but perhaps moving Judaism toward the periphery could encourage PNMs who end up joining other sororities, better sororities, to re-think ABC’s social positioning in relation to religion. In other words, it is an attempt at normativity.
The last things that are curiously hidden are drinking and partying. Whereas these, like the Judaism and the engagements with men, are part of the ABC experience, the video does not paint them as such. Rather, this lack of focus places sisterhood and friendship as core to being in ABC. Of course, this is true, given the vast amount of time is spent with one’s sisters and in the sorority house, but the experience of ABC sisterhood is attenuated through men and partying, which makes the sisterhood presented in the video mythical. Yet, unlike Judaism, which was alluded to, and straightness, which existed in absence, the lack of substances leaves the door open for substance use upon joining. There is no indication of ABC policy against substances because there is no discussion either way. It is not even tangential to the video, like straightness and Judaism are, but completely unseen. A PNM
without an understanding of Greek Life may not understand that partying and
drinking at times corresponds to fraternity or sorority participation, but a PNM who
enters with a Greek Life basic understanding, from the media or from discussions
with friends or from books or movies, might understand that drinking exists without
overt discussion. Recall what Riley said: “everyone has an idea of like what houses
they want, why, which they don’t want, which ones are good, which ones they think
are bad in their head.” Even the data consistently show that students who are
members of Greek-lettered organizations are more likely to drink more alcohol, drink
more frequently, binge drink, and show substance-abuse behaviors than students who
are not involved in Greek Life. Alcohol, drugs, and substance culture are exhausted
topics in Greek Life studies but more importantly they are exhausted in public
discussions as well. Understanding Greek Life as a vehicle for partying and
drinking is not an outrageus connection but a conditioned and primed one. Through
these understandings, ABC does not need to let PNMs explicitly know that drinking
is a part of sisterhood because that is implied. Caroline said, “Social life sucked

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131 For more information on how participation in Greek-lettered organizations correlated to drinking see:

132 Alcohol, drugs, and substance culture in Greek Life studies:
Sanday, Peggy Reeves. *Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus.*
Alcohol, drugs, substance culture in public discussions:
before joining,” with other sisters and some of the few fraternity members I spoke with expressing similar sentiments. Social life, for Caroline, is made synonymous with alcohol and party culture. But, ABC has policies that prohibit alcohol in the house and discussions during Rush about “booze, boys and brands,” as Virginia and Avery said, from either sisters or PNMs is prohibited. Should a PNM discuss or respond to a question in these realms, she can be immediately excluded from membership (more later in chapter). But these policies are not to say that the partying does not exist, and more importantly for the Rush Video, that partying is something to be expected. ABC could not say it does not party because that would scare away members, like Caroline, who joined in part for a “social life.” Rather, staying mum enables ABC to be compliant with its regulations regarding alcohol during Rush while maintaining a silent discourse about partying.

What the video(s) presents and chooses not to present reveals a modern phenomenon discussed by John Thompson in *Media and Modernity* regarding how people engage with the public. He defines “public” as “what is performed in front of spectators, what is open for all or many to see or hear or hear about.”

But Thompson wrote in 1995, when YouTube, Instagram, and de-centralized forms of personal media were not in existence. Whereas previously media power was centralized in conglomerates like large newspapers or Hollywood Blockbusters or gossip magazines to govern that which was publically seen, now every individual and entity can be a (self-)brand online. Modern media, now, facilitates new publics where private and group selves can be seen as the “performe[rs]” with peer networks being

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133 Thompson, John B. *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*: 123.
the “spectators.” These social spaces, like YouTube and Instagram, that celebrate ‘views’ and ‘comments,’ permit obscure, unpopular, or civilian entities to first engage with those who they do not see (e.g., viewers), and then have the potential to grow their public self. Although Thompson’s idea of the “public” is the same in terms of how media interacts with consumers, now individuals, not central businesses, can have a branded presence. This public self, like a Rush Video is for ABC, should be seen as engineered, not wholly that which an entity is or experiences, and is mitigated through what is chosen to be shown. Each individual, or for ABC individual entity, is thus a media entrepreneur, striving for ‘likes’ and visibility through contrived images. ABC’s Rush Video functions in such a manner, by helping to initiate an interaction, albeit a one-sided one (which Thompson discusses as well in terms of the celebrity-to-non-celebrity-relationship) that introduces the PNM to the idea of being in ABC, and asks her to mentally ‘like’ ABC so that she will come into the house in the following weeks with an idea of what to expect, a dream of sisterhood, and an expectation of conformity.

