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Moral Foundations and Rule-Breaking Behavior at Penn State University: An Analysis of the  
Role of Participation in Greek Life

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## ABSTRACT

Only a handful of studies have examined the relationship between students' moral foundations and their rule-breaking behavior, and none have done so within the context of participation in Greek life. In the current study, I use a sample of 1,593 college students gathered in 2020 to test the hypotheses that students with stronger binding moral foundations -- which places *the group* at the center of moral concern -- will be more likely to join Greek life, that individuals with strong binding and individuals with strong individualizing moral foundations -- which places *the individual* at the center of moral concern -- will engage in fewer rule-breaking behavior, and that participation in Greek life will weaken the protective effects of the both types of moral foundations on rule-breaking behaviors. Results show support for the hypotheses that Greek life attracts participants with strong binding moral foundations. Results also show that strong individualizing moral foundations are associated with less rule-breaking behavior. Finally, results show that binding moral foundations were associated with *more* rule-breaking for both groups, not less, as was hypothesized. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of these findings for future research on deviance and administrative policy in higher education.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Morality has long been of interest in the study of crime and deviance. However, most of the time it has been measured as the degree to which people think it is wrong to commit acts of crime and deviance. This way of studying morality is limited because it is so closely tied to crime and deviance itself, which makes it hard to separate out the effect of morality *per se*. Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) holds great promise for solving this problem because it measures moral intuitions separate from acts of crime and deviance.

This thesis examines the impact of moral foundations on rule-breaking behavior among college students using data from surveys distributed to 1,593 students at Penn State University in 2020. The following questions will be explored: To what extent do moral foundations influence participation in Greek life? To what extent do moral foundations influence rule-breaking behaviors among college students? Does the influence of moral foundations on college students' rule-breaking behavior depend on whether they participate in Greek life? Control variables include gender, self-control, political conservatism, and religiosity.

The specific moral intuitions in this thesis are based on Moral Foundations Theory and include Care, Fairness, Loyalty, Authority, and Purity. The first hypothesis is that students with strong moral foundations will engage in fewer rule-breaking behaviors. The second hypothesis is that students with strong binding moral foundations will be more drawn to participating in Greek life. The third hypothesis is that the relationship between the moral foundations and rule-breaking will be weaker among students who participate in Greek life because these students are

under greater pressure to conform to organizational norms regardless of their own moral foundations.

Understanding the influence of moral foundations on students' rule-breaking behavior and whether this influence varies with participation in Greek life makes this thesis an important contribution to the research literature on deviant behavior. It may also be helpful to colleges and universities in their efforts to promote safe and responsible behavior among students. Knowing which moral foundations are associated with rule-breaking behaviors such as violence, vandalism, and cheating can help college administrators tailor policies and messaging aimed at encouraging students to view their own and other students' rule-breaking behavior as morally relevant rather than as something to be ignored or tolerated. Additionally, the focus on Greek life participation encourages a more focused look at university institutions, particularly those with independent moral and value systems that may influence students' behavior.

There are currently 71 fraternities and sororities at Penn State University, encompassing 14 percent of the total undergraduate student body (Penn State Student Affairs, 2023). Although Greek life is engrained in college culture in the United States, it brings with it concerns about diversity and inclusion, criminal behavior including sexual assault and underage binge drinking, and exclusionary elitism. Calls for the abolition of Greek life on campuses have grown in recent years, but research evaluating the moral perspectives and deviant behaviors of Greek life students has been few and far between.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) defines several “innate [...] psychological systems which make up the foundations of intuitive ethics” (Haidt, 2004). Developed by moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt and his colleague Craig Joseph in the early 2000’s, Moral Foundations Theory asserts that most adult belief systems function implicitly, not deliberately, and are so deeply rooted as to be automatic (Haidt, 2004). The specific moral intuitions or foundations identified by MFT include Care/Harm, Fairness/Cheating, Loyalty/Betrayal, Authority/Subversion, and Sanctity/Degradation, though there are others in contention to be upgraded to “foundational status” (Haidt, 2012).

Though MFT is relatively new to the field of criminology, its suggestion that intuitive ethics and morality influence deviant behavior corresponds with previously established criminological work, especially Control Theory (Kornhauser, 1978; Agnew, 2014). Recent research by Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi, prominent criminologists who specialize in Control Theory, has found that “morality is the primary inhibitor and mitigator for engagement in criminal offenses” (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 2020). Control theorists have argued that intentional thought is less frequent and has less influence when one’s moral foundations are firmly established, thus affirming that moral and immoral decisions are primarily driven by innate moral heuristics (or rules of thumb), more so than by deliberate and logical reasoning (Silver, 2022).

