PEER VICTIMIZATION IN COLLEGE SORORITY AND FRATERNITY STUDENTS: THE IMPACT OF GROUP IDENTITY AND CAMPUS CONNECTEDNESS

By

Julia Jacquelyn Michael

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As members of the Dissertation Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Julia Jacquelyn Michael entitled Peer Victimization in College Sorority and Fraternity Students: The Impact of Group Identity and Campus Connectedness and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Date: 1/27/15

Michael L. Sulkowski

Date: 1/27/15

Katie R. Eklund

Date: 1/27/15

Richard J. Morris

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copies of the dissertation to the Graduate College. I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

Date: 1/27/15

Dissertation Director: Michael Sulkowski
STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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SIGNED: Julia J. Michael
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ABSTRACT

This study examined peer victimization, specifically indirect peer victimization and cyber victimization, in a sample of 311 college fraternity and sorority students at a large, public university in the southwestern United States. Of specific focus was the relationship between peer victimization—both within fraternity and sorority groups and between fraternity and sorority groups and outside members—and co-occurring psychological stress (i.e., anxiety, depression, stress). The potential mediating roles of group identity and campus connectedness were also examined. This study utilized the social psychological theory of Social Identity Theory to predict the relationships between the aforementioned variables. Results indicated that a majority of college fraternity and sorority students (58%) have experienced at least one instance of indirect peer victimization since being initiated into their respective organization. Collectively, the majority of respondents reported low levels of peer victimization and high levels of group identity and campus connectedness. As hypothesized, peer victimization was significantly and positively correlated with stress. In addition, higher ratings of within-group peer victimization were related to lower ratings of group identity. However, ratings of between-group peer victimization were not significantly related to ratings of group identity, which did not support the hypothesis that there would be a significant and positive correlation between the two.

It was also found that campus connectedness mediated the relationship between peer victimization and Stress. Specifically, campus connectedness served as a protective factor from stress. Alternately, group identity did not protect against stress. Lastly, a
specific subgroup of participants was identified as experiencing significantly high levels of peer victimization. Participants designated as “Victims” were significantly more likely to report ethnic minority status, be male, and be a fifth-year college student. Moreover, these students reported significantly higher levels of stress, and lower levels of group identity and campus connectedness. The implications of these findings for university and educational settings are discussed.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Peer victimization involves being on the receiving end of malicious and purposeful aggression perpetrated by a peer. It is a prevalent social problem that has received a great deal of attention during the past thirty years (Feshbach, 1969; Olweus, 1999). Peer aggression can include direct or indirect acts. Direct aggression has been defined as physical violence such as hitting, pushing, and tripping, as well as verbal attacks including name-calling, taunting, and threatening (Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008). Indirect aggression refers to behaviors that negatively impact a victim’s social status and peer relationships, often in a way that does not involve direct confrontation (Card et al., 2008). Indirect aggression can include intentional exclusion of the victim from the group, deliberately ignoring the victim, instigating peer conflicts, or spreading rumors (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Polan, Sieving, McMorris, 2013). Direct and indirect victimization can also occur in cyberspace through technologies such as e-mail, cell phone messaging, social networking web sites, chat rooms, and instant messaging (Olweus, 2012). Cyber aggression can incorporate both direct (e.g., name-calling, humiliation, threats or intimidation) and indirect forms of aggression (e.g., “masquerading” [i.e., pretending to be someone else and posting harmful information], “outing” [i.e., sending sensitive, private, or embarrassing information about a victim], and “exclusion” [i.e. excluding someone from an online group]; Dempsey, Sulkowski, Nichols, & Storch, 2009; Willard, 2007).

Research indicates that a significant proportion of youth have been victimized by their peers (Center for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2011; Nansel et al., 2001).
In national and international studies of middle and high school students, 20% (grades 9-12) to 34% (age 11-15 years) of youth report being the victim of direct aggression (CDC, 2011; Craig & Harel, 2004), while prevalence rates of indirect peer victimization among youth have been reported to be higher (Carbone-Lopez, Esbensen, & Brick, 2010; Dinkes et al., 2007). In a national survey of 1,222 youth (mean age = 12 years; Carbone-Lopez et al., 2010), more than twice as many participants reported involvement in indirect aggression (71%) as opposed to direct aggression (33%). The rates of peer victimization via cyber aggression suggest that this phenomenon is also prevalent, with over 30% of 2,186 surveyed middle and high school students self-reporting involvement with cyber aggression (Mishna, Khoury-Kassabri, Gadalla, & Daciuk, 2012).

In addition to significant prevalence rates, researchers have found considerable overlap between different types of peer victimization (Card et al., 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Olweus, 2012). For example, Card et al. (2008) found that direct and indirect aggression were significantly correlated, suggesting that the two forms of aggression are different expressions of an underlying aggressive nature, as opposed to being separate entities. In addition, researchers have found a high degree of overlap between students being victimized by aggressive behavior that occurs in physical settings and cyber aggression (Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Olweus, 2012). This indicates that students who are victimized in one setting likely will also be victimized in the other. Thus, while aggressive behavior can be divided into different forms, these forms are related.
Effects of Peer Victimization

In addition to being prevalent, peer victimization negatively affects the youth who are involved with this phenomenon. Research indicates that peer victimization is associated with elevated levels of psychological distress such as anxiety, loneliness, depression, health problems, and even suicidal ideation (Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Moore & Kirkham, 2001; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012). In a study of sixth-grade students, Juvonen, Graham, and Schuster (2003) found that youth who were victimized by peer aggression displayed elevated levels of depression, social anxiety, and loneliness when compared to their peers (both aggressors and uninvolved students). Moreover, Kowalski and Limber (2013) found that victimized students had significantly higher self-report ratings of anxiety and depression, and significantly lower ratings of emotional well-being and academic performance when compared to their non-victimized peers. Peer victimization has also been found to be negatively correlated with self-esteem (Glew, Rivara & Fewudtner, 2000; Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Moore & Kirkham, 2001). In general, victims of peer aggression tend to have a negative view of themselves and their environment. Findings from cross-sectional studies indicate that victims report lower levels of self-concept (Carbone-Lopez et al., 2010; Cassidy, 2008; Kowalski & Smith, 2013). Therefore, in light of these findings, peer victimization appears to be deleterious to victim’s psychological functioning.

Research also indicates that peer victimization is associated with long-term negative effects to psychological functioning. In support of this notion, some studies even
indicate that the negative effects of peer victimization can endure into adulthood (e.g., Gibb, Abramson, & Alloy, 2004; Eaton et al., 2012). In one study, college students who scored in the top 25% on a depression rating scale reported being exposed to higher levels of peer victimization prior to 18 years of age (Gibb et al., 2004). In addition, college students who reported being victimized in school reported higher levels of current depressive symptoms, anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and loneliness (Storch et al., 2004). Similarly, in a more recent study by Gladstone, Parker, and Malhi (2006), childhood victimization was found to be strongly related to later depression and co-morbid anxiety. Specifically, 25% of adults in an outpatient clinic for depression indicated that they had experienced severe and traumatic episodes of peer victimization in their childhood.

Similar to internalizing problems such as depression, anxiety, and poor self-esteem, researchers have found a relationship between peer victimization and elevated levels of externalizing behavior problems (e.g., Carbone-Lopez et al., 2010; Sullivan, Farrell, & Kliwer, 2006). As a salient example of the former, Sullivan et al. (2006) found that peer victimization was related to alcohol use, cigarette use, and aggression in a sample of eighth grade students. Being the victim of either direct or indirect aggression was also correlated with delinquent behaviors such as stealing, damaging property, and skipping school (Carbone-Lopez et al., 2010; Sullivan et al., 2006). Therefore, to summarize, peer victimization appears to exert an enduring negative impact on students’ psychosocial functioning over time and across multiple domains of functioning.
Peer Victimization in College Students

The majority of research on peer victimization has focused on children and adolescents in K-12 school settings, whereas comparably little research has been conducted on this phenomenon in college students (American Educational Research Association (AERA), 2013; Harachi, Catalano, & Hawkins, 1999). However, from what research is available, it appears that high rates of college students also are impacted by peer victimization. For example, one study found that 21% of surveyed college students reported being the victim of peer aggression at least once or twice (Chapell et al., 2006). Similarly, in a survey of 100 undergraduate students, 21% reported having been the victim of cyber aggression yet over 30% of participants indicated that their first experience of cyber victimization occurred in college (Kowalski, et al., 2012). Thus, from the extant research, it seems that peer victimization affects a significant amount of college-aged students, potentially for the first time in their lives. However, relatively little empirical work has been conducted on how college students are impacted by peer victimization.

Limitations of research on peer victimization in college students are concerning because these individuals display some unique vulnerabilities. For example, demographic shifts in college students over the past few decades indicate that college students may be exposed to significant adjustment and developmental challenges in addition to the usual stress associated with being in college (e.g., taking challenging courses, balancing a job and school work). Research indicates that college students are younger and more ethnically and geographically diverse than they have been in the past 30 years.
(McCormick et al., 2013; United States Department of Education [USDOE], 2009). In a survey of 364,193 undergraduate students from 613 institutions across the United States and Canada, 30% identified as being of ethnic minority and 46% identified as being a first generation student (McCormick et al, 2013). Moreover, 71% of college students reported being younger than 24 years of age and students younger than 25 increased by 33% from 1995 to 2006 (McCormick et al., 2013). In addition, college students—particularly college women—are a growing population: Enrollment among women increased 27% from 1997 to 2007 (USDOE, 2009). Thus, enrollment of women in college rose 29%, as opposed to an increase of 22% in men (USDOE, 2009). Lastly, 35% of college students reported living on campus, potentially away from the supervision of their immediate caregivers for the first time in their lives (McCormick et al., 2013).

Research indicates that college students present with a range of vulnerabilities that make them particularly vulnerable to being victimized by peer aggression (Benton, Robertson, Tseng, Newton, & Benton, 2003; Blanco et al., 2013; Zivin, Eisenberg). According to the USDOE (2009), 11% of students enrolled in college in 2008 had a diagnosed disability, 22% of which had a mental health condition. Furthermore, in other studies, even more students have reported symptoms of mental illness that were not recognized as disabilities: Over half of a sample of college students have reported experiencing anxiety, depression, substance-abuse, eating disorders, or self-injurious behaviors (Blanco et al., 2013; Zivin et al., 2009). Consequently, the rate of students who are experiencing mental health problems is growing. Coinciding with this phenomenon, Benton et al. (2003) found increases in students’ use of college counseling centers over a
13-year period (1988-2001) for problems including anxiety, depression, and suicidality. In another study, many students reported that their mental health needs did not surface until college, further highlighting the growing mental health needs of college students (Megivern, Pellerito, & Mowbray, 2003).

