

ASSESSING SEXUAL CONSENT BELIEFS IN TULANE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS  
PARTICIPATING IN FRATERNITY AND SORORITY LIFE

AN HONORS THESIS

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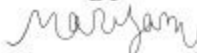
TULANE UNIVERSITY

FOR THE DEGREE OF

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WITH HONORS IN PUBLIC HEALTH

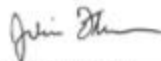
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## **Abstract**

Sexual violence is a public health crisis on college campuses due to its pervasive nature and deleterious. Experiencing sexual violence increases the risk for many psychological issues including anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicidal thoughts. When these mental health challenges occur in a college context, victims' academic achievement can also be adversely affected. Sexual violence is a particularly salient issue on Tulane University's campus. As of 2017, approximately 33% of all undergraduate Tulane students have experienced some form of sexual assault since matriculating. This study is focused on assessing the sexual consent beliefs of Tulane University students participating in Greek life. Students affiliated with Greek life are not only more likely to experience sexual violence but also perpetrate it. Subjects were recruited to voluntarily participate in the survey via email with 308 participants completing the survey. The Process-Based Consent Scale was utilized to assess sexual consent beliefs, and demographic information on gender, council, race, age, region of U.S., relationship status, sexuality, and class classification was captured. Significant differences were found between fraternity men and sorority women in the subtle coercion subscale with fraternity men having higher levels of agreement with subtle coercion techniques than sorority women. Significant differences were also found between people with differing relationship statuses for the communicative sexuality subscale with those in relationships having the highest levels of agreement with comfort with communicating about sex and sexuality. There were also moderately significant differences between people with different sexualities for the communicative sexuality subscale with those identifying as non-heterosexual having the highest levels of agreement with comfort with communicating about sex and sexuality. These significant differences indicate that individual identities and backgrounds has an impact on one's beliefs regarding the aspects of sexual consent that were measured.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Background and Significance**

Sexual violence is a public health crisis on college campuses due to its pervasive nature and deleterious effects (Fedina et al., 2018). Sexual violence is defined as any sexual act that a person inflicts or attempts to inflict on another without the consent of the latter party. Consent is the freely given, informed permission for engagement in sexual activity between partners (Basile et al., 2014). Specifically, parameters for consent are for the agreement to be continuously negotiated and reversible, for the individuals involved to be above the age of 18, and for both parties to be informed regarding the actions being taken (Beres, 2014).

Sexual coercion is a form of sexual violence, which is the use of tactics to pressure another to experience or be exposed to a sexual act. These sexually violent acts include physical sexual experiences (touching of genitalia, anus, groin, breast, inner thigh, or buttocks of any person without their consent), unwanted sexual penetration (the completed or attempted oral, vaginal, or anal penetration of any person without their consent by any object), unwanted noncontact sexual experiences (sexual violence occurring without physical contact of any person without their consent), and stalking (Basile et al., 2014; Fedina et al., 2018).

Sexual violence can occur when an individual is either unable to consent because of their age, lack of information, mental or physical health, cognitive state such as being asleep or unconscious, or intoxication due to voluntary or involuntary use of alcohol or drugs (Basile et al., 2014). Additionally, sexual violence can occur by coercion or prohibition of the ability to refuse sexual acts. Tactics to coerce individuals into sex include using physical force, intimidation or manipulation, possession of weapons, and abuse of authority. These lone methods for bypassing consent can be used in combination with any other method (Basile et al., 2014).



In the United States, approximately one in five undergraduate women and one in twenty undergraduate men students experience sexual assault during their enrollment (Fedina et al., 2018). Experiencing sexual violence in college can lead to a variety of long-term physical and mental health, behavioral, and professional consequences (Campbell et al., 2002, Campbell et al., 2009; Hill & Silva, 2005; Potter, 2018). Physical health problems can encompass chronic pain, gynecological or gastrointestinal issues, substance abuse, and sexually transmitted diseases (Campbell et al., 2002). Although the circumstances regarding how and what kind of sexually violent act is carried out may result in varying levels of mental impact on victims, experiencing sexual violence increases the risk for many psychological issues including anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicidal thoughts (Campbell, 2002; Hermann et al., 2018).

When these mental health challenges occur in a college context, victims' academic achievement can also be adversely affected. According to a 2015 study, experiencing sexual violence was significantly associated with declines in overall GPA and dropping out of school (Mengo & Black, 2016). Students who have lived through sexual violence are more likely to skip class, avoid certain areas of campus, drop courses, and participate less in class compared to those who have not experienced sexual violence (Hill & Silva, 2005). These academic changes can then result in longer-term changes to the anticipated trajectory of educational and career attainments for those who experience sexual violence, often resulting in financial burden or loss and derailment from intended paths (Loya, 2014; Potter, 2018). Examples of post-college, professional impacts from sexual violence are taking extra semesters to complete their degree, changing career paths, having difficulty performing in the workplace due to mental health challenges, and an increased need for health care services such as counseling, all of which can contribute to increased financial burden and struggle (Loya, 2014; Potter, 2018). Additionally,

individuals who experience sexual assault are more likely to be victimized again (Norris et al., 2018).

Sexual violence is a particularly salient issue on Tulane University's campus. In 2017, the University administration in collaboration with sexual violence researchers assessed the prevalence of sexual violence, dating violence, and stalking amongst undergraduate students since matriculating. It was found that approximately 33% of all undergraduate Tulane students have experienced some form of sexual assault with 15% experiencing rape, 16% experiencing dating violence, 28% experiencing stalking since matriculating (All In: Tulane's Commitment to Stop All Sexual Violence, n.d.). For most cases, the perpetrator was known to the victim, and both the perpetrator and victim had consumed alcohol or drugs prior to the incident, except for stalking (All In: Tulane's Commitment to Stop All Sexual Violence, n.d.).