And yet, despite all this marketing and self-branding, most PNMs understand how the chapter, Rush, and the Greek system work before even going through the process. There is a feedback loop of class. Avery expressed that she did not think she would have gotten a bid if she had not previously known ABC sisters and said that the vast majority of her current sisters had a connection to ABC before they rushed. Sylvie added to this, saying that while there are some sisters who “didn’t even know” about ABC, and that “it’s cool that you can have that too” she ultimately agreed that most of the women, including herself, knew about ABC. Beyond just
knowing someone in the house, Rush asks that you know about how to Rush. There are different days that require different apparel, there are things you cannot talk about (like alcohol, men, and money), you are not permitted to go to the fraternities during first semester freshman year or you may be blacklisted, and you may not speak with sisters about joining their houses, which could also result in blacklisting. Much like how Pierre Bourdieu explains that “members of the different social classes differ not so much in the extent to which they acknowledge culture as in the extent to which they know it,” getting into a sorority has more to do with understanding how to get in and the unspoken rules of Rush than just participating in it.\textsuperscript{134} To understand it previously is to have someone explain it to you either directly or through observation, and to have this knowledge you must know someone who has previously participated. In this sense, the people who are accepted into ABC exist within concentric social circles. One might be from Chicago and one might be from Memphis but each most likely has a pre-Rush understanding of the house, what is needed to be considered, and what is absolutely not permitted. The Rush Video therefore is an attempt to shake whatever pre-conceived beliefs PNMs have; to encourage some freshwomen to think ABC is predominantly sisterly oriented and fun; to reaffirm to white, wealthy, straight (and subtly Jewish) women that ABC is for them; and to hopefully get some “cool” new members. These PNMs, as multiple ABC women detailed, are “like” them.

Rush from the Inside

The process of Rush, from the ABC sisters, consists of various skits, jingles, and conversations, all amounting from months-long preparation. ABC tries to have the most organized, fluid, efficient, clean, and well-run events as possible. The full days (can be 12+ hours) are planned to a tee with full sorority cooperation needed. Unfortunately, events and admissions decisions are private, and as an outsider not rushing, I could not gain access to the process. Additionally, I visited in October with Rush happening in January, and could not fund a second trip. What I did learn of Rush is that it both brings the house together to work toward a common goal and cultivates an environment of extremism, where sisters who have one 30-minute conversation with a PNM will agree to dares and bargains to admit the freshwoman. Olivia, a senior, remembered one sister who licked another sister’s ingrown toenail for a PNM she had met once. The performances put on for PNM pleasure are mating-rituals of sorts, designed to attract the most desirable cohort of new sisters and ultimately to select the ones who want ABC back.

There are circumstances beyond the control of sitting ABC sisters, when taking new sisters has nothing to do with “fit.” ABC has a commitment to automatically take every legacy: if someone’s mother (and sometimes grandmother or sister) was in ABC at any ABC nationally, or if a PNM’s sister is currently in ABC at Big State U, that PNM will receive a bid. Olivia said, “We don’t even talk about it.” It is just understood that if a woman’s mother is ABC, or if her sister currently is, then the daughter or sister too should be. Privilege and legacy-based practices are not foreign to the context within which Greek Life finds itself. They are situated on
college campuses, which are institutions of selection and nepotism. In higher education in general, preference for legacies in admitted classes permits for a re-packaging of overt exclusionary practices generally based on race and class.\textsuperscript{135} Before the 1920s overt techniques of exclusion were common. Post 1920s, techniques such as mandating that matriculating classes must not exceed a specific number and giving preference for students’ whose parents attended work(ed) to subtly keep white, wealthy, Protestant men as the main demographic in colleges.\textsuperscript{136} A similar idea works for ABC’s admission. Selecting a legacy permits for keeping the same demographics who originally joined – white, wealthy, Jewish women – to continue joining. It keeps ABC literally familial and limits the potential growth of the institution to utterly unaffiliated women. It also indicates a biological override of the traditional Rush process, as though through nebulous genetics, qualities of being an ABC are passed down. Taking legacies indicates that being a “good fit” has less to do with who actually would fit in the sorority and more to do with pleasing alumni, keeping ABC insular, and trusting the blood of an ABC sister to pass on her ABC-like qualities.