Mental health needs and disability status might make college students particularly vulnerable to peer victimization. For instance, the core symptoms of depression include decreased interest or pleasure in activities as well as social withdrawal (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Participating in fewer activities might cause students with higher rates of depression to feel lonely and become socially isolated. Although there are no current studies identifying vulnerability to peer victimization in college students, research with K-12 students indicates that students with poorer emotional adjustment and greater loneliness experienced higher rates of victimization (Nansel et al., 2001). In a three-year longitudinal study, Turner, Reynolds, Leer, Subsasic, and Bromhead (2014) found that increased rates of anxiety and depression in seventh to tenth grade students predicted being victimized by peer aggression at a later time. Furthermore, students with internalizing distress may have poorer social relationships and feel less peer social support (both of which are protective factors against peer victimization; Lester, Cross, Shaw, & Dooley, 2013; Card & Hodges, 2008). In a seminal study, Nansel et al. (2001) found that victims of aggression reported a greater difficulty making friends and had fewer relationships with their peers. In subsequent research, students aged 12-18 years who reported feeling rejected at school were found to be five times more likely to report being victimized by peer aggression (Wynne & Joo, 2010). Therefore, experiencing
emotional distress might render students more susceptible to peer victimization, and peer victimization might then precipitate further emotional distress. To summarize this putative reciprocal relationship, Turner et al. (2014) argued that mental health problems may be both a cause and a consequence of peer victimization.

**Peer Victimization in Fraternity and Sorority Members**

Sorority and Fraternity members (colloquially known as “Greek students”) are a subset of college students that may be particularly vulnerable to peer aggression and its negative effects. Fraternity and sorority members experience direct peer aggression through hazing. Allan and Madden (2008) define hazing as “any activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers them regardless of a person’s willingness to participate (p. 2).” In a nationwide survey of college students, 73% of students in a fraternity or sorority reported being the victim of at least one hazing incident (Allan & Madden, 2008). In addition, membership in a fraternity or sorority also has been found to predict involvement in hazing (Campo, Poulos, & Sipple, 2005). In a sample of college fraternity and sorority members, 53% of respondents reported being the victim of direct hazing-related behaviors such as participating in a drinking game; 31% reported singing or chanting in public in a situation not related to a game, event, or practice; 26% reported drinking alcohol to the point of getting sick or passing out; 16% reported associating with specific people and not others; 17% reported sleep-deprivation; and 18% reported being verbally aggressed by other members (Allan & Madden, 2008). Perhaps most concerning, the authors found that 10%
of respondents reported “performing sex acts with the opposite gender,” and 9% reported “watching live sex acts (p. 10).”

Contrary to other forms of peer victimization, college students were more likely to report that their hazing experiences were positive (Allan & Madden, 2008; Allan & Madden, 2012). For example, in the study by Allan and Madden (2008), 31% of the 9,067 college respondents reported that being the victim of hazing caused them to feel more like a member of the group, whereas only 11% of respondents indicated that it made them feel stressed. Moreover, in the same study, 22% reported a sense of accomplishment, 18% felt strong, and 15% reported doing better in class. Alternately, the perceived negative effects of hazing were minimal. For example, only 4% of students indicated they felt guilty and 2% reported feeling like they were in danger (Allan & Madden, 2008). Moreover, students involved in fraternities and sororities expressed a more favorable impression of hazing than their college counterparts did; they viewed hazing as more fun and less harmful than students not involved (Campo et al., 2005). It may be that fraternity and sorority members minimize hazing behaviors or that they hold different definitions of what constitutes hazing. Thus, participation in hazing appears to foster a mentality that condones hazing as part of the social experiences of members of the Greek system.

Positive perceived effects of hazing could prevent some victims from reporting incidents. Research indicates students did not report being the victim of hazing in 95% of the cases (Allan & Madden, 2008). Moreover, when interviewed, students minimized, rationalized, or normalized their hazing experiences. For example, they would report that
“It was no big deal,” “No one was harmed,” “Feelings afterward outweighed the pain or stress felt during,” or “It was tradition, so I didn’t mind.” (p.29) In addition to minimizing or rationalizing their experiences, the majority of students did not even define their experiences as hazing (Allan & Madden, 2008; 2012). In a nationwide study of college students who reported engaging in behaviors that met the definition of hazing, 9 out of 10 did not consider themselves to have been hazed (Allan & Madden, 2012).

However, despite students’ tendency to underreport and minimize its effects, hazing significantly threatens students’ safety and wellbeing, and it may even result in death in extreme cases (Campo et al., 2005; Nuwer, 2013). According to Nuwer (2013), 23 students died from hazing-related behaviors in 2000, 24 in 2001, and 42 in 2002. In addition, hazing has been found to result in poor psychosocial outcomes for some victims, such as decreased school attendance, feeling unsafe, and experiencing anxiety and depression (Allan & Madden, 2008). Thus, experiencing hazing can have damaging and dire consequences for some students.

In contrast to other forms of peer victimization such as bullying that involve repeated incidents of victimization, hazing is a time limited phenomenon—it only occurs while students are attempting to gain membership into the organization and it ceases once membership is obtained. Thus, it is unclear whether the high rates of hazing within fraternity and sorority groups foster a group mentality that is accepting of peer victimization. Moreover, the prevalence of hazing in fraternity and sorority organizations emphasizes the sanctity of group membership. In order to gain access, new recruits must be temporarily victimized by existing members. This heightens the importance of
belonging. Consequently, attention that can potentially ostracize one from the group can be especially upsetting (Bauman, Baldasare, Goldman, & Barre, in press). Therefore, college fraternity and sorority members appear to be particularly at-risk for increased rates of ongoing peer victimization and elevated levels of stress. However, there is very little research examining peer aggression and resulting stress within college fraternity and sorority groups.

Studies that have examined ongoing peer victimization in college fraternity and sorority members have yielded mixed results. Smith, Grimm, Lombard, and Wolfe (2012) examined peer victimization (specifically cyber aggression) as it occurred in particular groups of college students such as fraternity and sorority members. Members of these Greek organizations did not report significantly higher rates of being targeted by cyber victimization than did students who were not involved (Smith et al., 2012). However, they did report witnessing a significantly higher rate of peer victimization: 51% of fraternity or sorority members compared to 35% of the general college population. Smith et al. (2012) did not specify who were the victims or aggressors in the scenarios. In addition, they did not specify if the reported aggressive behavior occurred within a fraternity or sorority, between members of sororities/fraternities, or between Greek members and other students.

Contrary to the findings of Smith et al. (2012), Bauman et al. (in press) did find significant differences in the rates of engagement in cyber bullying between members of Greek organizations and their nonaffiliated peers. Significantly higher rates of cyber humiliation were found for the group of students who affiliated with a fraternity or
sorority compared to nonaffiliated college students. In addition, members of fraternities and sororities also reported a significantly greater amount of distress in response to bullying (Bauman et al., in press). Therefore, the small amount of research that has been conducted investigating peer victimization suggests that members of fraternity or sorority groups are more susceptible to it and that victimization causes them a greater amount of stress than is experienced by unaffiliated students. However, a lack of research in this area prevents the drawing of any definitive conclusions.

As implied, research examining peer victimization in college students is limited. What has been published indicates that prevalence rates are similar to those observed in school-aged students (Chapell et al., 2004; 2006). In addition, the research on hazing in Greek students is mixed: A significant percent of students do not report negative effects, although they recognize the potential harm (Allan & Madden 2008, 2013). Greek students may be particularly vulnerable to the effects of peer victimization because of the strong emphasis on group membership and social relationships associated with being a member of a fraternity or sorority. However, no theory has been applied to how peer victimization can negatively impact psychosocial functioning. Thus, a theoretically grounded study on this phenomenon is needed.
CHAPTER II: A THEORETICAL MODEL TO EXPLAIN PEER VICTIMIZATION AND RESULTING STRESS IN FRATERNITY AND SORORITY MEMBERS

One significant limitation to examining peer victimization in college fraternity and sorority members is that no theoretical framework has been applied to understand this phenomenon. However, Social Identity Theory (SIT) could explain the potentially higher incidence of peer victimization within these groups, as well as the exacerbated negative effects on these individuals’ psychosocial functioning. Social Identity Theory invokes the relationship between an individual and his or her group to explain the behavior of group members. According to SIT, individuals have a basic need to obtain a relatively positive view of themselves and their group through comparing themselves to others. Thus, individuals adjust their self-concept (and consequently their self-esteem) through their affiliation with a chosen group such as a fraternity or sorority (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Group Identity

Social Identity Theory (SIT) posits that an individual attempts to increase his or her own self-esteem and self-concept through identifying with a group. Group identification can therefore be defined as the extent to which an individual believes that he or she embodies group values, characteristics, and attitudes. Individuals can vary on the extent that they identify with members of their in-group. According to SIT, an individual obtains a sense of self-esteem and self-worth through identifying with group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Therefore, to facilitate group identification, the
individual will emphasize the differences between members of his or her group (fraternity or sorority) and out-groups (other fraternity or sorority groups; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In addition, according to SIT, members of the in-group would likely view their own group more favorably than they would view members of the out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This phenomenon appears to be particularly relevant to college Greek systems in which social factors related to group membership are especially salient and pronounced.

Membership grants students access into a centuries-old group with a unique history. The organization has its own confidential rituals, deep-rooted customs, and specific rites of passage. Fraternity and sorority groups thus constitute well-established in-group institutions that even appear to be secretive, enigmatic, and insular to outsiders.

Tenants of SIT have been supported by studies of college students (Sidanius, Pratto, & Mitchell, 1994; Smith & Tyler, 1997). In a study by Sidanius, et al. (1994), college students who reported higher levels of group identification viewed their group as being more competent than the identified out-group (i.e., expressed the belief that members of their in-group were better at the experimental task). They also reported more psychological distance toward members of the out-group—they were less willing to cooperate with them. This effect also translates into sorority and fraternity membership. In a study of sorority women, level of identification with one’s own sorority was related to how members of other sororities were viewed (Smith & Tyler, 1997). Ratings of group identification, conceptualized as pride, were related to lower ratings of positive characteristics of other sorority members such as “attractive,” “confident,” “friendly,” “likable,” “popular,” “sophisticated,” and “talented.” (p. 160) Thus, the more a sorority
member identified with her group and the more pride she had toward it, the less positively she viewed members of other sororities that were perceived to be members of an out-group. Consequently, SIT suggests that group identity can promote strong identification and potential discrimination and isolation of individuals who are real or perceived to be outsiders.