The moral foundations identified by MFT can be separated into two scales of measurement, referred to as “individualizing” and “binding.” Individualizing moral foundations emphasize values of justice, equality, and individual autonomy. They place *the individual* at the

center of moral concern and include Care/Harm and Fairness/Cheating. Binding moral intuitions emphasize values of culture and community. They place *the group* at the center of moral concern, and include Loyalty/Betrayal, Authority/Subversion, and Sanctity/Degradation (Silver, 2020). This thesis builds upon previous research that has proposed that deviance is impacted beyond the individualizing moral foundations, and that the inclusion of binding foundations allows a better understanding of the nuanced make up of morality and its impact on deviance (Silver and Abell, 2016).

The decision to focus on college-aged adults is supported by the work of developmental psychologists Lawrence Kohlberg and Robert Kramer, who state that “innate moral foundations are strongly solidified by the age of college participation and decision making relating to crime engagement is well established” (Kohlberg and Kramer, 1969). From a broader perspective encompassing the duties of higher education, the promotion of emotional and ethical development among college-aged students has risen in salience as a responsibility of universities, equally as important as intellectual enrichment. As the former President of Harvard University Derek Bok puts it, universities “have a responsibility to contribute in any way they can to the moral development of students” (Rest and Narvaez, 1991). In response to increased costs of college attendance, an overabundance of colleges to choose from, and changing social norms, universities “must demonstrate – not just claim – that students are changing as a consequence of the college experience and in ways that society values” (Rest and Narvaez, 1991). Thus, the choice to concentrate on college students as a sample focuses this study on young adults with largely solidified moral intuitions who are also the target of positive moral development within institutions of higher education.

The American college party culture encourages “heavy drinking, drinking games, pregameing, tailgating, and often, drug use with the end goal of becoming as intoxicated as possible within the context of a social group engaging in the same activities” (Lasky, 2017). These behaviors serve as bonding activities for university students, especially those involved in Greek life, as the behaviors are treated as normative among the participants. Greek life membership is significantly linked to increased frequency of binge drinking: “The single best predictor of binge drinking in college is fraternity membership” (Wechsler, 1995). Binge drinking is not only encouraged among Greek life participants, but also “a positive, functional, and necessary activity” to fit in and excel within Greek life social hierarchies (Workman, 2001). The propensity for underclassmen’s involvement is of note as well; many “pledges” (hopeful participants) in Greek life organizations are first- or second-year students who are typically underage and are introduced to college culture through the lens of Greek life, therefore skewing their perceptions of the normative behavior of their college peers.

Greek life participation and binge drinking are linked to increased rates of rule-breaking behavior, including sexual promiscuity, engagement in violent sexual acts, driving under the influence, petty theft, property damage, and illicit drug use (Lasky, 2017; Dazzio et al, 2021). Gendered differences among Greek life participants and deviant behavior are important as well: female sorority members have the highest risk for victimization, especially sexual victimization, compared to other college-aged women due to their propensity for binge drinking and fraternity social involvement; fraternity men have the highest rates of binge drinking on college campuses compared to nonaffiliated men (Lasky, 2017). Thus, binge drinking and increased rates of deviant behavior among Greek life participants have been shown to affect fraternity men and sorority women differently: fraternity men are more likely to engage in criminal perpetration

(particularly against women), and sorority women are more likely to be victimized (particularly by men) due to inexperience with excessive alcohol consumption and frequent social involvement with fraternity men (Lasky, 2017).

Penn State University is one of the largest Greek life affiliated universities in the United States. Since its introduction in 1872, Penn State's Greek life community has been the focus of heavy scrutiny, as well as praise (Penn State Student Affairs, 2023). Heavily publicized hazing related deaths and sexual assaults, including the tragic death of Timothy Piazza in 2017 at his Beta Theta Pi initiation have placed Penn State at the center of the conversation of Greek life abolition at American colleges. Conversely, Penn State's IFC/Panhellenic Dance Marathon, known affectionately as THON, has received significant praise for being the world's largest student-run philanthropy dedicated to raising money for pediatric cancer research and treatment. Since its inception in 1973, THON has raised over \$200M, a feat accomplished by student members of the Interfraternity Council (IFC) and College Panhellenic Association, as they are founders of the philanthropy and primarily responsible for fundraising. As stated in the 2017 Relationship Statement provided by the Penn State Office of Fraternity and Sorority life, Greek life is "founded upon basic principles that promote social, moral, and educational development" and the "fraternal experience provides opportunities for individual, organizational, and institutional growth and success." (Penn State Student Affairs, 2023).