There are some legacies who are deemed incompatible with ABC, and that is when surreptitious schemes arise. Because there is automatic selection, if the legacy-PNM is believed not to make a good sister, the current members have to “build a case,” as Leah put it, against her. This has to do with knowing whether the PNM would be “uncomfortable in the house...[and when] they won’t fit in,” Avery

\begin{footnotes}
\item[136] Ibid., 32.
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See also Syrett, Nicholas L. \textit{The Company He Keeps}, especially Chapters One and Two, which discuss the early years of the Fraternity.
explained. When pressed to explain what these undesirable, non-good-fit qualities are, Olivia said

Some people just aren’t as outgoing or whatever…if we really think they aren’t going to thrive at all in the house we’re going to try to do as much as we can to hopefully make her not choose us, which is really shitty…we’re just looking out for them—they won’t have friends.

How the sisters do this is to first “pair them with an East Coast bitch,” at the pre-Rush legacy dinner as Avery explained, and then “get them to say something that you then have leverage to say ‘that was inappropriate,’” as Virginia explained, like talking about men, drinking, or money, all of which are not permissible topics. Much like with the Rush Video, ABC does not have to discuss these topics in order for them to be understood as part of the experience. Especially legacies, who have direct connections to people who understand how the Rush process works, should know that men, drinking, and money are part of the ABC experience.

Hiding these experiences then is a lie, much like the sweet-eating in the Rush Video, and in this sense reads more like political speech and propaganda than a promise of sisterhood. On Big State U’s Panhellenic website, there is no mention of men or parties on any of their tabs. For the sake of protecting identity and remaining IRB complaint, I am unable to provide links to the website but I can share that the website states that Panhellenic is dedicated to “creating unity” among its members along “values” and “sisterhood” lines. These values include “philanthropy, education,” “service,” “leadership,” and “personal development” but no mention of partying, hookup culture, drinking, or drugs, that sometimes ensue.\(^{137}\) Panhellenic, and therefore ABC as a member, works to glaze over these realities and sell a

\(^{137}\) I have moved around the order of these terms and have neglected others to protect against incidentally linking the website to this thesis.
product, pure sisterhood, that is less true than it is fantastical. They do this even to PNMs, like legacies, who know that this is a lie. The sisterhood that Panhellenic and ABC claim they stand for is only one part of the sisterhood that manifests. Indeed, Kelly said, “I wish people asked more about our philanthropy and more about the community service that we do in general, like we’re constantly like collecting clothes, collecting cans to give to people in need,” which is undeniably true, and Greek organizations raise millions of dollars for charitable causes, but this is not the full story. Caroline could not even remember the names of one of their philanthropic partners. Kelly also noted, “everybody thinks it’s just about the pairs and the parties and the social life” and she wanted to change that association through our interview.

Drinking and partying certainly are some of the more well-known thoughts about Greek Life, but hiding men, alcohol, and money from Rush runs deeper. It reveals that these things, specifically, indicate something that ABC and Panhellenic wish to minimize or conceal. Sociologist Anthony Giddens defines “shame” as “anxiety about the adequacy of the narrative by means of which the individual sustains a coherent biography.” To promulgate a mythical sisterhood entirely devoted to philanthropy, leadership, education, etc., while in actuality these are just components of a much larger web of entanglement, is to be anxious of the incoherent narratives between myth and reality. Perhaps then ABC has shame about men and partying. Especially given what Kelly said about wanting to shift the discourse toward a more philanthropic-oriented one, if ABC were not ashamed about its fraternal engagements, it would not need to hide them. Of course there are legal