In accordance with predictions from SIT, researchers have also found that school-aged individuals tend to favor their in-group over out-group members when condoning aggressive behavior (Gini, 2007; Jones, Haslam, York, & Ryan, 2008; Jones, Manstead, & Livingstone, 2009). Ojala and Nesdale (2004) found that boys (aged 10-13 years) were more likely to accept peer aggression if it was directed toward an out-group member. Participants read a scenario that described two characters. One was a member of “the dudes,” a group described to encourage reader identification (“the dudes” were competitive and liked sports; p. 25). The other character was a member of the “try-hards,” a group designed to be the out-group (p. 25). Participants were more likely to retain the aggressor (a member of “the dudes”) when members of the out-group (the “try-hards”) were more similar to them (also liked sports, etc.; Ojala & Nesdale, 2004). The researchers argued that these findings support SIT. Participants condoned aggression because their group identity (the group’s status quo) was threatened when out-group members were similar to them (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). If group members did not feel threatened by out-group members, they would be less accepting of aggression toward them.
The findings of Ojala and Nesdale (2004) also have significant implications for fraternity and sorority students. The threat of similar out-group members, as predicted by SIT, could lead to significantly elevated levels of peer aggression between fraternity and sorority groups. Many Greek-affiliated students share similar socio-economic status and ethnicity. Specifically, at the university where this research was conducted, administration reported 77% of their Greek-affiliated students to be of Caucasian ethnicity. Therefore, members of another fraternity or sorority could be viewed as especially threatening because of their similarities to members of the in-group, aside from the Greek letters that they wear.

Moreover, membership in fraternity and sorority can facilitate in-group mentality in which individuals distance themselves from members of other fraternities and sororities and/or nonaffiliated peers. The research by Ojala and Nesdale (2004) suggests that the greater an individual identifies with his or her particular fraternity or sorority, the higher likelihood of refusal to cooperate with other Greek-affiliated or unaffiliated members. That individual might even be more condoning of aggressive acts toward them. This mentality could lead to increased levels of peer victimization.

In support of the influence of group identity on peer victimization as implied by SIT, research has highlighted a relationship between the two. In a study conducted by Cassidy (2009), students (aged 11-15) who identified as being the victim of peer victimization reported significantly reduced levels of social identity compared to their peers. Therefore, students who were victimized reported significant lower levels of identification with a close group of friends and students who do not report a feeling of
social identity are at increased risk for victimization (Cassidy, 2009). Similarly, studies of peer aggression in school-aged students have revealed relationships between peer victimization, peer rejection, and peer acceptance (Card et al., 2008). Students who are targets of peer aggression experience higher rates of peer rejection and lower ratings of peer acceptance (Card et al., 2008). Consequently, victimization has been correlated with an individual’s feelings of identity to his or her group and same-aged peers.

**Effect of In-group vs. Out-group Victimization**

The tenants of SIT suggest that the relationship between peer victimization and group identity could be partially moderated by the group from which the aggressor is affiliated. Being victimized by members of an out-group (either another fraternity or sorority or an unaffiliated student) might support an individual’s negative view of out-group members. By attributing more negative characteristics to out-group members, the individual could be consequently elevating the status of his or her own group (fraternity or sorority). For example: “Alpha Alpha’s are so inconsiderate for doing that to me—members of my own Beta Beta would never do such a thing!” According to SIT, this might increase the member’s feelings of identifying with his or her own fraternity or sorority. Therefore, being victimized by members of an out-group might increase an individual’s level of identification with his or her distinct in-group.

Conversely, being victimized by a member of one’s own sorority or fraternity might decrease an individual’s level of group identification. Being victimized by members of one’s esteemed group could potentially cause the individual to feel ostracized and isolated. Consequently, the individual might experience less identification
with the group. Being victimized by a member of one’s own group might not only threaten the individual member, but also negatively affect the impression this person has of the group (sorority or fraternity). Thus, negative feelings about one’s in-group could potentially decrease feelings of group identity.

**Stress**

Social Identity Theory also predicts the negative psychosocial effects of peer victimization that were identified in a study by Bauman et al (in press). Greater in-group identification suggests the presence of amplified distress when one’s in-group status is threatened. According to SIT, strong identity with one’s group is not only a personal belief, but also an important source of self-esteem. Therefore, threats to a members’ social status can be particularly devastating. It is hypothesized that peer victimization from out-group members (or anonymous members) will still have a positive relationship to psychological stress, but that this effect will not be as pronounced as being victimized by a member of one’s own sorority or fraternity.

**Campus Connectedness**

Researchers have worked to identify protective factors against peer victimization and its negative psychosocial effects. One factor that has been identified is social connectedness (Lester, Cross, Shaw, & Dooley, 2012). Lee and Robbins (1995) identified social connectedness as a psychological construct that reflects one’s ideas about oneself and how he or she relates to his or her social world. It incorporates relationships with both proximal and distal figures such as family, friends, acquaintances, and even strangers (Lee & Robbins, 1998). High levels of social connectedness enhance the belief
that one can ask others for help and support in times of need and it also allows an individual to enter into social relationships with the belief that they share something in common with others (Aroniff, Stollak, & Woike, 1994; Miller, 1992). Conversely, individuals with low levels of social connectedness have been found to be more prone to chronic loneliness, depression, lower self-esteem, higher perceived stress, higher anxiety, more social discomfort, and higher degrees of hostility (Lee, Draper, & Lee, 2001; Lee & Robbins, 1998).

Lee et al. (2001) examined social connectedness in college students as it related to their feelings of connectedness with their overall college community and campus life. They found social connectedness to be negatively correlated to social stress: students who felt more connected to their wider college community felt more able to handle life’s demands and subsequently felt less stress. In another study of college students, Williams and Galliher (2006) found that social connectedness was significantly associated with anxiety, self-esteem, perceived stress, depression, social discomfort, and hostility. In addition, social connectedness mediated the relationship between self-esteem and depression (Williams & Galliher, 2006).

Therefore, social connectedness appears to serve as a protective factor against a range of psychological distress, both in adults and college students (Williams & Galliher, 2006). In support of this, self-reported levels of social connectedness predicted lower levels of engaging the peer victimization (Lester et al., 2012). These findings suggest that feelings of social connectedness in college students might protect against the negative psychosocial effects of peer victimization. Moreover, feelings of social connectedness to
one’s campus as a whole could be independent of group identity to a specific fraternity or sorority. Thus, even if a fraternity or sorority member did not feel a strong sense of group identity to his or her respective group, feelings of overall campus connectedness might mitigate the negative effects of peer victimization. If this is so, this relationship would have important ramifications for university institutions that aim to foster feelings of campus connectedness and support the wellbeing of students more generally.

**Purpose of the Present Study**

A central aim of this current study is to explore the phenomenology of peer victimization in college fraternity and sorority members. While the literature examining the nature, prevalence, and associated negative effects of peer victimization on school-aged students is extensive, few studies have investigated this phenomenon in college students, especially as it occurs within fraternity and sorority members (AERA, 2013). This is unfortunate given that the research suggests that members of fraternity and sorority groups may be particularly vulnerable to peer victimization and resulting stress such as anxiety and depression (Bauman et al., in press; Benton et al., 2003; Blanco et al., 2013; McCormick et al., 2013; USDOE, 2009). Moreover, research also suggests that members of college fraternity and sorority groups already commonly experience pernicious incidents of peer victimization such as hazing, which further highlights a need for research on this topic (Allan & Madden, 2008, 2012).

Therefore, using SIT as a conceptual framework, this study will investigate the relationships between a number of variables including peer victimization, social group affiliation of the aggressor (e.g., within one’s fraternity/sorority, from an outside
fraternity/sorority, from an unaffiliated peer, or unknown), one’s group identity, stress, and overall level of campus connectedness. Similar to the findings from other studies in school-aged students (Hawker & Boulton, 2001; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Moore & Kirkham, 2001; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012) and college students (Bauman et al, in press), it is hypothesized that peer victimization in college fraternity and sorority members will be positively associated with level of stress. However, the aggressor’s group membership is expected to influence victims’ level of group identity and his or her level of stress. According to the principles of SIT, being victimized by an out-group member is expected to be associated with higher levels of in-group identification. Alternately, victimization from one’s own fraternity or sorority is predicted to be associated with lower levels of group identification and elevated levels of stress.

In addition, the relationship between peer victimization and stress is expected to be influenced by campus connectedness ratings. In this regard, campus connectedness ratings are expected to attenuate the negative impact of peer victimization as measured by ratings of stress independent from students’ in-group and out-group identities. Findings will reveal important insight into the phenomenology of peer victimization as it occurs within college fraternity and sorority organizations, a system in which group membership is particularly salient and important. It will also investigate the degree that campus connectedness can protect against the development of psychosocial stress associated with peer victimization. If so, university personnel might be able to prioritize efforts to enhance students feeling of connectedness to help mitigate the negative effects of peer
victimization. Figure 1 lists the proposed nature of the relationship between included study variables.

**Hypotheses:**

Based on the proposed model, the following hypothesis/research questions are presented:

1. Peer victimization will be significantly correlated with stress.

2. Within-group victimization (from a member of one’s own fraternity/sorority) will be negatively correlated related to group identity.

3. Between-group victimization (from another fraternity/sorority and another, from an unaffiliated peer, or unknown) will be positively correlated to group identity.

4. The variables Group Identity and Campus Connectedness will partially mediate the relationship between peer victimization and stress.

*Figure 1. Model of Peer Victimization in College Fraternity and Sorority Members*
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Study Population

Participants in this study were recruited from the population of undergraduate student members affiliated with a Greek organization at a large university in the southwest United States. Greek organizations consisted of those affiliated with the National Panhellenic Council (NPC), North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC), National Pan-Hellenic Council, Incorporated (NPHC), or United Sorority and Fraternity Council (USFC). According to the university where data were collected, this group consisted of 4,861 students (3,123 female; 64%). In 2012, the ethnic breakdown of membership was as follows: Caucasian (77%), Hispanic/Latino (11%), biracial (9%), Asian American (2%), African American (2%), and other/unknown (0.1%).

Study Participants

The population of this study (i.e., the 311 analyzed cases; 7% total response rate) consisted of 28% male and 72% female students. Of the participants, 13% indicated that they were 18 years old, 27% indicated that they were 19 years old, 23% indicated being 20 years old, 25% indicated being 21 years old, and 12% indicated being 22 years of age or older. In addition, 20% of the participants indicated being freshman, 29% sophomores, 24% juniors, 23% seniors, and 1% in their fifth year of college or more. As for self-reported college grade point average (GPA), 3% of students reported having a 4.0, 33% reported a GPS in the range of 3.5-3.99, 40% reported having a GPA between 3.0-3.49, 17% reported a GPA between 2.5-2.99, 5% between 2.0-2.49, and 3% less than a 2.0.
The majority of participants identified as being of Caucasian ethnicity (72%). Following that, 14% identified as being Hispanic/Latino, 3% as Asian American/Pacific Islander, 2% as African American, 0.3% as Native American, 6% as two or more races, 2% as other, and 0.6% preferred not to say. Overall, 89% of students indicated involvement in an outside organization or extra-curricular activity. Of the participants, 61% reported involvement in a campus club, 42% were involved in a philanthropy or charity, 38% were involved in an honor society, 28% an intramural or college sports team, and 1% an outside job. Moreover, 36% of students indicated being involved in one outside organization, 33% indicated two, 15% indicated three organizations, and 6% reported involvement in 4 outside organizations.