For non-White students, victimization rates across the board were lower than for White students except for stalking which was approximately the same; however, the use of alcohol or drugs during sexual assault or dating violence by the perpetrator or victim were significantly lower for non-White students than for White students (All In: Tulane's Commitment to Stop All Sexual Violence, n.d.). When breaking down rates of sexual violence by gender and sexual orientation, heterosexual men face the lowest rates of sexual assault (12.8%), dating violence (9.3%), and stalking (21.5) in comparison to the heterosexual women (38.5%, 16%, 32.4%, respectively) and non-heterosexual women and men of the Tulane community. LGBTQ undergraduate women experience the highest rates of sexual assault and dating violence in comparison to heterosexual men and women as well as LGBTQ men, with the statistics for this group being 51% and 33.2% respectively. 50.1% of LGBTQ undergraduate women experience stalking which is higher than heterosexual women and men; however, LGBTQ men experience the

greatest rate of stalking in comparison to heterosexual students and LGBTQ women at 56.3%. Moreover, 44.3% of LGBTQ men experience sexual assault and 32% of LGBTQ men experience dating violence which is higher than both heterosexual women and men.

The perpetrator's gender was overwhelmingly male for cases of sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking involving female victims (97.4%, 95.4%, 92.7%, respectively) and LGBTQ+ male victims (66.6%, 82.7%, 80.4%, respectively). Heterosexual men who were victims indicated that most of their perpetrators were women for cases of sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking (98.3%, 90.8%, 70.7%, respectively) (All In: Tulane's Commitment to Stop All Sexual Violence, n.d.).

Sororities and fraternities have been consistently studied for both victimization and perpetration of sexual violence. College social groups, like sororities and fraternities, can encourage sexual violence by promoting risk-taking in sexual relationships, protecting perpetrators of sexual violence within their groups, and creating situations, like parties, in which consent is difficult to obtain because of loud music, dim lighting, social pressure, and relative anonymity of guests (Hirsch & Khan, 2020). College students come onto campuses with the expectation that parties are a fun, desirable experience that involves drinking heavily and participating in casual sex (Armstrong et al. 2006; Mazar & Kirkner, 2016; Wade, 2017). For many campuses, these parties are organized by members of Greek life, particularly fraternities. Fraternity parties are popular among college students because they provide students access to alcohol, social capital, and college party culture. Moreover, fraternities can host such parties due to a deep history with higher education in that they have institutional backing to exist, organize, and host gatherings as well as receive funding from multiple different outlets (Wade, 2017). This gives fraternities a unique position on campus as most other social groups do not have the same

degree of funding, history, or space (Mazar & Kirkner, 2016). In this way, fraternities control the party scene at nearly every undergraduate institution within the United States.

A meta-analysis of studies demonstrated that in terms of perpetrating sexual assault, White members of fraternities score higher in terms of acceptance of hypermasculinity and rape myths as well as self-reports of sexual aggression than men who do not participate in such groups (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). All-male groups have been theorized to promote hypermasculine beliefs and to create an environment that pressures group members to be sexually aggressive (Seabrook et al., 2018). Fraternity members report feeling peer pressure to prove their masculinity to other members by having sex with women as a way of achieving such masculinity (Mazar & Kirkner, 2016). To obtain sex, fraternity members may rely on sexual deception which positively correlates with rape myth acceptance. Fraternity members have been found to use sexual deception more often than nonmembers to obtain sex (Martinez et al., 2018; Seabrook et al., 2018). Fraternities instill this culture via bonding rituals in new newcomers during their recruitment process where they undergo a series of activities to develop their connection with their peers (Mazar & Kirkner, 2016). Fraternity men are more at risk than non-affiliated college men to experience sexual assault (specifically touching) during these bonding rituals, thus making this population at high risk for both perpetration and victimization (Mellins et al., 2017). Bonding rituals also include actively objectifying women such as rating their attractiveness which positively reinforces the objectification and dehumanization of women—ultimately creating empathy gaps that strongly correlate with believing traditional gender roles and perpetuating sexual violence (Seabrook et al., 2018; Sweeney, 2014).

This culture can be seen in action throughout the fraternity party scene (Hirsch & Khan, 2020, Mazar & Kirkner, 2016, Wade, 2017). These parties are often based on sexist themes

which are focused on encouraging women attendees to dress skimpily. Moreover, fraternity men guard the entrance of the party, turning away non-affiliated men and women who are deemed as not attractive enough (Mazar & Kirkner, 2016). These sexist themes and selection of attendees creates a reputation that fraternity members believe in traditional gender roles and have exclusive access to alcohol, parties, a certain kind of woman, deepening the desire to be let into the scene. Then, once in the party, fraternity members control who drinks what, to what amount, and in what space within the house (Hirsch & Khan, 2020). Distinct from other student organizations, fraternities have their own homes where members live and can host events with little to no supervision from the university. Because of this, fraternity members can curate who gets to be where and with whom (Mazar & Kirkner, 2016). The control of attendance, alcohol, and space places significant power in the hands of fraternity men, granting greater access to perpetrate sexual violence. This is compounded by the strict standards sororities have within their chapters regarding alcohol during their own events which furthers a desire among sorority women to access party culture and alcohol through fraternity parties (Mazar & Kirkner, 2016).

Beyond alcohol and drugs, heterosexual sex is another commodity available during these parties: fraternity men and female attendees are often focused on finding someone worthy to themselves and their social group to hook up with (Wade, 2017). Party attendees and fraternity members can judge worthiness by the potential hook-up's looks, clothes, social status, and more. Sororities also facilitate this by valuing relationships with members of fraternities and granting sorority sisters social capital when members have acceptable sexual encounters (Wade, 2017). Many fraternities use female attendees' desire for forming relationships, sex, and alcohol to place blame on the women who attend for any social violence they experience during the event, perpetuating rape culture within the fraternity as well as the student body.

Overall, sorority women are also at higher risk than their non-affiliated peers for experiencing sexual violence, as members of sororities are 74% more likely to experience rape than non-affiliated women (Mohler-Kuo et al., 2004). Additionally, sorority women also have stronger adherence than their non-affiliated counterparts to traditional gender roles, adversarial sexual beliefs, victim-blaming, and rape myth acceptance; however, when sorority women are compared to fraternity men, the former adheres to such beliefs to a significantly lesser degree than the latter and has more willingness to intervene in sexually violent situations (Bannon et al., 2013).