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implications for showing under-age drinking, but just under half of the members are above 21 and therefore permitted to drink. Showing or permitting their drinking during Rush would not be illegal. Legal arguments similarly do not hold true for attending a party in general, as this is not illegal whatsoever, and therefore hiding it has less to do with fear of adjudication and more to do with the perception associated with engaging with it. Especially because ABC falls outside the realm of the “best” sororities, that mirror Bourdieu’s “dominant” class, or in other words those who have (cultural) power, the sorority is “haunted by the look of others,” in this case PNM and current members of Panhellenic organizations, “are endlessly occupied with being seen in a good light,” in this case being seen as sisterly, welcoming, open to anyone, and fun, as opposed to an organization internally regulated for external engagements with men, with a drinking culture and a need for wealth to participate.\footnote{Bourdieu, Pierre. \textit{Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste}: 255, 253.} Therefore, getting an undesirable legacy-PNM to talk about men, drinking, or money, disqualifies her under the understanding that she is not a “good fit,” which really means that she may not be able to follow rules correctly. After all, she is a legacy and should therefore know, from her mother or sister, not to talk about men, money or partying. Making the less “outgoing or whatever” PNM, as Olivia said, the weird PNM, talk about that which they should not is an attempt to keep ABC from dropping tier. If she talks about what she is not supposed to, what else will she do to forsake the House? If she “won’t have friends,” then how can ABC continue to be a cohesive sisterhood? If she is a loner, and part of what ABC wants its peers to think is that it is “fun” and “happy” (recall the pairings and Instagram posting and the Rush
Video images) then she will make ABC look bad for its peers, and in turn the society will crumble tier-wise.

On the other hand, getting PNMs into the house that the sisters do want requires the same level of scheming. Recall what Olivia remembered about one sister who “licked some girl’s ingrown toenail for a girl she met once who she was obsessed with.” The women that sisters lick toes for, the women that they want, are PNMs who are “like” them, as most of the ABC interviewees told me. These women will be “nice” and “genuine,” will “care” about the house, and will want to be in ABC as much as ABC wants them. Rush is a time to replace graduated sisters through a process that nebulously “works out,” an idea that many ABC sisters expressed to me. Sylvie, a sophomore, admitted that she was “skeptical” at first because she thought the process was about “popularity” or “how pretty you are” but that the sororities know how to accurately select new members who would “fit” in their respective houses. She said, “the system works.” Her skepticism is now gone; she and her friends are happy in the house; and she, as a sophomore, is now exited to meet freshwomen who “fit.” But Sylvie’s belief that it somehow “works out” does not take into account Panhellenic’s new law that dictated that ABC and its peer organizations must increase the number of sisters. Now, “fit” is mandated. It is less “mystic” and more abiding by rules. While this is not to say that ABC sisterhood is not intimate, it is to say that it is, in part, a numbers game, a rule, and not solely a godly-ordained selection.

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Taking women “like me” and taking women who “fit” help keep the house white, wealthy, straight, and Jewish, like how taking legacies does. The idea of “fit” and being “comfortable” in the house can be read through a discourse of postfeminist neoliberalism. Cultural theorist Angela McRobbie postulates that postfeminism operates through a mentality of “choice” and “empowerment,” which swaps out ideas of liberatory feminism in favor of individualistic ideologies whereby being a consumer and being a member of society means “notional” equality within an inherently domineering capitalistic system. Postfeminism therefore falls within neoliberal theories that make each individual an entrepreneur who is free to exercise her power through consumption-based decisions and modes of buying and selling. In such, the idea of “fit” naturalizes that which is subjective – in theory the Rush process opens up membership to anyone – by indicating that there is a hazily specific type of woman who would be a good member of ABC while simultaneously stressing that it is hard to say exactly what the house is looking for beyond being “nice” and “genuine.” Sylvie said, “When I talk to them I’ll just kind of know” although she too was not sure what type of person she was looking for beyond “someone who is kind of like myself.” This is the paradox of “fit.” One PNM must be an individual, separating herself out from the pack of PNMs but also similar enough to what ABC is looking for. Whereas generally ABC regulates within, Rush permits them to extend control over women outside of ABC. The identity or perhaps the performance of self (the self-brand) that a PNM puts forward must fit the ideal that ABC aspires to, which forces PNMs, even before

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142 See Harvey, David. A Brief History of Neoliberalism: 2-3.
joining ABC, to begin to acquiesce to the collective identity. The language of “fit” is therefore language of branded assimilation. Further, under the rhetoric of “it works out for a reason” both PNMs and sisters “interpellate,” to use philosopher Louis Althusser’s term about how one begins to believe in, internalize, and then promote, cultural ideologies upon the self, sorority propaganda. Arguing that “the system works,” as Sylvie did, is an act of interpellating postfeminist ideology. For the PNMs, the act of choosing to participate in Rush, even before being selected for a sorority, is to begin individual assimilation into their eventual houses. To be part of ABC or another sorority is first to buy into the institution of The Sorority in general. Second, it is to buy into the identity of the specific sorority to and for whom the PNM self-markets. Ideology like “it works out for a reason” works for postfeminist “choice,” fallacious choice, in that the PNM women give up their agency to the sitting sisters to make decisions for them, for their sorority affiliation, for which house they will land in, ultimately in an unequal system.