**Measures**

Participants were asked demographic questions. They were also asked to complete the following measures: Peer Victimization Questionnaire (PVQ), Social Connectedness Scale—Campus Version, Depression Anxiety Stress Scales, 21 Item Short Form (DASS-21), and the Social Identity Scale. All study measures were administered in full as was done in previous investigations. Slight adaptations were made to address the varied experiences of participants such as who victimized them.

**Peer Victimization Questionnaire.** The Peer Victimization Questionnaire (PVQ) was developed for this study with the purpose of measuring the prevalence of peer victimization as it occurs within college fraternity and sorority members. It is based on the Victimization of Self (VS) portion of the Revised Peer Experiences Questionnaire (RPEQ; Prinstein, Boegers, & Vernberg, 2001). The VS portion consists of four
questions that deal with overt forms of peer victimization and five questions asking about indirect or relational forms of peer victimization. For each item, the participant is asked to indicate how often they experience each type of victimization on a Likert scale ranging from “one” (never) to “five” (a few times a week). Prinstein et al. (2001) conducted factor analysis of the RPEQ and confirmed its factor structure: Overt Victimization (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .79$) and Relational Victimization (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .76$). Similarly, in a more recent study by Dempsey, Sulkowski, Nichols, and Storch (2009), the VS portion of RPEQ was found to have similar internal reliability measures for Overt Victimization (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .70$) and Relational Victimization ($\alpha = .81$).

The survey for this study included questions about members’ experience with peer victimization. The questions asked about Within-group Peer Victimization (from members of the participants’ own Greek organization) and Between-group Peer Victimization (from outside members/students) to comprise the Total Peer Victimization score (PV). It should be noted that wording in the questionnaire made explicit reference to victimization that occurred: “Since being initiated into [the respondent’s] fraternity/sorority” to exclude any victimization that might have occurred as a part of the hazing process.

**Social Connectedness Scale-Campus Version.** The Social Connectedness Scale, Campus Version (SCS-CV; Lee et al., 2001) is a 14-item self-report scale designed to measure college students’ feelings of interpersonal closeness to their college community as well as their effort in maintaining this closeness. In a study of over 200 college students, the SCS-CV was found to have strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .91$; Lee et al.,
The SCS-CV is a modified version of the Social Connectedness Scale (Lee & Robbins, 1995) that is designed to measure one’s feelings of intimacy with their greater social world. Lee et al. (2001) found the SCS to have good internal reliability and concurrent validity with measures of similar constructs ($r = .94$). The SCS-CV consists of 14 items that respondent endorse to illustrate their level of agreement, with “one” being “Strongly Disagree” and “six” being “Strongly Agree.” There are eight negatively worded items and six positively worded items. Negatively word items are reverse scale scored and summed with positively worded items to provide a total score that can range from 14–84. Higher scores indicate greater levels of social connectedness and belongingness.

**Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scales, 21 Item Short Form.** The Depression Anxiety Stress Scales 21 Item Short Form (DASS-21; Antony, Bieling, Cox, Enns, & Swinson, 1998), a 21-item self-report scale based on the Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scales (DASS) by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) that measures three factors of psychological distress: Anxiety, Depression, and Stress. Answers are indicated on a four-point Likert scale (0=Never, 1=Sometimes, 2=Often, and 3=Almost Always). The total score for each factor indicates the individual’s level of disturbance: The higher the score, the greater the severity. Each resulting factor score is assigned a qualitative descriptor of Normal, Mild, Moderate, Severe, or Extremely Severe. In a study of clinical and non-clinical volunteers, Antony et al. (1998) found good-to-excellent internal consistency for Depression ($\alpha = .94$), Anxiety ($\alpha = .87$), and Stress ($\alpha = .91$) subscales. Antony et al. (1998) also found significant correlations to between the DASS-21 and other validated measures.
of anxiety and depression such as Beck’s Depression Inventory and Beck’s Anxiety Inventory.

**Social Identity Scale.** The Social Identity Scale (SIS) was developed by Karasawa in 1991 in order to measure the level of group identity Japanese students aged 19-22 years felt toward their school. It consists of six items for which respondents indicate their level of agreement on a seven-point Likert scale (1, “not at all” to 7, “very much so”). Responses to each item are summed to produce a total score. A higher score indicates a greater degree of social identity, whereas a lower score indicates a lesser degree of social identity. Cassidy (2009) used the SIS in a sample of 461 students aged 11-15 years with slight modifications. The measure was found to have strong internal consistency (α=. 89). This study used the modified scale from Cassidy (2009), with slight altering of wording in order to target participants’ feelings of social identity with their respective fraternity or sorority. Therefore, “a group of close friends” as used in Cassidy’s version was replaced by “your fraternity or sorority.”

**Procedure**

A link to the online survey was distributed to all university fraternity and sorority members in the spring of 2014. This link contained study information and the opportunity to provide consent through endorsing an electronic informed consent form. Only students aged 18 years or older (and consequently allowed to provide independent consent) were allowed to participate, and only students who provided consent to participate were allowed to access the survey. In total, the survey consisted of 60 items, and it was expected to take approximately 20 minutes to complete. All students contacted
had the opportunity to be entered into a raffle to win one of four gift-card prizes. All students also received reminder emails one and two weeks following initial contact. A university IRB approved all study procedures.

**Statistical Analyses**

After all student data were collected, data were coded and entered into SPSS (Version 22.0). Statistical analyses were run in SPSS. The statistical tests that will be used to test all hypotheses are described below:

**Hypothesis 1:** Peer victimization will be significantly correlated with stress. Spearman correlations were run between the variables Total Peer Victimization, Within-group Peer Victimization, Between-group Peer Victimization, and Stress.

**Hypothesis 2:** Within-group victimization (from a member of one’s own fraternity/sorority) will be negatively correlated related to group identity. Spearman correlations were conducted to examine the relationship between the variables Within-group Peer Victimization and Group Identity.

**Hypothesis 3:** Between-group victimization (from another fraternity/sorority and another, from an unaffiliated peer, or unknown) will be positively correlated to group identity. Spearman correlations were conducted to examine the relationship between the variables Between-group Peer Victimization and Group Identity.

**Hypothesis 4:** The variables Group Identity and Campus Connectedness will partially mediate the relationship between peer victimization and stress.

The indirect effect of peer victimization on stress when accounting for group identity and campus connectedness was analyzed using a multiple meditational model (Hayes, 2012).
This model was used, as opposed to others such as Sobel test or causal steps approach, because it has been found to have higher power while simultaneous providing sufficient control over the type 1 error rate (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). In addition, it allowed for the analysis of multiple potential mediators (Campus Connectedness and Group Identity). Bootstrapping (1000 samples) was used to account for the non-normal distribution of data. The 1000 bootstrap samples were used to estimate the indirect effects of Group Identity, while limiting susceptibility of the data to biased distributions (Fritz & MacKinnon, 2007). According to Preacher & Hayes (2008), indirect effects were determined to be significant if their confidence intervals did not include values of zero. In addition, eta squared ($\eta^2$ statistic) was calculated to determine the magnitude of effect for indirect relationships. Eta squared parallels the reported $R^2$ statistic such that small, medium, and large effect sizes relate to values of .01, .09, and .25, respectively.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Rates of Within-group Peer Victimization

Three hundred and eleven out of a total of 4,861 students who were solicited contributed data (response rate = 7%). Reported levels of each type of peer victimization are listed on Table 1. Descriptive analyses revealed that since being initiated into their respective Greek organization, 58% of respondents reported being left out (i.e., socially excluded) at least once or twice by a fellow member. Specifically, 33% of respondents were left out once or twice, 18% reported being left out a few times, 5% reported being left out once a week, and 3% reported being left out a few times a week. In addition, 31% of respondents endorsed being socially excluded via being denied an invitation to a desired social event by a fellow member at least once or twice since being initiated into the fraternity or sorority. Specifically, 19% of respondents reported being denied an invitation once or twice, 8% a few times, and 3% about once a week.

As for getting the “silent treatment” from a fellow member, 25% of respondents endorsed being on the receiving end at least once or twice since being initiated. Specifically, 13% of respondents reported being on the receiving end once or twice, 9% a few times, 2% about once a week, and 1% a few times a week. In addition, 12% of respondents indicated that a fellow member told others not to associate with him or her at least once or twice since being initiated, 5% reported that this occurred once or twice, 5% a few times, 1% once a week, and 1% a few times a week. Moreover, 14% of respondents reported that a fellow sorority/fraternity member purposefully harmed one of their friendships at least once or twice since being initiated, with 9% reporting that this
occurred once or twice, 4% a few times, and 1% about once a week. Lastly, 17% of respondents endorsed having been victimized via text or social media by fellow fraternity/sorority members at least once or twice since being initiated. Further, 10% of respondents reported being victimized once or twice through text messages or social media and 5% reported being victimized a few times, 1% reported being victimized once a week, and 1% reported being victimized a few times a week through this form of aggressive behavior.

**Rates of Between-group Peer Victimization**

With regard to being victimized by others not involved in one’s respective fraternity or sorority, 54% of respondents reported being social excluded at least once or twice since being initiated. Specifically, 32% reported being left out from a social activity once or twice, 18% reported being left out a few times, 3% reported about once a week, and 2% reported being left out a few times a week. In addition, 38% of respondents endorsed not being invited to a social event from someone outside of their Greek organization at least once or twice since initiation, even though it was known that person who was excluded wanted to go. Specifically, 24% reported not being invited once or twice, 12% reported it occurring a few times, 1% about once per week, and 1% a few times per week.

Participants also reported being given the silent treatment by someone who was not in their Greek organization. Twenty-nine percent reported being given the silent treatment at least once or twice since being initiated. Specifically, 19% of respondents reported being given the silent treatment once or twice, 7% reported a few times, 1%
about once a week, and 2% a few times per week. Sixteen percent of participants reported that a nonaffiliated peer told others not to associate with them at least once or twice since initiation. Specifically, 10% reported that this occurred once or twice, 5% indicated that this happened a few times, 1% once a week, and 1% a few times per week. At least one or two instances of purposeful friendship harming by an outside peer since initiation was reported by 18% of respondents; specifically once or twice by 13% of respondents, a few times by 3%, once a week by 1%, and a few times a week by 1%. Lastly, 23% of respondents reported being teased or harassed via either text or social media by an outside peer at least once or twice since being initiated. Similarly, 16% reported being teased or harassed once or twice, 6% a few times, 1% once a week, and 1% a few times per week.