Frequent alcohol consumption is a risk factor for perpetrating and experiencing assault, and involvement and membership in Greek life are strongly associated with high levels of alcohol consumption (Abbey, 2002; Abbey et al., 1998; Hirsch & Khan, 2020; Mellins et al., 2017; Ward et al., 2012). In over 50% of cases of sexual assault in college students, either the perpetrator, victim, or both consume alcohol prior to the event (Davis et al., 2012, Tjaden, P., Thoennes, N., 2006). Simply consuming alcohol does not guarantee one to perpetrate assault or experience it; however, a variety of psychological and social criteria work together amidst the consumption of alcohol to increase or decrease the likelihood of assault (Abbey et al., 1998).

Although distortion of sexual intentions can happen without the presence of alcohol, drinking can further misinterpretation due to it diminishing higher order processing skills and encouraging individuals “to focus on the most salient cues in the situation” (Abbey et al., 1998). Moreover, alcohol and drugs can psychologically diminish one’s inhibitions and thus encourage more aggressive and persistent behaviors while interacting with others—again, leaving room for individuals to cross the line into sexual violence (Abbey et al., 1998). These can cause individuals to wrongfully identify interactions with others as invitations for sex. Thus, the high

level of alcohol consumption among members of Greek life plays an active role in their experiences perpetrating or facing sexual violence. Beliefs in traditional gender roles and rape myths, as fraternity and sorority members have, can influence how individuals interpret situations with regards to alcohol and drugs. Adherence to these beliefs can facilitate one perpetrating drug-facilitated sexual assault (Abbey et al., 1998). An example of a traditional stereotype regarding sex and alcohol is that women who consent while sober maintain that consent while incapacitated or unconscious (Abbey et al., 1998).

Participation in healthy sexual relationships requires mutual agreement, more specifically consent, among everyone involved (Jozkowski and Humphreys, 2014). Informed, mutually made decisions regarding sexual acts from both parties prevent the long-term physical and mental health, behavioral, and professional consequences that come from facing sexual violence. This negotiation of consent can be verbally or non-verbally discussed (Flecha et al., 2020). Verbally, individuals can talk about the actions to be potentially taken and whether they would like to participate in them (Flecha et al., 2020; Jozkowski and Humphreys, 2014). Non-verbally, consent can be given by positive body language which can comprise of open gestures, direct eye contact, nods, smiles, and active touching (Flecha et al., 2020; Jozkowski and Humphreys, 2014). The absence of an agreement to proceed with a sexual act from any participant results in sexual violence occurring. Discussing and negotiating consent whether that be verbally or nonverbally prevents sexual violence because it results in an agreement by both parties to conduct whatever actions they have given expressed permission for, including not having any kind of sexual contact at all (Flecha et al., 2020). Thus, the connection between consent and sexual violence is inextricably tied.

There are many factors that influence consent negotiations (Beres, 2014; Jozkowski and Humphreys, 2014). In heterosexual encounters, men typically rely on nonverbal forms of communication while women focus on verbal (Jozkowski and Humphreys, 2014). Women want to be asked for consent while men assume consent is given through body language. Furthermore, methods of communication vary by forms of sexual behavior: sexual intercourse relies more on verbal communication, kissing or genital touching relies more on nonverbal cues, and oral sex relies on a combination of both. Another factor that impacts consent is relationship status (Jozkowski and Humphreys, 2014). Participants who have been dating for a while are better able to pick up on each other's nonverbal cues; however, consent is often assumed when it comes to sexual intercourse.

Additionally, conversation norms influence consent negotiations (Jozkowski and Humphreys, 2014). Although many campaigns promote that one can “just say no” to refuse sex, the reality is that consent is more complicated. Culturally, a no without any justification may feel awkward, rude, or hostile to the other person involved. More often, individuals give statements of appreciation or apologies to soften the refusal and focus more on their inability rather than lack of desire to have sex. This can result in passive refusals that a more assertive partner can circumvent to pressure the other to participate in sexual acts. Moreover, there are certain scripts that individuals follow while negotiating sex (Jozkowski and Humphreys, 2014). For example, in heterosexual relationships that may look like men being the initiators while women being the gatekeepers of sex. These dynamics influence men to assume consent until told otherwise and women to wait for men to initiate and ask for consent (Jozkowski and Humphreys, 2014). Individuals can also leverage their identity status, space, circumstance, or access to influence consent negotiations (Hirsch & Khan, 2020). In college, this could look like hesitancy to report



sexually violent acts due to historical racial tensions with police, assumption of consent when one goes with another to their room, varying intoxication levels resulting in impaired decision making, and more.

Thus, when reviewing risk factors for perpetrating sexual violence, one must consider how all these factors affect obtaining sexual consent. Although rape myth acceptance has been well studied amongst college fraternity members, little is known about the consent beliefs of fraternity members as well as sorority members. The aim of this study is to assess current sexual consent beliefs amongst current Tulane University students participating in fraternity and sorority life. By examining these students' current level of consent knowledge, we will gain a greater understanding of the consent beliefs of the Greek-affiliated undergraduate population. Additionally, I will examine how consent beliefs may or may not vary across certain demographic groups including membership in a fraternity vs. a sorority, gender, race and ethnicity, and academic year. This study will also ask Greek life-affiliated students about their attendance of sexual education programs, and their perceived usefulness. It is anticipated for there to be statistically significant differences in consent beliefs between members of sororities and fraternities.

By examining students' current level of knowledge regarding consent and which events they found helpful, we can begin to understand what sexual education programs Greek members value and will gain a greater understanding as to how to improve university sexual violence prevention programming for the said population.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Methods**

#### **Study Sample**

The current study includes Tulane University undergraduate students participating in the Greek system, including members of the Interfraternity Council, National Panhellenic Council, Panhellenic Council, and Multicultural Council (n = 308). Approximately 40% of Tulane undergraduate students currently participate in Greek life. The large number of students participating in Greek life and the fact that they are all mandated to participate in at least one sexual violence prevention program makes this target population ideal for this study because they will be able to reflect on and provide information on Tulane sexual education programs, which many non-affiliated members may have avoided because they were not required to complete them. Additionally, outreach for survey participation was achieved through the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Programs within the university. Fraternities and sororities were able to provide extra promotion of the survey within their organizations via their internal communications: chapter meetings, emails, group chats, and word of mouth.