Claiming the need for a good “fit” specifically for institutions that are exclusively comprised of women, limits the scope of permissible womanhood. The act of selecting some women while “othering” others states that the attributes of the selected women are welcomed while the attributes of the rejected women are less valuable. PNMs are chosen for their sisterhood qualities based on subjective criteria that privileges a selection for ABC similarity. Therefore, if ABC is already

white, wealthy, Jewish, straight, fun, and nice, but looks to be better by strengthening some of the more normative qualities (being “pretty,” as Riley said, for example), the PNM’s level of “good fit,” their appeal, is rooted in feminine normativity. Carmen touched on this when she said that there was a “rumor going around” that one of the higher tier sororities, the one that is “half Jewish, but those are the cooler Jews” was not allowed to take a new pledge class this year. She said she had friends in this higher tier sorority who she could see in ABC and that therefore, “if they can’t accept a pledge class then we could be getting their pledges... But that could either be like completely the opposite of what we want or good for us.” These women she identified as woman who “should be in ABC and would make ABC a lot better” but who are “not recognized” in the higher tier sorority. These women are Jewish, but deemed “cooler,” although still not cool enough for higher-tiered recognition, and their membership in ABC could bolster its brand in general. Taking these women would be “good” in that it would help make ABC seem like a higher tier sorority but could be “the opposite” of what they are seeking in that it could rupture the ABC brand entirely by adding in new people who completely would not “fit,” not because ABC would deem them to be non-normative, but because they would change for what the sisterhood stood. Taking women deemed “cool,” as an essence however amorphous, could help the organization be seen as higher tier but it would also change the pledge class that Carmen wants, which are “girls who seem like they want to be in ABC and not just girls who want to be in the sorority for the social aspect of it.” This therefore reads like one of Lauren Berlant’s “relation[s] of cruel
optimism.”145 Berlant, an English scholar, argues that a “cruel optimism” is “something you desire [that] is actually an obstacle to your flourishing.”146 In this case, taking the women who would usually go to the higher tier sorority because they are “cooler” would mean that ABC would then have to “deal with facey [sic] stuff” and therefore lose the “girls who seem like they really want to be in ABC.”147 But ABC’s not taking these higher-tier-destined women would mean that they would matriculate to a different sorority and elevate the status of that sorority through the Greek System’s perception of their coolness, and that ABC would lose out of its chance for climbing the tier system. What ABC wants is to be a higher tier; Carmen also said, “we’re at this standstill for where we are in the tier system;” but what could help them be in a higher tier would mean that they would have to fundamentally change who they were taking. They could no longer take women “like me;” those who would placate the status of the sorority as is. To be cooler, higher tier, ABC would have to take PNMs who in some ways read like them—white, wealthy, Jewish, straight — but who, in other ways, are not what ABC seeks, who are “face[ier]” and who are less likely to want to be in ABC for ABC.

Greek Jewish organizations have employed tactics for limiting their Jewishness since their beginnings. Mirroring the same practices of exclusion from universities in general, the Judaic historian Marianne R. Sanua writes that from the late-nineteenth century through 1941 “most elite Jewish fraternities and sororities” asked potential new members to disclose their “birthplace, mother’s maiden name,

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146 Ibid.
147 “Facey” (adjective): 1) popular 2) having a good-looking face 3) most common: a person who makes appearances at many functions aka someone whose face you are likely to see. A pejorative term to describe someone who is overtly obsessed with social image.
and the birthplace of both parents,” in an attempt to keep students with “a name ending in ‘-sky,’ origins in Eastern Europe or the Middle East, residence in the wrong neighborhood, or an overly ‘Semitic’ appearance” from joining.\(^\text{148}\) The belief was that if Jewish fraternity and sorority members had “proper manners, acceptable dress, and quiet speech in public,” if they assimilated, then their unwelcoming non-Jewish peers might accept them.\(^\text{149}\) Sanua calls this the “internalization of external anti-Jewish” ideology.\(^\text{150}\) Eventually they did assimilate. From post-WW2 through the early 1960s, Jewish organizations joined the non-Jewish white fraternity and white sorority councils, thereby giving up their separate Greek system as they got assigned whiteness.\(^\text{151}\) Even with joining, however, anti-Semitism remains. Nevertheless, while the specific practices of sending Judaism to the periphery have changed since the late-nineteenth through the early-twentieth centuries, the same ideology of being stuck between Judaism and whiteness remains.