Table 1

Reported Rates of Within-group Peer Victimization and Between-Group Peer Victimization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Within-group peer victimization:</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once or twice</th>
<th>A few times</th>
<th>About once a week</th>
<th>A few times a week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Left me out of what he or she was doing</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not invite me to a social event even though he or she knew I wanted to go.</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave me the silent treatment (did not talk to me on purpose).</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Told others not to associate with me.</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposefully harmed a friendship/relationship of mine.</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teased or harassed me either through text or social media.</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Between-group peer victimization:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Since being initiated into my fraternity/sorority, someone who is NOT a member of my fraternity/sorority:</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once or twice</th>
<th>A few times</th>
<th>About once a week</th>
<th>A few times a week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Left me out of what he or she was doing</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not invite me to a social event even though he or she knew I wanted to go.</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave me the silent treatment (did not talk to me on purpose).</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Told others not to associate with me.</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposefully harmed a friendship/relationship of mine.</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teased or harassed me either through text or social media.</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Differences in rates of Peer Victimization**

Using independent samples Wilcoxon signed-rank tests, no significant differences were noted in self-reported rates of within-group vs. between-group peer victimization. Non-parametric tests were used to examine if there were any significant differences in participants’ experience of peer victimization based on demographic variables, including gender, ethnicity, year in university, self-reported GPA, and involvement in outside groups. Independent samples Mann-Whitney tests were conducted to test for these differences and males were found to report significantly higher levels of being teased or harassed via text or social media by within-group members ($M_{rank} = 173.30$) than females ($M_{rank} = 149.12$), $U = 8204.00$, $z = -3.28$, $p < .001$, $r = -.19$. Males also reported significantly elevated levels of having someone outside of their fraternity tell others not to associate with them ($M_{rank} = 167.41$) compared with females ($M_{rank} = 151.57$), $U = 8742.00$, $z = -2.19$, $p < .05$, $r = -.12$. As for ethnicity, a one-way analysis of
variance Kruskal-Walis test was conducted to test for difference between experiences of victimization across different ethnicities and no significant differences were identified. There was a significant difference between the number of years students had attended college and their experience of being denied an invitation to a desired social event $H(4) = 11.84, p < .05$. However, pairwise comparisons revealed no significant differences between each individual year group. Rather, the significance of year in college seems to mainly reflect the fact that fifth year students reported higher ratings of not being invited to a desired social event ($M_{rank} = 223.67$) than the other groups, which included freshman ($M_{rank} = 146.65$) sophomores ($M_{rank} = 142.72$), juniors ($M_{rank} = 173.30$), and seniors ($M_{rank} = 147.18$). In addition, there were differences in receiving the silent treatment by a fellow member based on year in university, $H(4) = 16.12, p < .05$.

Pairwise comparisons with adjusted $\alpha$-values showed that juniors reported a significantly greater amount of within-group silent treatment ($M_{rank} = 171.25$) than freshman ($M_{rank} = 136.50; p < .05$). Junior respondents also reported significantly higher levels of within-group silent treatment than sophomores ($M_{rank} = 138.84; p < .05$). There were no significant differences in type of victimization based on self-reported GPA or involvement in additional campus groups/activities.

**Study Variables**

Prior to conducting inferential analyses, the shape of dependent variable distributions was assessed. Table 2 includes means, standard deviations, measures of skewness, kurtosis, $K$-$S$ statistic, and percent of missing data for study variables. The variables Total Peer Victimization, Within-group Peer Victimization, and Between-group
Peer Victimization were non-normal and positively skewed. They had no missing data, and they demonstrated excess positive kurtosis, indicating a peaked distribution of scores. Thus, while the majority of participants indicated low levels of victimization, a smaller percentage of participants indicated markedly higher levels.

The variable distribution for Stress was also non-normal and significantly positively skewed, with less than 5% missing data. Campus Connectedness was significantly non-normal with 7% missing data. The only variable that approached normality was Group Identity, with only 1% missing data. The majority of respondents reported high levels of Group Identity and Campus Connectedness; fewer students reported lower levels of these variables.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S)</th>
<th>Percent of missing data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total PV</td>
<td>17.18</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.19***</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PVwg</td>
<td>8.52</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.24***</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PVbg</td>
<td>8.66</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>9.75</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.23***</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>10.81</td>
<td>7.78</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.13***</td>
<td>4.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GI</td>
<td>32.06</td>
<td>7.58</td>
<td>-.74</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.11***</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>69.66</td>
<td>10.73</td>
<td>-1.00</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.09***</td>
<td>6.87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: PV = Peer Victimization; PVwg = Within-group Peer Victimization; PVbg = Between-group Peer Victimization; S = Stress; GI = Group Identity; CC = Campus Connectedness; *= p < .05, ** = p < .01, *** = p < .001.
Between-group difference tests were conducted to assess for potential moderating effects between levels of independent variables and dependent outcomes. The Mann-Whitney test of independent samples revealed no significant differences between gender for Total Peer Victimization, Within-group Peer Victimization, Between-group Peer Victimization, Stress, Group Identity, and Campus Connectedness. A Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance test was conducted to determine the presence of any significant differences between groups based on ethnicity, year in college, self-reported GPA, and involvement in outside groups. A significant difference was noted based on year in college for level of Within-group Peer Victimization, \(H(4) = 11.58, p < .05\). Pairwise comparisons with adjusted p-values showed that sophomore respondents (\(Mean \ rank = 136.51\)) reported significantly less Within-group Peer Victimization than junior (\(Mean \ rank = 176.43\)) respondents (\(p < .05\)). No significant differences (\(p < .05\)) were found for any of the measured variables between reported GPA, ethnicity, and involvement in outside groups.

**Relationships between Within-group Peer Victimization, Between-group Peer Victimization, Total Peer Victimization, and Stress**

Spearman correlations were computed to determine the presence of significant relationships (\(p < .05\)) between study variables. These associations are listed in Table 3. Within-group Peer Victimization and Between-group Peer Victimization were both strongly \((r_s \sim .80)\) and positively correlated to Total Peer Victimization. A moderate \((r_s \sim .40)\) positive correlation was found between Within-group Peer Victimization and Between-group Peer Victimization. Thus, the greater the amount of one type of peer
victimization experienced, the greater amount of the other also experienced. A small to moderate correlation ($r_s \sim .35$) was also found between Total Peer Victimization and Stress. Therefore, increases in level of Total Peer Victimization were associated with concordant increases in reported Stress. Small, yet significant correlations were also found between Within-group Peer Victimization and Stress, and between Between-group Peer Victimization and Stress ($r_s \sim .30$), indicating that increases in Between-group and Within-group Peer Victimization were both related to increases in Stress. Lastly, there was no significant difference between the strengths of correlations between Within-group Peer Victimization and Stress and Between-group Peer Victimization and Stress.

Table 3

Correlations between Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CC</th>
<th>GI</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>PVbg</th>
<th>PVwg</th>
<th>PV Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PV Total</td>
<td>-.20**</td>
<td>-.18**</td>
<td>.35***</td>
<td>.80***</td>
<td>.80***</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PV wg</td>
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<td>-.20***</td>
<td>.30***</td>
<td>.38***</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PV bg</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.27***</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>-.38***</td>
<td>-.21***</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>GI</td>
<td>.46***</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: PV = Peer Victimization; PV wg = Within-group Peer Victimization; PV bg = Between-group Peer Victimization; S = Stress; GI = Group Identity; CC = Campus Connectedness; *= $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$.

Characteristics of Victims

In order to analyze the characteristics of participants who experienced high levels of victimization, the variables Within-group Peer Victimization, Between-group Peer
Victimization, and Total Peer Victimization were each split into two groups, Victims (respondents who scored at or above one standard deviation from the mean) and Average-Scorers (i.e., respondents who score below one standard deviation from the mean). Table 4 is a contingency table showing the number of Victims and Average-Scorers of each demographic variable for the variables Between-group Peer Victimization, Within-group Peer Victimization, and Total Peer Victimization. Chi-square tests of independence revealed that for ratings of Between-group Peer Victimization, participants who fell into the Victim category were significantly more likely to be male, $\chi^2(1)=3.83$, Fischer’s exact significance test (1 sided), $p < 0.05$. Similarly, Victims on ratings of Between-group Peer Victimization and Total Peer Victimization were more likely to be 5th year students (Between-group), $\chi^2(4)=10.34$, $p < 0.05$; Total $\chi^2(4)=10.92$, $p < 0.05$. Various groups of student ethnicities (African-American, Other, More than two races, and Prefer not to say) were significantly more likely to be Victims on ratings of Between-group Peer Victimization, $\chi^2(7)=21.22$, $p < 0.05$. However, the analysis of Victims and Average-Scorers of various ethnicities violated one of the assumptions of analyzing categorical data, in that more than 20% of the expected counts were less than 5 (62.5% in this case). Therefore, this finding had very limited power. In order to account for this violation of a categorical-level data assumption, the 8 levels of ethnicity were collapsed into 2 levels (Caucasian and non-Caucasian). In this analysis, Victims were not more likely to be Caucasian or non-Caucasian than Average-Scorers. Lastly, Victims did not have any differences in self-reported GPA or group involvement.
Table 4

Contingency Table of How Many Participants for Each Demographic Variable are a Victim or an Average-scorer on Ratings of PV

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total PV</th>
<th></th>
<th>Between-group PV</th>
<th></th>
<th>Within-group PV</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average-scroer</td>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>Average-scroer</td>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>Average-scroer</td>
<td>Victim</td>
</tr>
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<td>Gender</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>80</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year in university</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>64</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>202</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>African American</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/Hispanic</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 2 races</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
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<td>4.0</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>3.5-3.99</td>
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<td>91</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>111</td>
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</tr>
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<td>2.5-2.99</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
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<td>Less than 2.0</td>
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<td>2</td>
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</tr>
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<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>1000</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>46</td>
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<td>41</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparing Victims and Average-Scorers of Between-group Peer Victimization

Victims and Average-Scorers were compared on their DASS-21 Total Scores, the DASS-21 subscales of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress, and the variables Group Identity and Campus Connectedness. For Between-group Peer Victimization, an independent samples Mann-Whitney U test revealed that Victims (Between-group Peer Victimization score ≥12.30) significantly differed from Average-Scorers (Between-group Peer Victimization score < 12.30) on levels of multiple variables. Specifically, Victims had higher Total DASS-21 Scores (Mean rank = 196.83) than Average-Scorers (Mean rank = 144.20), U = 5,440.00, z = 3.18, p < .05, r = 0.18. Victims also differed from Average-Scorers on all three subscales of the DASS-21. Specifically, Victims had significantly higher rates of Depression (Mean rank = 186.10) than Average-Scorers (145.40), U = 5,118.00, z = 2.51, p < .05, r = 0.15. In addition, the rate of Anxiety in Victims (Mean rank = 197.33) was significantly higher than the rate of Anxiety in Average-Scorers (Mean rank = 144.15), U = 5,455.00, z = 3.29, p < .05, r = 0.19. Lastly, the rate of Stress in Victims (Mean rank = 197.00) was significantly higher than the rate of Stress in Average-Scorers (Mean rank = 144.18), U = 5,445.00, z = 3.20, p < .05, r = 0.19.