Criticism of Penn State's Greek life organizations has been equally compelling. The Grand Jury Presentment regarding the investigation into Beta Theta Pi brothers closed with the finding that Piazza's death was attributed to systemic failures. It was "not simply an unfortunate accident, but was the direct result of encouraged reckless conduct that demonstrated a reckless disregard for human life, or a reckless indifference to the possible consequences of such

conduct” (Centre County Grand Jury, 2017). Such critical assessments of Penn State’s Greek life community have divided Penn State leadership on how to appropriately respond to risks while respecting the historical significance that Greek life has had on the university’s culture.

Studies of Greek life participation and rule-breaking behavior using MFT have yet to be conducted within the fields of criminology and sociology, though studies outside these disciplines have examined how moral values “buffer” risk-taking behavior. These studies focus specifically on the protective effect of religiosity on alcohol abuse and non-medical use of prescription drugs (Dazzio et al, 2021; Snipes et al, 2015). Both studies found significant negative correlations between religious attendance and risk-taking behavior engagement, but Dazzio et al also established the possibility of a reverse impact, in which participation in Greek life decreases the protective effect of religiosity due to moral licensing (a psychological phenomenon where engagement in a morally sound activity, such as attending religious services, “cancels out” or justifies morally questionable activities, including binge drinking) (Dazzio et al, 2021). This thesis contributes to the established literature by attempting to clarify the impact of moral foundations on rule-breaking behavior among Greek life participants.

## Chapter 3

### The Current Study

The current study examines a sample of over 1,500 college students to address the following research questions: To what extent do moral foundations influence participation in Greek life? To what extent do moral foundations influence rule-breaking behaviors among college students? Does the influence of moral foundations on college students' rule-breaking behavior depend on whether they participate in Greek life? Students were asked to report involvement in rule-breaking behavior over the past year. The intention of this study is to discern which moral foundations are associated with participation, or lack thereof, in both Greek life and rule-breaking behavior.

I hypothesize that students with stronger binding moral foundations are more likely to be drawn to joining Greek life due to highly valuing community dynamics. I anticipate that individuals with strong moral foundations (both individualizing and binding) will engage in fewer rule-breaking behaviors, including both the general student body and Greek life participants. However, I also anticipate that participation in Greek life will weaken the protective effects of the moral foundations on rule-breaking behaviors due to the influence of integration into a community that is more likely to engage in deviant behaviors.

## Chapter 4

### Methods

#### Data Source

The data for this thesis was gathered in 2020 from students in 10 high-enrollment general education courses in sociology and criminology at Penn State University. Respondents were presented with a 30-item Moral Foundations Questionnaire, which is split into two parts with different question styles. In Part 1, students rate the relevance of 15 principles to their assessments of right and wrong, while Part 2 asks them to rate their agreement with 15 morally relevant statements (Graham et al., 2011). Within the questionnaire, 12 questions relate to individualizing intuitions, and 18 questions relate to binding intuitions.

A respondent's score is then calculated by averaging responses that correspond to each of the two overarching domains: individualizing or binding. Examples of items include "Justice is the most important requirement for a society" (Fairness/Cheating = Individualizing), or "It is more important to be a team player than to express oneself" (Loyalty/Betrayal = Binding). While individualizing moral intuitions put the care and protection of the vulnerable at the center of moral concern, binding moral intuitions put social order and cohesion at the center of moral concern (Agnew, 2014; Silver, 2022).

We define rule-breaking behavior as violence (pushing, grabbing, or hitting someone), vandalism (damaging or destroying property that did not belong to you), drug use other than marijuana, cheating on a major assignment (a test, final exam, or term paper), or letting someone cheat off of you on a major assignment. While not all these behaviors are explicitly criminal, measuring both dangerous and common deviancy allows us to examine the propensity for rule-

breaking behavior *in general* among young adults. Students were asked if they had engaged in any of these behaviors in the past year while in college.