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At the end of Rush, bids are doled out to those who make the cut. Bid Day/Night occurs right after the PNMs find out to which, if any, sorority they have been selected. Riley described the day with confusion, saying,

> After bid night there’s all this social media stuff and everyone seems so happy and you kind of like compare, like ‘I didn’t take a picture like this,’ or ‘it doesn’t look like I was doing this’ or ‘I’m not already hugging the girls in my pledge class.’


\(^{149}\) Ibid., 28.

\(^{150}\) Ibid.

Bid Day/Night, while being on the surface a rite of sisterhood and the means by which a PNM commences her pathway to specific sorority, is a spectacle of ownership and a Bourdieu-ian “act of communication;” a ritual that “signifies to someone what [her] identity is, but in a way that both expresses it to [her] and imposes it on [her] by expressing it in front of everyone,” which in turn “inform[s] in an authoritative manner of what [she] is and what [she] must be.” Inviting women to be members indicates that she is now (an) ABC. Putting pictures on social media indicates to the greater Greek community (and beyond) that this woman is now a sister of, in part defined by, will spend time with, and believes in, this institution, which calls her into the cloth, and gives her a ready-made identity. The movement from PNM to pledge to sister is one of assimilation with Bid Day/Night as the outward, performatively happy, spectacle of inclusion. It states who is in, now and forever, but erases those who tried and did not receive a bid, those who the new member used to associate with, her peers who she went through Rush with, in lieu of a new, instant identity, that of women she does not know, and who have selected her for a purpose of “fit.”

Bid Day/Night also indicates to the new member that she must begin her process of coalescing into the ABC collective. Carmen said, “It’s like if you don’t like it for how it is and you wanna see fake stuff and that’s gonna make you happy then you shouldn’t be here.” In other words, to be in ABC you must agree with ABC’s practices. If you do not agree, then you want “fake stuff” (Carmen did not define what she meant). If you want to change things, then you should leave.

Through having fun, taking photos, and hugging sisters, Bid Day/Night quashes any PNM’s doubt to reassure a new member that she belongs. “Fit” is pervasive and atemporal. It keeps ABC as is and weeds out those who would try to entirely change things. After all, sororities are conservative entities. Rush is an assertive, aggressive, offensive, forward-thinking, and promotional process that introduces women to who they could be, if they can somehow shape themselves to be “like me.”

Conclusion:

A Call for Re-evaluation

One of my goals for this project is to add to the conversation of how, if at all, Greek Life should exist on college campuses. This is a case study with data collected over the course of nine days, with twenty-eight people, and therefore in no way a conclusion about how ABC functions in its entirety or an indication of Greek Life as a whole. Greek Life is pervasive and powerful, and would be nearly impossible to tackle entirely. Many scholars have written powerful works on Greek organizations’ practices and I hope to add to that conversation.

While Greek Life holds many historical roles, and certainly promotes friendships, philanthropy, networking, and leadership, the strategies of holding whiteness, wealth, and straightness as social and cultural capital work to structurally exclude (albeit perhaps not overtly) participants who fall outside of these perceived identifiers. Moreover, as Education scholar Matthew Mayhew et al., points out in the exhaustive literature review, *How College Affects Students: 21st Century Evidence That Higher Education Works*, having a “divers[e]” university “does not automatically ensure a campus environment that is welcoming and inclusive.”  

To extrapolate this out to Greek-lettered organizations like ABC, just because there are students of color and other non-white students on Big State U’s campus does not mean that the Greek organizations are “welcoming and inclusive” and can actually work to further sequester non-white students through practices of claiming anti-