Comparing Victims and Average-Scorers of Within-group Peer Victimization

As for Within-group Peer Victimization, comparison of Victims (score > 12.01) with Average-Scorers revealed significant differences on every variable. Total DASS-21 scores were higher for Victims (Mean rank = 193.66) than Average-Scorers (Mean rank = 144.20), U = 5,181.00, z = 2.91, p < .05, r = 0.17. For Depression, Victims (Mean rank = 194.83) scored significantly higher than Average-Scorers (Mean rank = 144.61), U =
5,215.00, $z = 3.05, p < .05, r = 0.18$. Victims ($Mean \text{ rank} = 197.05$) also scored significantly higher than Average-Scorers ($Mean \text{ rank} = 144.37$) on rates of Anxiety, $U = 5,279.50, z = 3.21, p < .05, r = 0.19$. Lastly, ratings of Stress were significantly higher for Victims ($Mean \text{ rank} = 180.98$) than Average Scorers ($Mean \text{ rank} = 146.11$), $U = 4,813.50, z = 2.08, p < .05, r = 0.12$.

Moreover, Victims of Within-group Peer Victimization differed significantly from Average-Scorers on level of Group Identity and Campus Connectedness. For Group Identity, Victims reported significantly lower ratings ($Mean \text{ rank} = 98.97$) than Average-Scorers ($Mean \text{ rank} = 160.18$), $U = 2,572.00, z = -3.65, p < .001, r = -0.21$. Victims also reported significantly lower levels of Campus Connectedness ($Mean \text{ rank} = 95.02$) than Average-Scorers ($Mean \text{ rank} = 151.43$), $U = 2,254.50, z = -3.37, p < .05, r = -0.20$.

**Comparing Victims and Average-Scorers of Total Peer Victimization**

Similar to Victims of Within-group Peer Victimization and Victims of Between-group Peer Victimization, Victims of Total Victimization (score $\geq 23.12$) had significantly higher total DASS-21 scores, and significantly higher ratings of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress than Average-Scorers of Total Victimization. Specifically, total DASS-21 scores were higher for Victims ($Mean \text{ rank} = 197.80$) than Average-Scorers ($Mean \text{ rank} = 143.69$), $U = 5,181.50, z = 3.36, p < .05, r = 0.19$. For Depression, Victims ($Mean \text{ rank} = 192.78$) scored significantly higher than Average-Scorers ($Mean \text{ rank} = 144.29$), $U = 5,641.00, z = 3.07, p < .05, r = 0.18$. Victims ($Mean \text{ rank} = 201.27$) also scored significantly higher than Average-Scorers ($Mean \text{ rank} = 143.27$) on rates of Anxiety, $U = 5,912.50, z = 3.69, p < .001, r = 0.21$. Lastly, ratings of Stress were
significantly higher for Victims (Mean rank = 194.11) than Average-Scorers (Mean rank = 144.13), $U = 5,683.50, z = 3.12, p < .05, r = 0.18$.

**Relationship of Group Identity and Campus Connectedness to Other Variables**

The correlation coefficients between the variables Group Identity and Campus Connectedness, and Total Peer Victimization, Between-group Peer Victimization, Within-group Peer Victimization, and Stress are presented in Table 3. A small, yet significant, negative correlation was found between Group Identity and Total Peer Victimization ($r_s \sim -.20$). In addition, a small, yet significant correlation was found between Group Identity and Within-group Peer Victimization ($r_s \sim -.20$). Thus, increased levels of Group Identity co-occurred with decreased levels of reported Total Peer Victimization, specifically Within-group Peer Victimization. There was no significant relationship between Group Identity and Between-group Peer Victimization. In addition, a small, yet significant negative correlation was found between Group Identity and Stress ($r_s \sim -.20$). Thus, similar to Peer Victimization, increases in reported level of Group Identity were related to decreases in Stress. Group Identity was moderately positively related to Campus Connectedness ($r_s < .40$); participants who reported higher levels of Group Identity in regards to their own fraternity/sorority also reported higher levels of Campus Connectedness in regards to the university as a whole.

Lastly, small yet significant negative correlations were found between Campus Connectedness and Total Peer Victimization ($r_s \sim -.20$), Campus Connectedness and Within-group Peer Victimization ($r_s \sim -.25$), and Campus Connectedness and Between-group Victimization ($r_s \sim -.10$). As Campus Connectedness increased, Total Peer
Victimization, Within-group Peer Victimization, and Between-group peer Victimization decreased. The variables Campus Connectedness and Stress were also significantly moderately negatively correlated ($r_s \sim -.40$), indicating that increases in reported level of Campus Connectedness were related to decreases in expressed Stress.

**Mediating role of Group Identity and Campus Connectedness**

To test for the indirect effects of Group Identity and Campus Connectedness on the relationship between Total Peer Victimization and Stress, the relations among the variables were analyzed using bootstrapping techniques (Hayes, 2012). Indirect effects were tested with 1000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals using the PROCESS model in SPSS 20 (Hayes, 2012). When considering individual relationships through bivariate regressions, Peer Victimization significantly predicted Stress, $b = .34, \beta = .07, t = 4.54, p < .001$, with increased Peer Victimization leading to increased Stress. In addition, Peer Victimization also significantly predicted Group Identity, $b = -.25, \beta = .08, t = -3.15, p < .05$; Group Identity decreased as Total Peer Victimization increased. However, Group Identity did not significantly predict Stress. Alternately, Peer Victimization significantly predicted Campus Connectedness, $b = -.38, \beta = .11, t = -3.40, p < .001$, and Campus Connectedness significantly predicted Stress, $b = -.24, \beta = .04, t = -5.69, p < .001$. An indirect effect was detected, with Peer Victimization affecting Stress by first decreasing Campus Connectedness, $k^2 = .07, 95\% CI = .03-.13$. A visual depiction of the mediating effect of Campus Connectedness is presented in Figure 2.
Figure 2. SPSS Process output for indirect effects of Campus Connectedness on the relationship between Peer Victimization and Stress. Note: Standardized regression coefficients for all paths are presented; * = p < .05, ** = p < .01, *** = p < .001.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Prevalence of Peer Victimization

This study provides novel data on the impact of peer victimization in college fraternity and sorority students. Results indicate that a substantial percentage of the 311 respondents reported being victimized, both by members of their own fraternity or sorority, as well as by unaffiliated students. Specifically, 58% of respondents reported that a fellow member left them out of a social activity at least once or twice since being initiated, while 54% of respondents reported being left out at least once or twice by someone not in their fraternity or sorority within the same time frame. Overall, the number of individuals reporting peer victimization in this study is notably higher than previous studies examining college students more generally, in which only 17% of students reporting victimization since being in college (Smith et al., 2012) and 21% of students reporting victimization in their lifetime (Kowalski et al., 2012).

The noted discrepancy could be because the present study encompassed a broader definition of peer victimization than was employed by previous studies. Specifically, similar to contemporary definitions of cyber victimization, the definition of peer victimization in this study did not include a prerequisite for a power differential to exist between perpetrators and victims (Willard, 2007). In addition, this study included items that assessed face-to-face victimization as well as cyber victimization. However, it should be noted that the rate of strictly cyber victimization in this study was similar to previous ones studying the phenomenon in college students more generally (Smith et al., 2012; Kowalski et al., 2012). Smith et al. (2012) found that 17% of the 341 college students
surveyed reported experiencing cyber victimization, whereas Kowalski et al. (2012) reported the prevalence rate of cyber victimization in their study of 107 college students to be 31%. Similarly, 23% of respondents in this study reported experiencing cyber victimization at least once or twice from individuals outside of their sorority or fraternity, and 17% of respondents reported being victimized by electronic means at least once or twice by members of their own fraternity or sorority.

Another reason for the higher rates of peer victimization reported in the present study could be the inclusion of indirect aggression in addition to more overt or direct forms of aggressive behavior (e.g., not being invited to a desired event, being given the silent treatment, someone purposefully harming a relationship). Previous research has shown that indirect victimization remains prevalent in older students and young adults and that their use might even increase with age in contrast to direct forms of peer victimization (Chapell et al., 2006; Nansel et al., 2001). Therefore, the higher level of reported victimization in this study appears to represent a more comprehensive picture of peer victimization, including indirect aggression, face-to-face victimization, and cyber victimization. These results potentially indicate high rates of peer victimization among university students in fraternities and sororities, illustrating a prevalent and harmful phenomenon that impacts a particular subset of the college student population.

The Significance of Peer Victimization in Sorority and Fraternity Groups

Participants in this study were recruited from fraternity and sorority groups that represent approximately 15% of the total undergraduate student body at the university in which data were collected. These individual sorority and fraternity members purposely
join their chosen group. They work hard to induce feelings of group membership and group loyalty, including participating in ceremonies, traditions, even hazing. Hazing is a practice of time-limited, socially accepted peer victimization in which initiated members require “pledges” to perform outlandish, humiliating, even self-compromising acts in order to become part of the group. Practices such as ceremonies and hazing elevate the desirability of group entrance and consequently the status of the group in the eyes of individual members. It is also possible that hazing behaviors foster a group culture of peer aggression, consequently condoning ongoing periodic episodes of victimization. In support of this notion, a study by Allan and Madden (2008) found that the majority of university students who reported having been hazed to gain entry into their campus organization (including a fraternity or sorority) did not view their experience negatively. Instead, some of these students even reported some positive results associated with their experiences such as feeling more like a member of the group and a sense of accomplishment (Allan & Madden, 2008). Positive associations related to hazing could allow for peer victimization to be condoned as a group norm. In other words, in the absence of negative connotations associated with incidents of peer victimization such as hazing, one would expect for the practice to continue. Moreover, victimizing incoming fraternity and sorority members might serve to maintain a social hierarchy within the group, in which more powerful members victimize less powerful members.

In addition to individual motivations for engaging in peer aggression, the social makeup of university Greek culture might contribute to members indirectly victimizing each other (e.g. not being invited to social events, being left out). The university Greek
system is highly socially structured, often in distinct hierarchies that can exacerbate elements of peer victimization (Bauman et al., 2013). The social calendars of sorority and fraternity members are replete with events to which only a few are invited. These can involve specific fraternity or sorority chapters, select chapter cohorts (e.g. juniors and/or seniors), or even individual members who have been selected as someone’s date. Thus, because of the nature of the Greek system, opportunities to be socially excluded (or perceived to be socially excluded) abound and these incidents may be highly public and laden with strong connotations. For example, on many campuses, the sorority chapter with the supposed most beautiful and popular girls will get asked to the most chapter-wide social events by campus fraternity groups, while less popular chapters might not get asked to any. Those chapters that are asked might wear t-shirts advertising the event, and consequently flaunting their desirability. These types of exclusionary social activities potentially emphasize a social hierarchy, in which higher status equals more access to a greater number of social events, possibly leading members to victimize one another by indirect means in order to gain more social status.