All participating Greek life members, approximately 3,000 students total, were offered the opportunity to voluntarily participate in the study. Approximately 10% of students affiliated with the Greek system (N=308) completed study procedures. Study inclusion criteria included the following: 1) a current undergraduate student at Tulane University, 2) formally affiliated with the Tulane Greek system, and 3) age 18 years or older.

## **Study Procedures**

The Office of Fraternity and Sorority Programs sent a recruitment email to all students affiliated with the Greek system including a Qualtrics survey link (see Appendix A). The survey was open from April 1st, 2021 to May 12th, 2021. Reminder emails for students to fill out the survey were sent out weekly. After a month of the survey being open and promoted via email, specifically on May 4th, students were further incentivized to take the survey for a gift card prize ranging from five to fifteen dollars which was given to every student that completed the survey until the May 12th deadline.

After May 4th, the next 190 people who filled out the survey from then to May 12th were eligible for gift card prizes. The first 2 people to fill out the survey received a \$15 dollar gift card (delivered online via Giftogram, a website that allowed participants to choose which vendor they would like a gift card for) the next 3 people received 10-dollar gift cards, and the next 185 people received a 5-dollar gifts-card via email. To ensure confidentiality of survey data, at the end of the survey participants were redirected to an unconnected Google Form which asked for their name and email to which the Giftogram should be sent. They were notified about the limited supply of gift cards and that their information would be destroyed once the gift cards were sent.

The self-report survey first presented a paragraph detailing research participation consent and restrictions, anonymity, confidentiality, time to complete the survey, and a content warning: “The purpose of the following anonymous survey is to understand more about Tulane fraternity and sorority members' attitudes and experiences regarding sex and to understand what sexual health programming people attend. To be eligible to participate in the survey, you must be an active member in a Greek organization, Interfraternity Council (IFC), National Panhellenic

Council (NPHC), Panhellenic Council (Panhel), and Multicultural Greek Council (MGC), AND be over the age of 18. The survey is completely anonymous and confidential. Your answers will not be tied to you individually in any way. Your email will not be connected to this survey. This survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete, though you may take as much time as you need. By continuing the survey, you are indicating that you understand and agree to the terms of the survey and give researchers permission to access your survey results. Content warning: The contents of this survey include questions about sex and sexuality.”

Then, the participants were asked what year they matriculated at Tulane University. Participants were then asked questions in the following domains: 1) participation in and perceived helpfulness of Tulane sexual violence prevention related activities, 2) participation in additional off-campus sexual violence prevention activities, 3) sexual consent related knowledge, attitudes, and self-reported behaviors, and 4) demographics.

### **Demographics**

The survey asked participants about their personal information to contextualize their answers. See Appendix B for demographic questions asked. 308 participants were recruited to participate in the survey by the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Programs (OFSP).

Demographics obtained included matriculation semester, transfer/spring scholar status, race, gender, sexuality, age, relationship status, religious affiliation, Greek Council membership, and state of origin.

Approximately 40% of Tulane students participate in Greek life and every single member of such organizations participate in the Potential New Member Series which includes workshops and events centered around sexual violence programming. Because of the large number of students participating in Greek life and the fact that they are mandated to participate in at least

one sexual violence prevention program makes this target population ideal for this study. Additionally, this population has been a focus of Tulane's efforts to prevent sexual violence via implementing a variety of programs to educate the student body and faculty on healthy sexual behavior.

### **Process-Based Consent Scale (PBCS)**

The Process-Based Consent Scale (PCBS) was utilized to measure self-reported attitudes, knowledge of, and behaviors regarding sexual consent (Glance et al., 2020; see Appendix B). The PBCS is a 17-item measure that utilizes a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree. The measure has three subscales: ongoing consent, communicative sexuality, and subtle coercion. Ongoing consent includes items regarding if a participant values sexual consent that is process-based, meaning that it is constantly negotiated. The subtle coercion subscale measures the degree to which a participant self-reports attitudes or behaviors that involve guilt or pressuring a partner to have sex. The final subscale, communicative sexuality, is defined as measuring how comfortable participants are regarding discussing sex with a partner.

The PBCS was found to have "good convergent and concurrent validity," meaning that the scale has high levels of legitimacy while examining an individual's true beliefs regarding consent. Additionally, the PBCS was found to be highly reliable when evaluated by Cronbach's alpha with ongoing consent subscale having an alpha of .86, subtle coercion subscale having an alpha of .88, and communicative sexuality subscale having an alpha of .82.

Three additional items were added to the scale upon request from campus partners, Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Office of Title IX and Sexual Misconduct. The ongoing consent subscale had one addition regarding substance use and ongoing consent. The communicative

sexuality subscale had two additional prompts focused on communicating pleasure and comfort in rejecting sex. To assess the reliability of the scale with the additional prompts, Cronbach's alpha was again calculated for each subscale that was changed. Ongoing consent and communicative sexuality now both have alphas of .84 suggesting reliability remains strong for these subscales.

Subscales were scored by taking the mean of the answers to the prompts in the subscale. In contrast to ongoing sexuality and communicative sexuality, subtle coercion was reverse scored meaning that the 7-point Likert scale ranged from 7 = Strongly Disagree to 1 = Strongly Agree. Mean scores within subscales will be compared to different members of demographics to determine which groups have higher or lower means as well as statistically significant differences.

Additionally, scale items do not use the word consent. This is advantageous as research has shown that the word consent is often perceived by participants as related to the legal system and "inapplicable to their own experiences" (Glance et al., 2020). This decreases the chances of priming the participants and encourages honest, authentic answers.

### **Assessment of Tulane Sexual Violence Prevention Programming and Activities**

Participants were asked about Tulane sexual education programs that they may have attended. The activities and programs were investigated beforehand and were included in this study if they involved discussions of consent. Campus partners were consulted while making this list. Participants selected all events and programs they attended from this list (see Appendix C). After indicating program attendance, participants were asked to rate the helpfulness of all the Tulane programs in general using a 5-point Likert-Scale ranging from 1 = Not at all helpful to 5 = Helpful.