For their participation, students were awarded one extra credit point in their sociology or criminology course in which the survey was distributed. 1,601 of the 2,291 students who were contacted took the survey, resulting in a 70% response rate. The responses of eight students were dropped due to incompleteness, leading to a final sample size of 1,593. The final sample is 60% female, 69% non-Latino white, 8% non-Latino black, 9% Asian, and 10% other race. The demographic characteristics of the sample are comparable to Penn State's undergraduate student body in terms of race, which is 65% non-Latino white, 6% African American, and 6% Asian. The sample, however, overrepresents females who comprise 47% of the Penn State student body. 21% of respondents are members of Greek life.

## **Measures**

The independent variables are moral intuitions, both individualizing and binding. Previous studies, as well as our own, have found that among the five categories of moral foundations, those designated as individualizing (Care/Harm, Fairness/Cheating) and binding (Loyalty/Betrayal, Authority/Subversion, and Sanctity/Degradation) are strongly correlated with one another (Silver, 2022). This supports the approach to separate the individualizing and binding intuitions and interpret their effects separately.

The dependent variable is participation in rule-breaking behavior. Students were asked to check each of the following rule-breaking behaviors if they had engaged in any of them within the past year: pushing, grabbing, or hitting someone, damaging, or destroying property that did

not belong to you, drug use other than marijuana, cheating on a major assignment (a test, final exam, or term paper), or letting someone cheat off of you on a major assignment. We then created a binary dependent variable which categorized students as either having been involved in rule-breaking behavior (coded 1), or not having been involved in rule-breaking behavior (coded 0).

Control variables include gender (conceptualized as a male/female binary), race/ethnicity, age, self-control, political conservatism, religiosity, Greek life membership, and whether the respondent is a criminology or sociology major (as the respondents were sampled from criminology and sociology general education courses). These variables may have a confounding effect on the relationship between moral intuitions and rule-breaking behavior. By controlling for them, we are able to focus on the unique effects of our selected independent on our dependent variables.

Race/ethnicity is coded as a series of dummy variables for non-Latino black, Asian, Latino, and Other (which included respondents who identified as Middle Eastern, Indian, or mixed race) with non-Latino white as the reference category. Age was coded as follows: 17- and 18-year-olds were coded as a '1' (20.2% of respondents), 19-year-olds as a '2' (34.1%), 20-year-olds as a '3' (19.8%), 21-year-olds as a '4' (15.5%), and anyone 22 or above as a '5' (10.5%).

Self-control is important to control for as it has been found by previous research to impact the choice to engage in rule-breaking behavior (Gottfredson and Hirshi, 1990). Self-control was measured by thirteen statements where respondents were asked to rate how much they identified with each, with a '4' indicating a response of "Extremely accurate" to a '1' indicating "Not at all accurate". Examples of statements included "I am lazy" and "I have a hard time breaking bad habits" (Silver, 2022).

Political conservatism is measured by a single question where respondents were asked to rate themselves on a scale of 1-7 on how liberal or conservative they consider themselves (with a ‘1’ being “Very liberal” and a ‘7’ being “Very conservative”). Approximately 38% categorized themselves as liberal, 32% as moderate, and 30.2% conservative. Religiosity is measured as the frequency of involvement in religious services, where 1 = Never, 2 = Less than once a year, 3 = About once a year, 4 = A couple of times a year, 5 = About once a month, 6 = About once a week, and 7 = More than once a week.

Greek life participation and whether the respondent was a criminology or sociology major were both controlled via binary questions. 21.1% of respondents identified as Greek life members, and 17.0% identified as criminology or sociology majors. The choice to control for criminology and sociology majors is due to the fact that students within these disciplines have heightened knowledge and awareness of concepts such as deviancy, morality, social science research, and unique relationships with the law due to common career interests in law enforcement or attending law school. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the sample:

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (N=1,593)**

Variable	Percent/ Mean (SD)	Range	Scale Alpha
<i>Dependent Variables</i>			
Rule-breaking	41%	0 – 1	
<i>Moral Intuitions</i>			
Individualizing	4.1 (0.5)	1 – 5	.75
Binding	3.4 (0.6)	1 – 5	.84
<i>Moderator Variable</i>			
Greek life involvement	21.1%	0 – 1	
<i>Control Variable</i>			
Female	59.7%	0 – 1	
Age	2.6 (1.3)	1 – 5	
White	69.3%	0 – 1	

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Black	7.6%	0 – 1	
Asian	9.3%	0 – 1	
Latino	4.4%	0 – 1	
Other race	9.5%	0 – 1	
Political conservatism	3.8 (1.7)	1 – 7	
Self-control	2.57 (0.5)	1 – 4	.83
Religiosity	3.2 (1.7)	1 – 7	
Soc or crim major	17.0%	0 – 1	

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SD = Standard deviation

## Chapter 5

### Results

This study uses logistic regression to examine participation in Greek life and rule-breaking behavior because both dependent variables consist of two categories. For rule-breaking, 1 = participation in at least one form of rule-breaking in the past year, and 0 = non-participation. For participation in Greek life, 1 = participation and 0 = non-participation. We will be examining the total sample in Tables 2 and 3. Table 4 splits the sample into Greek life participants and non-Greek life participants.