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racism in theory but not in reality. To get even broader, Education scholar Victor Sáenz used longitudinal data on nine public university campuses to prove that students engaged in predominately white environments, he gives the example of Greek organizations, without much inter-racial, inter-cultural, inter-ethnic “socializing” were more likely to experience a “negative affect on Positive CRI,” defined as “positive cross-racial attitudes” than students in more diverse environments.\(^\text{155}\) In other words, participating in a racially homogeneous organization leads to more racist attitudes. With this in mind, while ABC women are excluded from some sororities on the basis of being Jewish, the exclusion has harsher effects for students of color. Non-white organizations, multicultural organizations, and student of color organizations are wholly socially ignored by the Panhellenic and IFC organizations at Big State U. The fact that the tier system is only for white organizations and that ABC would never pair with a non-IFC fraternity erases non-white organizations from the social schema. Whiteness, and a strive for whiteness, becomes the norm. This belief is not unique to the Greek System, to Big State U, or to universities in general. The cultural values in whiteness, wealth, heterosexuality, and anti-Semitism pervade other institutions and discourse. In this sense, while this is a case study of a single sorority, perhaps it can also function as a case study of how national and societal ideologies of normativity become celebrated and disseminated in microcosm.

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In recent years, more and more universities have been re-evaluating the roles of Greek Life on their campuses. A 2014 mandate from President Michael Roth of Wesleyan University and the university’s Board of Trustees mandated the school’s fraternities to co-educate or risk losing University-recognized status. But while co-education may have been the right move at Wesleyan, the exclusion on other campuses runs deeper than gender or sex. If these organizations are to continue — and many scholars, activists, and administrators argue that they should not — then deep changes must happen in the name of combating fallacious anti-racism, entrenched class privilege, heteronormativity, and total control over members. It is my hope that this project, as a case study of one organization at one moment in time at one university, can spark collaborative discussion between academics, administrators, and fraternity/sorority members who are living these experiences to pose questions about how, if at all, Greek Life can exist on campuses.

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Bibliography:


Appendix A:

Glossary

16-Girl: The room in ABC’s sorority house that sleeps sixteen women and is always kept cold, dark, and quiet to respect any woman sleeping. It used to sleep six women.

23 Party, 16 Party, 9 Party, 3 Party: The names of the different Rush/Recruitment days based off the number of possible houses a woman can visit. Only at 23 Party is she guaranteed to visit all 23 houses. She can get cut at any round after 23 Party.

Bid Day/Bid Night: The day or night when offers of membership are given to women who have endured rush. The offer of membership is called a “bid.”

Blacklisted: To be institutionally and socially ostracized from a particular sorority house on the basis on pre-Rush behavior. This is technically not permitted but occurs regardless.

Chapter (Meeting): The required weekly meeting of the entire sorority. Skipping chapter can result in sanctions. The term “chapter” also refers to ABC at Big State U as well, for example, “My chapter is called ABC.”

Date Party: A sorority-hosted formal party where the sisters bring dates (or are set up by their sisters on blind dates) to a local restaurant or bar because the sisters are not allowed to have alcohol or parties in the house.

Executive Board: The committee of ABC leaders who are social equals but political overlords.

Facey: A person who makes appearances at many functions; someone whose face you are likely to see. A pejorative term to describe someone who is overtly obsessed with social image.

Finsta(gram): Short for “fake-Instagram.” An account that is controlled by the owner so that only select persons are permitted to follow. Generally the material on a
Finsta is more invasive, more personal, less likely to be appropriate to the general Instagram audience, and perhaps includes illegal activity or nudity.

**Go Out:** Engage socially on the weekend with persons outside of ABC, generally at a pair/pairing or another type of party, and usually involving men.

**House Points:** An economy of rewards whereby positive behavior is rewarded with House Points which can be traded in at the end of the year or mid-year for the selection of a room in the ABC house. More points correlates to a higher pick number.

**IFC (Interfraternity Council):** The on-campus organizational body of the North-American Interfraternity Conference. These fraternities on Big State U’s campus are white in everything but name.

**Legacy:** A Potential New Member whose mother (or grandmother or sister) was in the same sorority that she is rushing. ABC takes these women automatically unless she is deemed entirely undesirable.

**MCGC (National Multicultural Greek Council):** Organizational body of Latinx, Asian, and multicultural sororities and fraternities.

**NPHC (National Pan-Hellenic Council, Inc.):** Organizational body for the “Divine Nine,” or nine historically black sororities and fraternities.

**Open Up:** When a pair becomes welcomed to all members of the (Greek) Big State U community. This tends to be at about midnight. ABC sisters make the decision to check out with their sober monitor when the pairing officially ends and can go to another fraternity’s house that has “opened up” or can make the decision to stay at the pair they are at as members of the (Greek) Big State U community trickle in.