## **Assessment of Outside of Tulane Sexual Violence Prevention Programming and Activities**

Participants were asked about outside of Tulane sexual education programs that they may have attended. The activities and programs were investigated beforehand and were included in this study if they involved discussions of consent. Campus partners were consulted while making this list. Participants selected all events and programs they attended from this list (see Appendix C). After indicating program attendance, participants were asked to rate the helpfulness of all the outside of Tulane programs in general using a 5-point Likert-Scale ranging from 1 = Not at all helpful to 5 = Helpful.

### **Data Analysis**

A total of 308 completed responses were collected and stored in Qualtrics and Box. Survey data was cleaned using Python, R, and SPSS version 27 was used for data analysis. Descriptive analyses included frequency distributions for categorical variables and means and standard deviations for continuous variables of interest. One sample t-tests and one-way ANOVAs were utilized to assess differences amongst demographic groups for consent.

## Results

### PBCS Subscales

Tables 1 provides summary statistics for PBCS subscales overall and Table 2 provides bivariate results assessing differences in consent by demographic subgroups including gender, council, race, age, region of U.S., relationship status, sexuality, and class classification. For the subscales, if a participant selected prefer not to answer to any of the questions, the rest of their responses to the subscale were nulled and not included in the data analysis.

**Table 1.**

*Descriptive Statistics of Measures*

Subscale	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Range</i>
Ongoing Consent	294	6.59	0.56	4-7
Subtle Coercion*	302	6.52	0.61	3-7
Communicative Sexuality	292	5.76	0.92	2-7

\* Reverse Coded



**Table 2.***Sample Characteristics Frequency, t Tests, and ANOVAs by Selected Demographic Variables*

Sub-scale	n	%	Ongoing Consent		Subtle Coercion		Communicative Sexuality		
			M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Gender									
Women	250	81.2	6.60	0.57	6.57	0.54	*	5.78	0.94
Men	58	18.8	6.58	0.49	6.32	0.82		5.69	0.81
Council									
Sorority	250	81.1	6.60	0.57	6.57	0.54	*	5.78	0.94
Fraternity	58	18.8	6.58	0.49	6.32	0.82		5.69	0.81
Race									
White	261	84.7	6.59	0.57	6.53	0.61		5.76	0.95
Non-White <sup>1</sup>	45	14.6	6.65	0.47	6.48	0.593		5.78	0.74
Age									
18-19	110	35.8	6.64	0.52	6.63	0.50		5.68	0.97
20-21	163	53.1	6.59	0.58	6.46	0.66		5.83	0.92
22-23	34	11.1	6.46	0.53	6.46	0.66		5.73	0.73
Region of U.S.									
East	76	24.8	6.61	0.52	6.40	0.69		5.66	1.04
Midwest	58	18.9	6.60	0.62	6.58	0.57		5.76	0.87
West	51	39.7	6.45	0.64	6.57	0.49		5.66	1.07
South	112	16.6	6.64	0.50	6.55	0.62		5.86	0.78
Relationship Status									
Single	124	41.2	6.60	0.58	6.59	0.54		5.61	0.91
Relationship	107	34.7	6.64	0.51	6.48	0.70		6.12	0.76 *
Dating or hooking up	70	22.7	6.48	0.58	6.48	0.57		5.45	1.01
Sexuality									
Straight	229	74.8	6.58	0.54	6.48	0.64		5.68	0.89
Bisexual	50	16.3	6.61	0.68	6.64	0.46		5.88	1.04 **
Other <sup>3</sup>	27	8.8	6.69	0.44	6.61	0.57		6.23	0.77
Class Classification									
Freshman	77	25.1	6.65	0.50	6.59	0.52		5.64	0.96
Sophomore	94	30.6	6.64	0.57	6.49	0.73		5.86	0.93
Junior	92	30.0	6.55	0.58	6.51	0.53		5.78	0.85
Senior	44	14.3	6.48	0.58	6.48	0.63		5.71	0.97
Religion									
Form of Christianity	96	33.0	6.58	0.49	6.42	0.74		5.67	0.92
Judaism	74	25.4	6.59	0.62	6.53	0.55		5.88	0.94
Other <sup>4</sup>	121	41.6	6.59	0.57	6.57	0.53		5.77	0.92

Note. \*\*\* p value < 0.05, \*\* p value < 0.01, \* p value < 0.001.

<sup>1</sup> Multiracial, Black or African American, Asian, Latinx or Hispanic, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or American Indian or Alaska Native, <sup>2</sup> Asexual, gay, lesbian, pansexual, queer, questioning or unsure, or same gender loving, <sup>3</sup>

Protestant, Roman Catholic, Mormon, Eastern or Greek Orthodox, <sup>4</sup> Atheist/Agnostic/Nothing in particular/Something else

## **Demographics**

Overall, most participants were female (81.2%), members of sororities (81.2%), White (84.7%), straight (74.8%), or under the age of 22 (88.9%). Due to the limited number of participants in the non-dominant categories, groups were consolidated to create statistically relevant cohorts. For example, anyone who identified themselves as multiracial, Black or African American, Asian, Latinx or Hispanic, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or American Indian or Alaska Native were placed in the non-White category. Table 1 details the demographics of the subject participants.

## **Ongoing Consent**

The mean score for the ongoing consent subscale was 6.59 with a standard deviation of 0.57. No significant differences were found between demographic subgroups for gender, Greek council (sorority or fraternity), race, region, relationship status, sexuality, class classification, and religion.

## **Subtle Coercion**

The mean score for the subtle coercion subscale was 6.52 with a standard deviation of 0.61. No significant differences were present among participants grouped by race, region, relationship status, sexuality, class classification, and religion. For this subscale, higher mean scores indicate greater rejection of subtle coercion tactics.

There was minor significance present among age ranges,  $F(2) = 2.66$ ,  $P = 0.07$ , with the mean score being the highest for students between the ages of 18-19. There were highly significant differences between women and men,  $T(300) = 2.78$ ,  $P = 0.001$ , with men having higher subtle coercion scores than women. There were also highly significant differences

between members of sororities and fraternities,  $T(300) = 2.78, P = 0.001$ . Tables 8 and 9 contain summarized data regarding subscale scores and significances.

### **Communicative Sexuality**

The mean score for the communicative sexuality subscale was 5.76 with a standard deviation of 0.92. No significant differences were present among participants grouped by gender, council, race, age, region, matriculation semester, and religion. Higher mean scores within this subscale indicate greater comfort with communicating about one's own sexuality as well as their partners'.