Table 2 below relates to our first hypothesis regarding binding intuitions and the propensity to join Greek life. Table 2 shows that the relationship between binding intuitions and Greek life involvement is as hypothesized and significant, indicated by the coefficient being significant at the  $p < .001$  level. This shows support for the hypothesis that Greek life attracts participants with strong binding intuitions. The effect of individualizing moral foundations is not significant, suggesting that intuitions related to caring for fairness and protection of the vulnerable is not associated with the decision to participate in Greek life. Additionally, results for the control variables show that more women were involved in Greek life than men. Greek life participants were also younger and less likely to be a member of a minority group. The relationships between political conservatism, self-control, religiosity, and whether or not the respondent was a criminology or sociology student and participation in Greek life were not significant.

**Table 2. Logistic Regression Predicting Greek Life Involvement**

	b (SE)
<u>Moral Foundations</u>	
Individualizing	-.16 (.16)
Binding	.60 (.14) ***
<u>Control Variables</u>	
Female	.69 (.15) ***
Age	.16 (.05) **
Black <sup>1</sup>	-1.77 (.43) ***
Asian <sup>1</sup>	-1.72 (.34) ***
Latino <sup>1</sup>	-.28 (.31)
Other race <sup>1</sup>	-.83 (.27) **
Political conservatism	.02 (.05)
Self-control	-.20 (.13)
Religiosity	.001 (.04)
Soc or crim major	-.34 (.18)
R <sup>2</sup>	.12

~~ p<.10, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001 / SE = standard error

<sup>1</sup> Reference category = White

We hypothesized that high levels of both individualizing and binding intuitions would decrease the likelihood of participating in rule-breaking behavior. These results are shown in Table 3. Significant findings to note are that both individualizing and binding foundations predict rule-breaking behavior. Individualizing intuitions predicts it negatively as hypothesized, while binding intuitions predict it positively. The more individualizing values a respondent has, the less likely they are to engage in rule-breaking. Conversely, and surprisingly, stronger binding values are associated with *increased* levels of rule-breaking.

The relationships between the control variables align with prior criminological research. High levels of self-control decrease rule-breaking, and compared to Whites, Blacks are more involved in rule-breaking, and Asians are less involved. Finally, as expected, Greek life involvement is positively and significantly associated with rule-breaking.

**Table 3. Logistic Regression Predicting Rule-Breaking**

	Total Sample (N=1,597) b (SE)
<u>Moral Foundations</u>	
Individualizing	-.35 (.13) **
Binding	.31 (.12) **
<u>Control Variables</u>	
Greek life involvement	.36 (.14) **
Age	-.02 (.05)
Black <sup>1</sup>	.72 (.21) ***
Asian <sup>1</sup>	-.97 (.22) ***
Latino <sup>1</sup>	.19 (.27)
Other race <sup>1</sup>	-.05 (.19)
Political conservatism	-.06 (.04)
Self-control	-1.01 (.11) ***
Religiosity	-.02 (.04)
Soc or crim major	.15 (.15)
R <sup>2</sup>	.16

~~ p<.10, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001 / SE = standard error

<sup>1</sup> Reference category = White

Our final hypothesis is that participation in Greek life will weaken the protective effects of the moral intuitions on rule-breaking behaviors due to the influence of integration into a community that is more likely to engage in deviant behaviors. Binding moral foundations are positively associated with rule-breaking behavior among both Greek life and non-Greek life students, though this relationship is only statistically significant for the non-Greek life students. The binding coefficients in each group is similar in size, which means the magnitudes of the effects are similar across the two groups.

The effect of individualizing intuitions on rule-breaking behavior is negative for both Greek life and non-Greek life students. Higher levels of individualizing intuitions predict lower levels of rule-breaking, although this relationship appears stronger for Greek life participants.

The coefficient for Greek life students is -.60, which is over twice as large as the -.28 coefficient for non-Greek life students. Control variables echo the above findings and prior research.