**Pair/Pairing:** A pre-arranged party hosted by and in a fraternity house and attended by one sorority. The Social Chair of the sorority collaborates with the Social Chair of the fraternity to plan out the date/time and to coordinate “pledge rides,” rides from new members of the fraternity.
**Panhellenic (NPC):** The central governing body of sororities at Big State U that are, in all by name, white.

**Pledge:** A(n) (anachronistic) term to refer to new members who are not yet initiated into the sorority or fraternity. In light of stigma in recent years regarding hazing, the term “pledge” has been largely abandoned in favor of New Member.

**Pledge Class:** One’s sorority or fraternity peers who were selected at the same time and are generally, but not always, in one’s graduation year.

**Pledge Ride:** A ride given by new fraternity members for sisters in other sororities. The pledge rides will pick the women up and bring them to the pledge’s fraternity house for a party.

**Potential New Member (PNM):** A woman going through rush, who has not yet chosen or been chosen for a sorority house.

**Pre-game:** Drinking with peers before a larger party with the goal of showing up to the party drunk or on the way to getting drunk. Generally happens inside the sorority house or at a smaller venue. There are few people involved compared to the participants in a party. It is analogous to a pre-party.

**Rush/Recruitment:** The process through which potential new sorority members attend events at multiple sororities, eventually electing to join and being selected by, one sorority.

**Rush Video:** A video uploaded to YouTube for any to see of ABC (or other sororities or fraternities) sisterhood. The video permits an organization to show potential new members (and non-affiliated individuals) what being in ABC means through a contrived lens.

**Sister:** A member of ABC, or any sorority.

**Slate:** A committee of sisters selects the women who they assume would be good for the Executive Board positions; the women can try to select some but ultimately the members are chosen for the spots and vice versa.
**Sober/Sober Monitor:** The designated sister(s) who is(are) not to drink alcohol (or do drugs) during a pair or a Date Party or another function where persons may be inebriated. This sister is tasked to regulate her fellow sisters and has the authority to send them home if she deems them too drunk or out of it. She can leave a function when 85% of her sisters have left.

**Social Chair:** A leadership position within a sorority or fraternity. For ABC, the Social Chair is in charge of planning pairs with different fraternities throughout the week/weekend. This means texting the social chairs of desirable fraternities and hoping that they had an open night or wanted to pair with the ABC women.

**Standards Committee:** The overarching disciplinary council for all of ABC, which is comprised of fellow sisters.

**Suicide:** The process during 3 Party when a woman elects to be in one sorority and refuses to join other options (assuming she has more than one option) if she were selected for them. It is an ‘all-or-none’ principle; for example, ABC or bust.

**Tier System:** The status hierarchy in Panhellenic sororities. The IFC fraternities run parallel. The tier system ignores non-white and multicultural houses thereby making whiteness the norm. There are three tiers: top tier, middle tier, and bottom tier. ABC is a middle tier house.
Appendix B:
Oral Consent Script

Hello, my name is Isabel Fine. I am a student at Wesleyan University in Connecticut. For my senior thesis, I am conducting research on college student experiences with Fraternities and Sororities. The purpose is to let students speak freely about their experiences. I would like to speak with you about your experiences as a member of a Greek organization. This interview will last about an hour. If possible, I would like to record our conversation, but if you would feel more comfortable, I will write your answers in my notebook. Even if I record this interview, by audio or by writing, I will not be using your name, your Greek affiliation, or your University in the final project. All of this information will receive a pseudonym. If at any time during our conversation you feel uncomfortable answering a question, please let me know, and you do not need to answer it. Some of the topics I ask are about illegal activity, substance use, and sexual interactions. Please let me know if you do not feel comfortable speaking about these experiences as well. I understand that they are more sensitive. If you want to speak to other subjects I have not asked, please say so, and we can go in that direction. I will protect your identity, your Greek affiliation, and your University, throughout this next year by locking the interviews on my computer in password-locked files. Only myself, Kerwin Kaye and Megan Glick, my two thesis advisors at Wesleyan University, will have access to your name, your Greek affiliation, and your University. At the end of my thesis project, all the recorded files will be destroyed. This research carries minimal risk and you will not receive any benefits. Participation is strictly voluntary.
You have the right to stop this interview at any time and there will be no repercussions. If you would like more time to think about this interview before participating, you may contact me with the information provided on my contact sheet and we can schedule an interview for another time. Do you agree to participate and allow me to tape record our conversation?
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