There were highly significant differences between individuals who were single, in relationships, and dating or hooking up:  $F(2) = 14.53, P = 0.001$ . Those hooking up, casually dating, or single had higher variance than those in relationships for their communicative sexuality means. There were moderately significant differences between individuals who were straight, bisexual, and non-heterosexual:  $F(2) = 4.59, P = 0.011$ . Tables 8 and 9 contain summarized data regarding subscale scores and significances.

### **Activities**

On average, students participated in a total of 3 sexual education activities both at Tulane ( $M = 2.9513, SD = 1.65440$ ) and outside of Tulane ( $M = 3.13, SD = 1.37$ ). For Tulane affiliated sexual education activities, the range was 0-7 while for outside of Tulane sexual education activities the range was 0-5. At Tulane, the most attended programming was pre-orientation modules with 83.1% of participants in attendance. The least attended Tulane affiliated sexual education activities were Healthy Relationships Week (17.5%) and My Sister's Keeper (0%). For non-Tulane affiliated sexual education activities, most students participated in discussions with peers (87.7%), formal sexual health education in previous schooling environments such as high

school (59.4%), and discussions with family (53.6%). Table 2 depicts the attendance levels at Tulane sexual education activities.

Overall, on average, students found non-Tulane affiliated sexual education activities to be more helpful than Tulane affiliated sexual education activities on a scale from 1-5,  $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = 1.070$  and  $M = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 0.96$  respectively. In terms of how helpful subjects perceived such activities, non-Tulane affiliated sexual education activities were on average found to be more helpful than Tulane affiliated sexual education activities. Tables 3-6 contain summarized data regarding activity attendance.

**Table 3.**  
*Tulane Sexual Education Activity Attendance (N=308)*

<b>Tulane Sexual Education Activity</b>	<i>Attended</i>		<i>Did Not Attend</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
SAPHE Workshops	157	51.0	151	49.0
Pre-orientation	256	83.1	52	16.9
One Wave Workshop	125	40.6	183	59.4
Healthy Relationships Week	54	17.5	254	82.5
Sex Week	135	43.8	173	56.2
My Sister's Keeper	0	0	308	100
Tulane social media	121	39.3	187	60.7
Sexual Assault Awareness Month	61	19.8	247	80.2

**Table 4.**  
*Non-Tulane Sexual Education Activity Attendance (N=308)*

<b>Non-Tulane Sexual Education Activity</b>	<i>Attended</i>		<i>Did Not Attend</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Sexual Health Education	183	59.4	125	49.0
Non-Tulane social media	123	39.9	185	60.1
Discussions with Peers	270	87.7	38	12.3
Discussions with Family	165	53.6	143	46.4
Media	226	73.4	82	26.6

**Table 5.***Tulane Sexual Education Activity Degree of Helpfulness (N=308)*

<b>Degree of Helpfulness</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b><i>%</i></b>
Prefer not to answer	5	1.6
Not at all helpful	11	3.6
Somewhat unhelpful	14	4.5
Neither Helpful nor Unhelpful	53	17.2
Somewhat Helpful	15	48.7
Helpful	75	24.4

**Table 6.***Non-Tulane Sexual Education Activity Degree of Helpfulness (N=307)*

<b>Degree of Helpfulness</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b><i>%</i></b>
Prefer not to answer	2	0.7
Not at all helpful	6	2.0
Somewhat unhelpful	11	3.6
Neither Helpful nor Unhelpful	31	10.1
Somewhat Helpful	131	42.7
Helpful	126	41.0

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Discussion**

Prior research has demonstrated that sexual violence is pervasive on college settings and that sexual consent is the basis for any healthy sexual encounter (CDC, 2020). In colleges, those who participate in Greek life are more likely to perpetrate and experience sexual violence and adhere to rape myth beliefs to a higher degree than their non-affiliated peers (Mazar & Kirkner, 2016.; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007; Martinez et al., 2018; Seabrook et al., 2018). Fraternity men report feeling peer pressured to prove their masculinity by participating in sexual activities with women and to be more willing to use sexual deception to obtain sex (Martinez et al., 2018; Mazar & Kirkner, 2016; Seabrook et al., 2018). Sorority women also have pressure to participate in sex culture, but little work has been done to understand their beliefs regarding sexual coercion and consent in general (Mohler-Kuo et al., 2004). Thus, insufficient research has been done to understand the sexual attitudes and behaviors of all members of Greek life in terms of their sexual relationships. Additionally, as a reaction to the understanding that members of Greek life are more likely to perpetrate and experience sexual violence, this group is often the target for many sexual education activities by universities; however, research on Greek member's attendance and perception of such educational events has mainly focused on fraternity men and not sorority women.

This study addresses these gaps by comparing attitudes between selected demographic variables within Greek life at Tulane University while also observing the sexual education activities these students have participated in and their perceptions. By gaining a greater understanding of the sexual consent beliefs among members of Greek life and looking into individual attendance of sexual education efforts within and outside of the university,

administrators may gain a greater understanding of what educational curriculum is needed and attends to the needs of the subgroups within the larger Greek life population.

The current study suggests that within members of Greek life sorority women have higher levels of disagreement than fraternity men when it comes to tactics involving subtle coercion, and people in relationships or who identify as non-heterosexual have higher levels of agreement in communicating regarding about sex and sexuality than their respective other categories. When comparing between subscales, the average score was lower and had a higher variability for the communicative sexuality subscale than the other two subscales. These results indicate while many Greek students have a difficult time communicating about sex and sexuality. Moreover, there may have been social desirability influencing the answers to the first two subscales, increasing their respective averages, and lowering their variability.

When breaking results down based on demographic variables, there were highly significant differences in results for the subtle coercion subscale when grouping people based on gender and council. On average, fraternity men had higher scores with subtle coercion tactics than sorority women, indicating that fraternity men tolerate or agree with employing coercive techniques when approaching sexual situations more than women, which aligns with the findings of the original Process-Based Consent Scale study (Glance et al., 2020). This could be because previous research has shown that greater adherence to rape myths and gender roles leads to increases one's tendency to accept sexual coercion tactics; thus, fraternity men, who as a group have the greatest degree of rape myth tolerance on college campuses among their peers, are found to hold higher levels of subtle coercion acceptance. (Mohler-Kuo et al., 2004; Seabrook et al., 2018).