**Peer Victimization and Stress**

In this study, peer victimization was hypothesized to be positively correlated with stress, specifically depression, anxiety, and social stress. Study results supported this hypothetical relationship. Increased levels of reported peer victimization were significantly related to increased levels of Stress in the expected direction. Therefore, the more victimization a respondent reported, the more stress he/she also reported. Moreover, Victims on the variable Peer Victimization (Within-group, Between-group, and Total)
reported significantly higher levels of stress, including depression, anxiety, and stress, suggesting that students who experience significantly more peer victimization also experience significantly elevated levels of stress.

These results are supported by previous studies that have linked peer victimization to elevated levels of stress (e.g., Bauman et al., 2013; Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003). Specifically, Bauman et al. (2013) found that fraternity and sorority members reported significantly higher levels of distress in response to cyber aggression than their nonaffiliated peers. In a study by Juvonen et al. (2003), sixth grade students who were victimized by their peers reported the highest rates of depression, social stress, and loneliness. As a third example expressing this relationship, results of a meta-analysis conducted by Hawker and Boulton (2000) indicate a positive relationship between peer victimization and depression, loneliness, and anxiety.

**Social Identity Theory as Theoretical Model**

As predicted by Social Identity Theory (SIT), any factor that threatens group membership might be especially damaging to self-concept and psychosocial functioning. Peer victimization can be viewed as a threat to group membership, in which in the absence of being included might contribute to stress. Results from the current study support this proposed relationship. Specifically, within-group peer victimization was positively correlated with stress. Being victimized by members of one’s own group was significantly positively correlated with feelings of depression, anxiety, and social stress. This relationship was expected and it is partially explained by SIT. In this regard, when
respondents’ group membership was threatened in the form of peer victimization, they experienced stress.

However, SIT does not comprehensively explain all study results. If the findings of this study were to completely support SIT, the relationship between victimization by unaffiliated students and stress would not be as strong as the relationship between victimization by one’s own group members and stress. This is because being victimized by unaffiliated students does not explicitly threaten group membership, whereas being victimized by members of one’s own group does. However, no difference was observed in this study between the relationships of distress and victimization based upon the participant’s relationship to the aggressor. Therefore, the effect of victimization and between-group victimization influenced participants’ psychosocial functioning equally. However, if being victimized by a fellow member threatened participants’ level of identity with the Greek system as a whole, than it would impact psychosocial functioning. Participants’ level of group identity to the Greek system in general was not measured in this study, only their feelings of identity with their respective fraternity or sorority chapter.

**The Role of Group Identity**

A small, yet significant negative correlation was found between participants’ overall level of victimization and feelings of identity with their respective fraternity or sorority. Specifically, greater experience with peer victimization was related to lesser levels of group identity. Thus, similar to the findings of a study by Cassidy (2009), peer victimization was found to attenuate students’ group identity in this study. This finding
supports the study hypothesis that peer victimization would be positively related to stress and negatively related to group identity. In addition, being victimized by members of one’s own group was hypothesized to decrease feelings of belonging to the group, consequently impacting ratings of group identity. Support was found for this hypothesized relationship. In this study, fraternity and sorority students who experienced higher rates of victimization from fellow group members felt like they were less of a part of their fraternity/sorority, they felt less like a typical group member, and they reported a reduced desire to be associated with the group. Thus, when members of the group demonstrate undesirable characteristics or behaviors (i.e. victimizing other members), the individual de-identifies from them to protect their own perceptions of self.

No significant relationship was found between victimization from unaffiliated students and group-identity with one’s respective fraternity or sorority, failing to support the study hypothesis that there would be a positive and significant correlation. The study hypothesis was based on the assumption that being victimized by outside peers would strengthen feelings of identity with the participant’s own fraternity or sorority. A threat to membership in other social environments would strengthen feelings of identity within one’s own fraternity or sorority group. This hypothesis was not statistically supported in this study; although between-group victimization and group identity were negatively related, the relationship was not significant. Therefore, there was no significant relationship between being victimized by outside students and one’s feelings of group identity with their specific fraternity or sorority.
This study also hypothesized that group identity would mitigate the negative impact of peer victimization on Stress. However, this was not supported by the findings. Respondents’ level of group identity had no unique impact on the relationship between peer victimization and Stress. This result suggests that group identity is not the resiliency factor initially hypothesized. Moreover, it suggests the importance of students expanding their social networks beyond their fraternity and sorority group in order to get the palliative effects of group bonding. In other words, it may be more important to feel connected to the campus community as a whole, as opposed to connecting only with one’s Greek organization to protect against the negative psychosocial impacts of peer victimization.

**Campus Connectedness as a Protective Factor**

Previous research suggests that campus connectedness can be a robust protective factor against the negative psychosocial effects of peer victimization (Lee, Draper, & Lee, 2001; Lee, Keough, & Sexton, 2002; Lee & Robbins, 1998). Its putative role in this regard was investigated in the current study. Campus connectedness was hypothesized to at least partially mediate the relationship between peer victimization and Stress. In support of this expected relationship, campus connectedness did significantly attenuate the effect of peer victimization on Stress. Therefore, feeling socially bonded at college helps protect students from the negative psychosocial effects of being victimized by peer aggression. In light of these results and the previous findings that group identity did not influence the relationship between peer victimization and Stress, students can broaden their social networks beyond their Greek organizations to protect against the effects of
peer victimization. Thus, the proverbial warning against “placing all of one’s eggs in one basket” to firm up one’s social life also appears to apply to the social lives of college students in fraternities and sororities.

Providing further support for the former, a positive relationship was found between campus connectedness and group identity. Therefore, students who tended to feel socially bonded with the campus community also were more likely to identify with their fraternity or sorority. This finding suggests that students who identify with their Greek organization also feel connected to the overall campus community, which speaks to the large presence of Greek members in student government positions, clubs and recreational activities, and special Greek-only rituals and events that happen on or near campus communities in large universities in the U.S. Essentially, within a Social Ecological Theory framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the identities of students involved in Greek organizations might be influenced by the different environmental systems in which an individual interacts. Specifically, students involved in campus honor societies might also view themselves as intellectuals, while students who participate in affiliated philanthropic societies feel like a contributing member to the community at large. These views of the self can enrich one’s sense of identity, bolstering it from threats of social exclusion in any one specific group, such as a fraternity or sorority.

Alternatively, students victimized by members of their own fraternity or sorority feel less identity with their own chapter, as well as less campus connectedness. Thus, limited feelings of camaraderie in one setting (i.e., sorority or fraternity chapter) can similarly influence larger environmental systems (i.e., university). It is possible that being
victimized by one’s own fraternity and sorority members threatened victim’s feelings of identity with not only the personal sphere of their Greek chapter, but wider spheres including overall Greek life and university-wide campus connectedness.

**Demographic Differences in Peer Victimization**

Although exploratory, demographic differences in rates of peer victimization were also reported in this study. This was done in order to identify specific demographic characteristics that might make specific sorority or fraternity students particularly vulnerable to the phenomenon, as well as any potential subgroups to target for future intervention. It was found that males reported significantly higher rates of specific forms of peer victimization. Specifically, males reported a significantly greater amount of being teased or harassed by text or social media by a member of their own fraternity. This finding is contradictory with previous studies of cyber aggression in college-aged students, which did not find any significant gender differences in rates of cyber victimization (Kowalski et al., 2012; Bauman et al., 2013). However, previous studies utilized the Electronic Bullying Questionnaire (Kowalski & Limber, 2007), which conceptualized cyber victimization to include malice, humiliation, and unwanted contact. This study only considered malice (“harassed”) and humiliation (“teased”). The exclusion of unwanted contact in this study might have led to a higher percentage of males endorsing being teased or harassed via cyber technology.

Males in this study also reported significantly higher rates of someone not in their fraternity telling others not to associate with them. This finding also conflicts with previous findings in which similar levels of social victimization were found for male and
female college-aged students (e.g., Chapell et al., 2006). It could be that the highly social nature of the Greek university system precipitates greater levels of social victimization among males in this study, similar to their higher reported rates of verbal and physical victimization (Chapell et al., 2006). However, it should be noted that fraternity members reported higher levels of someone telling others not to associate with them only in the context of between-groups. They reported similar levels of within-group instances of someone telling others not to associate with them. It could be that higher levels of between-group peer victimization of this nature indicate a contentious relationship between fraternity groups and outside groups.

Moreover, high-scoring respondents on ratings of peer victimization, specifically victimization from unaffiliated students, were more likely to be male, in their fifth year of university, and of an ethnic minority group. This suggests the existence of a specific subset of fraternity and sorority students that are at-risk to victimization. High-scoring respondents also reported significantly elevated levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Victims of within-group peer victimization also reported significantly lower levels of group identity and campus connectedness. This finding supports SIT, in that students who reported significantly higher levels of being victimized by members of their own group reported lower levels of identifying with that group. Moreover, the same students also reported significantly lower levels of feeling connected to their campus as a whole. Such a finding suggests that this particular subset of victimized students, whom struggle to identify with their fraternity or sorority, also feel less connected to their overall campus community. Their feelings of isolation permeate across multiple environmental systems.
Thus, the participants in this study who experienced higher rates of peer victimization did appear to constitute a specific subset of victims, a group with significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. This group of students exhibited characteristics of younger school-aged children who experienced peer victimization, specifically higher rates of depression (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Moreover, the subgroup of victims in this study also resembled other college students who experienced higher rates of peer victimization in childhood such as higher levels of depression and anxiety (Gibb, Abramson, & Allow, 2004; Storch et al., 2004). This suggests the existence of a particular subgroup of fraternity and sorority students who experience peer victimization as a school-aged student and continue to experience victimization into college and perhaps beyond.

**Implications for Applied Practice**

The results of this study have implications for applied practice. First, they highlight that peer victimization is relatively prevalent in Greek organizations and that it negatively impacts victims’ psychosocial functioning. Moreover, some fraternity and sorority members appear to be uniquely vulnerable to peer victimization and its negative psychosocial impact, specifically males of ethnic minorities. These students’ level of bonding with their fellow fraternity or sorority members does not protect them against the negative effects of stress. However, if they feel better connected to their university campus as a whole, they might be protected.

Within the school setting, researchers have found similar protective effects of “school identification” against peer victimization in seventh through tenth grade students.
In a three-year longitudinal study of 492 students, Turner et al. (2014) found increased ratings of school identification to be significantly related to later decreases in self-reported rates of peer victimization. Moreover, school connectedness was found to demonstrate a stronger predictive relationship to peer victimization than factors such as anxiety and depression. This suggests that feelings of overall connectedness are also important for school-aged students and should be similarly targeted in schools.