**Table 4. Logistic Regression Predicting Rule-Breaking by Greek Life Membership**

	Greek Life Participants (N=337) b (SE)	Non-Greek Life (N=1,259) b (SE)
<u>Moral Foundations</u>		
Individualizing	-.60 (.30) *	-.28 (.15) ~~
Binding	.24 (.29)	.32 (.13) *
<u>Control Variables</u>		
Female	-1.12 (.30) ***	-.75 (.14) ***
Age	-.004 (.11)	-.04 (.05)
Black <sup>1</sup>	1.34 (1.17)	.70 (.22) ***
Asian <sup>1</sup>	-1.58 (.85)	-.90 (.23) ***
Latino <sup>1</sup>	-.36 (.63)	.34 (.30)
Other race <sup>1</sup>	.38 (.54)	-.08 (.21)
Political conservatism	-.14 (.09)	-.02 (.05)
Self-control	-1.14 (.26) ***	-.97 (.13) ***
Religiosity	.04 (.08)	-.03 (.04)
Soc or crim major	.19 (.35)	.14 (.16)
R <sup>2</sup>	.21	.14

~~ p<.10, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001 / SE = standard error

<sup>1</sup> Reference category = White

## Chapter 6

### Discussion

In this study, we set out to understand the relationship between moral intuitions and the likelihood of participating in rule-breaking behavior, as well as to understand how involvement in Greek life impacts this relationship. Our first question examined the extent to which moral foundations influence participation in Greek life. Our results showed that higher levels of binding intuitions influence participation in Greek life. Our results showed that higher levels of binding intuitions are associated with a higher likelihood of involvement in Greek life, while individualizing moral foundations have no significant relationship. This suggests that Greek life participants tend to possess strong binding moral intuitions that lead them to value group and community settings and interactions. Their tendency to place the group at the center of moral concern draws them to these settings. Greek life advertises itself as a place to find new “brothers” and “sisters” and become a part of a “family.” It therefore attracts those searching for outlets for fellowship.

We also hypothesized that individuals with strong moral intuitions (both individualizing and binding) would engage in fewer rule-breaking behaviors, regardless of their involvement in Greek life. That hypothesis was only partially supported. High levels of individualizing intuitions are associated with lower levels of rule-breaking, as hypothesized, but to our surprise, high levels of binding intuitions are associated with *higher* levels of rule-breaking. We speculate that the latter may be due to a pronounced sense of loyalty among Greek life participants. A pronounced sense of loyalty may increase the tendency of Greek life participants to conform to group norms, whether actual or perceived. Because Greek life has a reputation for rule-breaking, especially regarding partying and cheating, students attracted to Greek life may be more susceptible to engaging in such behaviors. In addition to one’s loyalty to fellow Greek life participants, we

speculate that loyalty to a specific role within a larger group may also lead to increased levels of rule-breaking. The commitment to a role that an individual may fulfill (a college student, a Greek Life pledge, a Penn Stater, etc.) and that role's accompanying norms and expectations may outweigh allegiances to rules, law enforcement, or informal authoritative figures.

When the sample is broken down into Greek life participants and non-Greek life participants, the aforementioned relationships continue. High individualizing moral intuitions are associated with less rule-breaking and high binding moral intuitions are associated with more rule-breaking for both groups. However, the protective effect of individualizing intuitions on rule-breaking is only half as strong for Greek life students. In our study, participants who are not involved in Greek life can be understood as exhibiting the "true effects" of morality on rule-breaking, unhindered by the institutional impacts that Greek life imposes on its participants. Therefore, while having high values for care and fairness generally leads to a lower likelihood for rule-breaking behavior, being involved with Greek life causes those virtues to be challenged and many Greek life participants may act against their ethical values in exchange for social capital and rewards associated with rule-breaking. This is reflected in the weaker effects of individualizing moral intuitions among Greek life participants compared to non-Greek life participants.

Current methods for addressing rule-breaking and risk within Greek life include preventative measures, such as required educational workshops, and reactive measures, such as university sanctions and law enforcement engagement. At Penn State University, Greek life organizations are bound by the Student Code of Conduct established by Student Affairs which defines hazing, sexual assault, and alcohol violations and prescribes subsequent punishments (Penn State Student Affairs, 2023). Prior research on Greek life participants and their

perspectives on beneficial interventions has shown that both male and female participants are invested in maintaining safety and high standards in their community, but there are significant gender differences in which issues are considered most important (Porta et al, 2021). Any methods to address risks must therefore be adapted to acknowledge the specific experiences associated with gender or work to dismantle the gender divide within Greek life altogether, a drastic measure unlikely to receive overwhelming support. Co-ed Greek life organizations are already present at many American universities, including Penn State, and we believe administrators should further examine how gender segregation impacts moral intuitions and may increase the likelihood to engage in rule-breaking behavior.