For communicative sexuality, highly and moderately significant differences were found when grouping people based on relationship status and sexuality respectively. Those in relationships or were non-straight were in higher levels of agreement with communicating about sex and sexuality. There were no significant differences in results for ongoing consent based on the demographic variables chosen.

For the communicative sexuality subscale, there highly significant differences were found between those who were single, in a relationship, and dating or hooking up. Those in relationships, on average, scored higher in terms of agreement or tolerance with comfortability discussing sex and sexuality than those casually dating, hooking up, or single. This indicates that relationship status may facilitate comfort in sexual communication, which aligns with prior research (Backstrom et al., 2012; Hirsch et al., 2020). This could be because being in a committed relationship creates a sense of security in that they become increasingly comfortable being open and honest with the other. Studies have demonstrated that when there is ambiguity in sexual scripts, like those in hook ups, there is an increase in difficulty communicating about sex due to uncertain expectations, preferences, and sexual scripts (Backstrom et al., 2012; Wade, 2017). Those in relationships have stake in understanding their partner, accommodate their needs, and build a stronger relationship. Additionally, for some, there are new scripts that arise when one is in a relationship. For example, a study found that many women do not expect cunnilingus during hook ups but are more expectant of it when in a relationship (Backstrom et al., 2012; Hirsch, 2020).

Additionally, sexual orientation was another factor that had moderate significant differences for the communicative sexuality subscale. Straight and bisexual people had lower mean scores than people who are gay, lesbian, asexual, pansexual, etc. This could be because



non-heterosexual, non-bisexual people may not have the same representation for how their sexuality is defined and generally lack sexual scripts that heterosexual people are easily able to learn through societal culture and media, resulting in explicit, open discussions about sex and sexuality to be required (Gabb, 2022). This is in opposition to heterosexual relationships which have gender differences and inequalities that drive rigid sexual scripts, leading to a lack of explicit discussions about sex and sexuality (Gabb, 2022).

### **Limitations**

Limitations in this study can be found in the method in which the survey was administered, the scope of the survey, and the modifications made to the survey for this study. This study is cross sectional, meaning that consent beliefs were only captured within one time point and activity participation was not used to explain or predict certain scores due to increased variability. To gauge if there are changes in consent beliefs over time in college and if activity participation had an impact, surveys should be administered to the same cohort over the course of four years. Future research could focus on understanding if increase in activity attendance results in higher or lower overall scores for the PBCS.

Additionally, the survey was taken voluntarily by Greek students. This could lead to self-selection for those willing to take a survey on their sexual activities, resulting in skewed results because those who self-selected into the study may be fundamentally different than those who did not. Social desirability could also be at play while subjects filled out the survey. The main limitation of the PBCS is that it was researched only in its ability to examine beliefs and thus cannot be used to predict individual's behavior when they are pursuing sex (Glance et al., 2020). Thus, many of the prompts, such as the prompts for subtle coercion, may have caused subjects to reflect more on what is societally acceptable than their actual beliefs and behaviors.

Future research should also capture a more representative sample of the Greek community to increase validity. This could look like having just as many members of fraternities and sororities participating in the survey, ensuring each chapter has sufficient representation, and increasing the number of non-White participants. Additionally, future research should also focus on capturing a non-Greek affiliated demographic's survey results to compare to. By doing so, previous research findings that members of Greek life adhere to rape myths more than their non-affiliated peers could be confirmed and expanded to include beliefs about consent.

Three new items were added to the consent subscale which may have impacted the validity and reliability of the subscale. These three items may have impacted the way individuals responded to other prompts, influenced the average scores of each subscale, and changed the properties of the scale. Moreover, before the consent scale, questions about sexual education program attendance were asked, which was not part of the original survey instrument. This could have led to survey fatigue and participants not completing the survey. Future research should analyze the impact of the new prompts and the addition of sexual education program questions on reliability and validity.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study demonstrates that within Greek life there are differing levels of agreement between certain demographics regarding aspects of sexual consent. Survey participants had similar levels of agreement to ongoing consent but had highly significant differences for the subtle coercion subscale between fraternity men and sorority women. This is in line with the original PBCS study and other studies focused on Greek life that have found that fraternity men agree more with subtle coercion techniques than their sorority women counterparts (Glance et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2018; Seabrook et al., 2018). Moreover, higher levels of agreement with

the communicative sexuality prompts for those in who are non-heterosexual or are in relationships also is in alignment with previous research (Gabb, 2022).

Ongoing consent prompts are focused on consent during the act itself: checking in with their partner, understanding body language, etc. Subtle coercion is focused more on the verbal and mental habits of subjects while negotiating the initiation of sexual acts: Do they feel entitled to sexual acts? Do they get upset easily when rejected from sexual acts? Do they feel like it is acceptable to convince someone to participate in sexual acts with them? To address the disconnect, Tulane University should implement programming to further explain bodily autonomy, acceptance of rejection, and the pillars of coercion.

Communicative sexuality had lower means, higher variances, and a wider range than the other two categories. This speaks to the larger issue that students are not comfortable speaking about sex as well as their own and their partner's sexuality. Being comfortable with discussing sex and sexuality whether that be in the context of themselves, or their partner is a key aspect of sexual consent in that individuals then communicate what feels good, what they feel comfortable partaking in, and what needs to be changed. Tulane University can tackle this issue by creating programming that educates students on sex refusal skills, promotes sex positivity, and destigmatizes sexual communication.

Overall, Greek students understand the basic aspects of consent and can demonstrate that via this survey. This leads to future questions of who Greek-affiliated students give the courtesy of healthy sexual consent to. Sexual violence is an act of power and control, and there needs to be further research focused on understanding how students participating in Greek life interact and interpret with the sexual consent beliefs of those of different identities in terms of race, gender, sexuality, social class, and more. Programming focused on unpacking the greater

nuances of sexual consent, how consent looks like in practice, what coercion entails, and sex positivity would be beneficial for this community to gain a greater understanding of sexual consent.