Campus connectedness (or “school connectedness” more generally) appears to be an important point of intervention for both university and school administrators. Within the elementary school setting, staff-reported school climate was found to significantly mediate the effectiveness of an anti-bullying intervention in a recent study, with higher levels of positive school climate related to lower levels of student-reported peer victimization (Low & Van Ryzin, 2014). Strategies for promoting campus connectedness on college campuses include student affairs groups running various events and affairs to promote a feeling of overall connectedness such as freshman seminars, interest groups, and philanthropy activities. Similarly, college student government can acknowledge the varied backgrounds and interests of their peers through student-lead affairs, social activities, and minority advocacy. At the school level, reinforcing “we” and “us” language as a school can help students to feel a greater sense of identity. Turner et al. (2014) found that participating schools with high levels of school climate developed a shared vision of what it meant to be member of that school with students, parents, and staff. In addition, the use of school-wide positive behavioral supports (SWPBIS) can be
used to identify and share school-wide values that are reinforced in individual students by catching them being good (Turner et al., 2014).

Moreover, college student affairs and student government groups can make a conscious effort to extend inclusive activities and events to students in Greek organizations, particularly those of minority groups. Specifically, campus administration can help to diversify their student body. Lee, Kellerman, LePhuoc, and Rundell (1999) found that students felt more connected on campuses in which diversity was celebrated. Similar to the overall student body, college Greek organizations would benefit from being more diverse and inclusive. On an individual level, school-based mental health practitioners can work with student clients (at both the school-age and college-age) to help normalize any feelings of limited school connectedness and help point out ways in which their clients are connected to others (Lee, Keough, & Sexton, 2002). Doing this might help distressed students understand a reason underlying some of their psychosocial difficulties.

**Limitations**

Results of the current study must be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the current study elicited a low response rate of about 7%. This response rate is lower than the chosen guideline of 10%, based upon research by Foschnacht, Sarraf, Howe, and Peck, 2013. Foschnacht et al. (2013) found a 10% response rate allow for the estimating of reliable estimates, based on conservative reliability criteria ($r \geq .90$). However, despite falling short of 10%, 311 students were recruited, and a significant percentage reporting being victimized by peer aggression. Second, the sample in this
study consisted of 72% females. While appearing superficially biased, this asymmetry is most likely related to the Greek population as a whole as females are overrepresented (65%), according to internal university report. Third, a mono-method bias was present in that experience of peer victimization was based on respondent report, and thus vulnerable to respondents “faking good” in order to prevent themselves from appearing vulnerable. This could have potentially skewed results in a biased direction. Fourth, the design of the current study was cross-sectional in nature. Data were collected from only one time sample and correlations between measured variables at the same point in time. Causal associations therefore cannot be determined, and it is unclear whether the phenomenon is time invariant. Fifth, another potential limitation to this study is possibility of respondent fatigue. The percentage of missing data for each variable increased with later items, indicating that respondents stopped answering as they progressed through the online survey. The percentage of missing data for the first variable was 0%, followed by 1%, then 4%, and finally 7%. This too, could have impacted the validity of responses. Last, the variable Peer Victimization was created by making edits to the questions on the Peer Victimization Questionnaire, in order to make it relevant to the Greek community accessed in this study. Because of these changed, the internal consistency of this modified version has not been assessed. Consequently, it is difficult to generalize the findings of this variable.

**Future Directions**

Because this study was the first known to examine the relationships between peer victimization, stress, group identity, and campus connectedness, replication would help to
support validity of the findings. It would also be beneficial to survey members of an entire fraternity or sorority chapter in order to reduce possible online response bias. In addition, examining the role of SIT in other university campus groups and activities would provide insight into whether or not the findings of this study could be generalized to other groups of university students. Another future direction would be to examine the role of stress, group identity, and campus connectedness on peer perpetration and acts of aggression, in addition to victimization. In support of SIT, it is expected that group identity would be positively correlated to lower levels of within-group aggression and higher levels of out-group aggression. Campus connectedness would also be expected to be negatively related to acts of aggression. Lastly, the experience of peer victimization and its impact on stress and campus connectedness in particular vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities, males, and students who visit campus learning centers would help to shed light on the university experience for these students.

**Conclusion**

Peer victimization, as it occurs in college fraternity and sorority students, is related to levels of stress, group identity, and overall campus connectedness. These findings partially support SIT as a framework for conceptualizing group identity and peer victimization. They also uniquely contribute to peer victimization literature, emphasizing the need for interventions that focus on helping students feel more connected and socially supported by their university and/or school community. This study revealed that a majority of college fraternity and sorority students (58%) have experienced at least one instance of indirect peer victimization since being initiated into their respective
organization. Males were more likely to experience cyber victimization by members of their own fraternity, and they were more likely to have unaffiliated peers tell other not to associate with them.

Collectively, the majority of students reported low levels of peer victimization and high levels of group identity and campus connectedness. However, as hypothesized in the current investigation, peer victimization was significantly and positively correlated with Stress in that higher rates of being victimized were related to higher levels of stress. In addition, feelings of group identity were significantly negatively correlated with within-group victimization, also supporting a hypothesized relationship: the more participants were victimized by members of their respective fraternity or sorority, the less they identified as a member of that group. However, group identity was not significantly correlated with being victimized by members outside of one’s Greek organization, failing to support the study’s hypothesis that there would be a significant and positive correlated between the two. Thus, there was no significant relationship between being victimized by members outside of one’s Greek organization and how much they felt like a member of that group.

Campus connectedness, or the level of camaraderie one feels with fellow university students, was found to mediate the relationship between peer victimization and stress. In this role and as predicted, it served as a protective factor against distress resulting from victimization. Alternately, contrary to predictions, group identity failed to protect against stress to a significant degree, implying that one’s level of fraternity or
sorority affinity does not significantly mediate the level of stress resulting from victimization. This failed to support the study hypothesis.

Lastly, a specific subgroup of participants was identified as experiencing elevated levels of victimization. These individuals were labeled as “Victims” and they were more likely to report having an ethnic minority identity, be male, and be a fifth-year student. Moreover, these students reported higher levels of stress and lower levels of group identity and campus connectedness. This suggests the existence of a specific subset of students who are potentially more susceptible to peer victimization and its negative psychological effects.

The implications of these findings are valuable for mental health professionals working in university settings. These individuals can target specific subgroups of students that display high risks for peer victimization and help these students feel more closely bonded to the campus community. Future studies examining the role of group identity and campus connectedness on students’ experience of peer victimization would be beneficial to further support or refute these findings.
APPENDIX A: MEASURES

Demographic Questions

1. What is your age?
   - 18
   - 19
   - 20
   - 21
   - 22 or older

2. Please indicate your gender
   - M
   - F

3. Please indicate your ethnicity:______________________

4. Year in school
   - Freshman
   - Sophomore
   - Junior
   - Senior
   - 5th year or more

5. Number of years in your sorority/fraternity (including the current year)
   - 1
   - 2
   - 3
   - 4
   - 5 or more

6. Involvement in other organizations (please tick all that apply)
   - College/intramural sports
   - Campus club
   - Philanthropy/charity
   - Academic/honor societies
   - Work
   - Other (please indicate)

7. Self-reported GPA
   - 4.0
   - 3.5-3.99
   - 3.0-3.49
   - 2.5-2.99
   - 2.0-2.40
   - Less than 2.0
Peer Victimization Questionnaire

**PART 1: WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU**

Since being initiated into my fraternity/sorority...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once or twice</th>
<th>A few times</th>
<th>About once a week</th>
<th>A few times a week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A member(s) of my fraternity/sorority:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Left me out of what he or she was doing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Did not invite me to a social event even though he or she knew I wanted to go.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Gave me the silent treatment (did not talk to me on purpose).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Told others not to associate with me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Purposefully harmed a friendship/relationship of mine.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Teased or harassed me either through text or social media.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone who is NOT a member of my fraternity/sorority:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Left me out of what he or she was doing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Did not invite me to a social event even though he or she knew I wanted to go.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Gave me the silent treatment (did not talk to me on purpose).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Told others not to associate with me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Purposefully harmed a friendship/relationship of mine.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Teased or harassed me either through text or social media.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social Connectedness Scale—Campus Version (SCS-CV)

**Directions:** The following statements reflect various ways in which you may describe your experience on this entire college campus. Rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement using the following scale (1 = Strongly Disagree and 6 = Strongly Agree). There is no right or wrong answer. Do not spend too much time with any one statement and do not leave any unanswered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Mildly Disagree</th>
<th>Mildly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. There are people on campus with whom I feel a close bond.

2. I don't feel that I really belong around the people that I know on campus.

3. I feel that I can share personal concerns with other students.

4. I am able to make connections with a diverse group of people.

5. I feel so distant from the other students.

6. I have no sense of togetherness with my peers.

7. I can relate to my fellow classmates.

8. I catch myself losing all sense of connectedness with college life.

9. I feel that I fit right in on campus.

10. There is no sense of brother/sisterhood with my college friends.

11. I don't feel related to anyone on campus.

12. Other students make me feel at home on campus.

13. I feel disconnected from campus life.

14. I don't feel I participate with anyone or any group.

* reverse score

Reverse score negative items 2, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14 and sum all 14 items.
### Depression Anxiety Stress Scales, 21 Item Short Form (DASS-21)

**DASS 21**  
**NAME ______________________ DATE ___________**

Please read each statement and circle a number 0, 1, 2, or 3 which indicates how much the statement applied to you over the past week. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any statement.

*The rating scale is as follows:*

- **0** Did not apply to me at all - NEVER
- **1** Applied to me to some degree, or some of the time - SOMETIMES
- **2** Applied to me to a considerable degree, or a good part of the time - OFTEN
- **3** Applied to me very much, or most of the time - ALMOST ALWAYS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>D</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I found it hard to wind down</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I was aware of dryness of my mouth</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I couldn’t seem to experience any positive feeling at all</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I experienced breathing difficulty (e.g. excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I tended to over-react to situations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I experienced trembling (e.g. in the hands)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I felt that I had nothing to look forward to</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I found myself getting agitated</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I found it difficult to relax</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I felt down-hearted and blue</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I felt I was close to panic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I felt I wasn’t worth much as a person</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I felt that I was rather touchy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (e.g. sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I felt scared without any good reason</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I felt that life was meaningless</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Social Identity Scale

Please circle the number between 1 and 7 which best reflects your response to the following six questions (1-not at all, 7-very much so).

1. I am very much a part of my fraternity/sorority.
2. Would it be accurate if you were described as a typical member of your fraternity/sorority?
3. Would you feel good if you were described as a typical member of this group?
4. To what extent do you feel attachment to your fraternity or sorority?
5. Do you feel it is important to be identified with your fraternity or sorority?
6. Do you value the fact that you are a member of your fraternity or sorority?
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