Gender inclusive environments have the potential to bolster empathy and allow for men and women to humanize one another, rather than view the other gender as adversarial or from an objectified perspective. We believe that gender inclusivity may encourage growth of individualizing intuitions, which focus on care and fairness, therefore “remapping” the ways in which morality interacts with Greek life institutions. Could gender desegregation widen the scope of Greek life participants’ moral intuitions to encompass members of the opposite sex more strongly? Additionally, how would inclusivity practices aimed at recruiting non-binary individuals impact the social and moral group dynamic? These questions should be considered in subsequent studies.

Administrators are tasked with developing safety plans for individuals who are generally unwilling to sacrifice the history, culture, and traditions associated with their organizations, even if the culture is contributing to problems that the participants themselves identify. For example, in a qualitative study of Greek life participants’ opinions about sexual violence within their organizations, fraternity brothers felt the risk of sexual violence was of moderate concern, while

sorority sisters felt the risk was of significant concern (Porta et al, 2021). The varying levels of concern expressed by male and female Greek life participants contributes to an uneven distribution of female victimization and male perpetration. Institutional interventions for addressing sexual violence therefore must include targeted approaches based on gender. Similarly, interventions cannot assume that all Greek life participants possess the same moral intuitions or that their moral intuitions contribute similarly to their propensity to break or follow rules. Though past examples of “individual-psychoeducational programming” have not been effective at lowering levels of sexual violence among Greek life participants, they have been infrequently utilized and seldom do they focus on appealing to the moral intuitions of Greek life participants (Porta et al, 2021). Future research should therefore incorporate methodologies that involve smaller samples to better understand the impacts of specialized intervention on male and female Greek life participants with different moral intuitions.

This thesis, and other research that has attempted to identify effective measures at lowering rule-breaking and risk within Greek life institutions, affirms that it is the duty of the university to institute comprehensive risk management protocols; methods that acknowledge the complexity of gender, race, and now, embedded ethical virtues that may increase or decrease risk within Greek life spaces. Greek life participants are generally unified in their pursuit for fostering safe environments, but current methodologies and practices have failed to acknowledge the above complexities, as well as the role of morality in determining what motivates a potential new member to join, and to buy into systematic rule-breaking practices once they do.

Moral Foundations Theory suggests that innate belief systems and moral intuitions impact our behavior in conjunction with environmental amplifiers. While Greek life organizations put a heavy emphasis on finding new members with similar values and

intentionally discuss individual member values during recruitment events (known as “Values Round”), superficial verbal allegiance to service pales in comparison to what established methods for evaluating moral intuitions, such as the MFT framework, might contribute to the recruitment process. We suggest exploratory pre-screening for potential new members using MFT surveys to determine their foundational scores. This approach would inform Greek life organizations of their prospective members’ values from a scientific perspective. It would be an improvement over the overly simplified, and at times discriminatory pre-screening methods that are typically used. While such screening could also be considered a form of judgment on an individual’s character, Greek life organizations have a duty to promote ethical and moral behavior that is aligned with their missions and any forms of evaluation of an individual’s worthiness should be focused on direct scientifically informed values rather than physical appearance or prestige, as is the current practice.

In conclusion, addressing the complex social systems active within Greek life institutions is a challenge, but both students and policymakers are dedicated to finding methods to keep participants safe and preserve Greek life, so long as it positively contributes to the student’s development and university’s interests. The core challenges within Greek life cannot be adequately addressed without collaboration from students and experts alike, and MFT is a promising framework that could help improve risk management by identifying potential warning signs linked with rule-breaking.

## Chapter 7

### Limitations

This study is not without limitations. The sample was gathered through convenience and was not random. Future studies using random samples would therefore be valuable. While variables such as major and age were controlled, future studies should aim to sample from a more diverse pool of individuals to ensure accurate approximation to larger populations of college students. Because the data was gathered at a single university, additional credibility would depend on replication at similar sized colleges to Penn State, or larger groupings of universities, such as the BIG10 Conference. Finally, the study relied on self-reported survey data regarding criminal behavior and deviance. There is therefore a risk of deceptive or socially desirable responses, despite the anonymous collection methods. Future studies would benefit from examining official records of deviance, such as documented academic integrity violations or campus police reports.