## Appendix

### Appendix A: Email Advertisement to Students

Hello,

We hope that you are having a great semester so far. The semester is rapidly winding down, but that does not mean our work as leaders and members of the Greek community is over. April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month and there are a variety of ways to get involved in active and passive programming both on-campus and in the community. Sexual violence prevention is a key content area in our health and wellness education process for both potential new members and active members, so we strongly encourage you and your organization to be engaged.

One way to get involved this month is to participate and complete the Greek Sexual Attitudes Survey. The survey is 100% anonymous and will allow our department and partnering offices create and implement intentional programming from the Greek community centered around violence prevention. Again, we highly encourage you to participate in the survey. Participation is voluntary, and answers are confidential. Please only fill out the survey ONCE. Responses will not be used to identify individuals. This survey should take 15 minutes or less to finish. For ease of completion, it is recommended to complete the survey via a non-mobile device (laptop, desktop computer, etc.) in a quiet setting.

### Appendix B: Full Survey

- What semester and year did you start at Tulane?
- Are you a transfer student?
- Are you a Spring Scholar?
- Which of the following best describes your race? Select all that apply.
  - White
  - Black or African American
  - Asian
  - Latinx or Hispanic
  - Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
  - American Indian or Alaska Native
  - Prefer Not to Answer
  - Prefer to Self-Describe
- Which of the following best describes your gender?
  - Woman
  - Man
  - Trans
  - Nonbinary
  - Prefer Not to Answer
  - Prefer to Self-Describe
- Which of the following best describes your sexuality?
  - Asexual

- Bisexual
- Gay
- Straight (Heterosexual)
- Lesbian
- Pansexual
- Queer
- Questioning or unsure
- Same gender loving
- Prefer to self-describe
- Prefer Not to Answer
- How old are you?
- What is your current relationship status?
  - Single
  - Steady, monogamous, committed relationship
  - Open relationship
  - Casually dating/hooking up
  - Prefer to Self-Describe
  - Prefer Not to Answer
- What is your current religious affiliation?
  - Protestant
  - Roman Catholic
  - Mormon
  - Eastern or Greek Orthodox
  - Jewish
  - Muslim
  - Buddhist
  - Hindu
  - Atheist
  - Agnostic
  - Nothing in particular
  - Something else
  - Prefer to Self-Describe
  - Prefer Not to Answer
- You selected Protestant as your religious affiliation. Which Protestant denomination are you affiliated with? You may select more than one.
  - Presbyterian
  - Episcopalian
  - Methodist
  - Lutheran
  - Baptist
  - Evangelical
  - Pentecostal
  - Anglican
  - Other
- Are you a member of an organization which is a part of a/an...
  - Interfraternity Council (IFC)

- National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC)
- Panhellenic Council (Panhel)
- Multicultural Greek Council (MGC)
- What state or territory do you consider yourself from? If not from the United States, please select not from the United States.
- Are there other identities you would like us to know that are important to you (e.g., age, veterans' status, sexual orientation, first-gen college and/or graduate, disability, non-US citizen)? Please describe any other identities would you like us to know that are important to you.

#### Ongoing Consent:

1. If my partner seems less than excited about sex, I stop and ask if they want to be sexual with me.
2. If my partner is not expressing physical affection toward me during sex, I check in with them to make sure they want to have sex, even if they verbally agreed to sex.
3. If I am unclear about my partner's body language, I make sure to verbally check in with them to be sure that they want to have sex.
4. I pay attention to my partner's body language during sexual encounters to be sure that they want to have sex.
5. If I'm having sex with a partner who I've had sex with before, I still make sure to check in about their sexual needs and desires.
- 6. If my partner seems to be under the influence, I make sure to verbally check in with them to be sure that they want to have sex. \***

#### Subtle Coercion:

1. I would tell a partner that if they cared about me, they would have sex with me.
2. When my partner says that they do not want to be a part of sexual activity, I try to change their mind.
3. Sometimes, people need a little verbal convincing to have sex.
4. I think that if you care about someone you should have sex with them even if you are not in the mood.
5. I think my partner should feel guilty if they do not want to have sex with me.
6. I am easily upset if I feel that my partner is not taking care of my sexual needs.

#### Communicative Sexuality:

1. I verbally tell my partner what I want sexually.
2. I ask my partner what they want sexually.
3. It is important to me to talk about my sexual needs and desires with my partner often.
4. I know that it will not hurt my relationship with my sexual partner if I say no to sex when I don't want to have it.
5. I value ongoing conversations about my and my partner's sexual desires.
6. During sexual activity, it is important to me that my partner knows what I am comfortable with.
- 7. During sexual activity, I feel comfortable communicating lack of pleasure to my partner. \***
- 8. I feel comfortable telling my partner that I do not want to have sex. \***

\* Additional items that were added to the scale upon request from campus partners

## **Appendix C: Sexual Education Activities**

### **Tulane SV Prevention Programming and Activities**

- SAPHE Workshops (Consent Conversation, Sexual Violence 101, etc.)
- Pre-orientation or Orientation event(s) or program(s) focused on sex, sexuality, and/or sexual violence (Summer reading project e.g., Beartown, online modules, discussions with Wave Leaders during orientation, The Hook Up, etc.)
- One Wave Workshop
- SAPHE's Healthy Relationships Week (Includes social media posts by SAPHE during this week)
- Sex Week (Includes social media posts during this week)
- My Sister's Keeper
- Tulane-affiliated organization's social media posts or content regarding sex, sexuality, or sexual violence (Instagram posts/stories, Tweets, etc.)
- Sexual Assault Awareness Month
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

### **Outside of Tulane Sexual Violence Prevention Programming and Activities**

- Sexual health education (includes discussions surrounding sex and sexuality, consent, sexual violence, sexually transmitted diseases, puberty, etc.)
- Non-Tulane-affiliated organization's social media posts or content regarding sex, sexuality, or sexual violence (Instagram posts/stories, Tweets, etc.)
- Discussions with peers about sex, sexuality, and/or sexual violence
- Discussions with family members about sex, sexuality, and/or sexual violence
- Television/Movies/Music about sex, sexuality, and/or sexual violence
- Other
- Prefer not to answer



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