Finally, I encourage additional research to disentangle the effects of the constituent moral foundations (care, fairness, loyalty, respect for authority, and sanctity) from within the broader categories of binding and individualizing. This may provide a more nuanced understanding of differences in rule-breaking in relation to morality. As evident in my speculations regarding why high binding intuitions are associated with rule-breaking, there may be distinct differences between the impact of loyalty, authority, and sanctity (and conversely care and fairness) on behavior. While I have found insightful results from our individualizing/binding categorization, future research should aim to separate the five foundations to examine more focused hypotheses based on the individual foundations themselves.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusion**

This thesis applied a moral-intuitionist approach to understanding rule-breaking behavior. I argued that preconceived ethical values in the form of moral intuitions should be associated with the decision to enter Greek life and to engage in deviant behavior. Greek life institutions at American universities exist within a complex and imperfect system of risk and reward, and the critical conversation about what place Greek life has on our campuses is ever looming. Careful consideration must be given to those at high risk of victimization or perpetration, and the role of morality in understanding rule-breaking behavior is a promising area of inquiry deserving of continued research.

## APPENDIX

## Moral Foundations Questionnaire

## Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ-30)

<u>MFO Item</u>	<u>Moral Intuition</u>	<u>Moral Foundation</u>
<u>Part 1: How relevant/irrelevant?</u>		
Whether or not someone conformed to the traditions of society	Binding	Authority/subversion
Whether or not someone showed a lack of respect for authority	Binding	Authority/subversion
Whether or not an action caused chaos or disorder	Binding	Authority/subversion
Whether or not someone did something to betray his or her group	Binding	Loyalty/betrayal
Whether or not someone's action showed love for his or her country	Binding	Loyalty/betrayal
Whether or not someone showed a lack of loyalty	Binding	Loyalty/betrayal
Whether or not someone did something disgusting	Binding	Sanctity/degradation
Whether or not someone violated standards of purity and decency	Binding	Sanctity/degradation
Whether or not someone acted in a way that God would approve of	Binding	Sanctity/degradation
Whether or not someone suffered emotionally	Individualizing	Care/harm
Whether or not someone cared for someone weak or vulnerable	Individualizing	Care/harm
Whether or not someone was cruel	Individualizing	Care/harm
Whether or not someone acted unfairly	Individualizing	Fairness/cheating
Whether or not some people were treated differently than others	Individualizing	Fairness/cheating
Whether or not someone was denied his or her rights	Individualizing	Fairness/cheating
<u>Part 2: Agree/Disagree</u>		
Respect for authority is something all children need to learn.	Binding	Authority/subversion
Men and women each have different roles to play in society.	Binding	Authority/subversion
If I were a soldier and disagreed with my commanding officer's orders, I would obey anyway because that is my duty.	Binding	Authority/subversion
I am proud of my country's history.	Binding	Loyalty/betrayal
People should be loyal to their family members, even when they have done something wrong.	Binding	Loyalty/betrayal

It is more important to be a team player than to express oneself.	Binding	Loyalty/betrayal
People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed.	Binding	Sanctity/degradation
I would call some acts wrong on the grounds that they are unnatural.	Binding	Sanctity/degradation
Chastity is an important and valuable virtue.	Binding	Sanctity/degradation
Compassion for those who are suffering is the most crucial virtue.	Individualizing	Care/harm
One of the worst things a person could do is hurt a defenseless animal.	Individualizing	Care/harm
It can never be right to kill a human being.	Individualizing	Care/harm
When the government makes laws, the number one principle should be ensuring that everyone is treated fairly.	Individualizing	Fairness/cheating
Justice is the most important requirement for a society.	Individualizing	Fairness/cheating
I think it's morally wrong that rich children inherit a lot of money while poor children inherit nothing.	Individualizing	Fairness/cheating

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## ACADEMIC VITA

**Rachel Sorensen**

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### **Education**

**The Pennsylvania State University** - *University Park, PA*

Bachelor of Arts in Criminology

Minors: Sociology (Enhanced), Security Risk Analysis

College of the Liberal Arts

### **Honors**

Schreyer Honors College Scholar, Paterno Fellow, Phi Sigma Pi National Honors Fraternity, Phi Beta Kappa Honors Society

Distinguished Graduating Senior Award Spring 2023

### **Undergraduate Criminology Honors Thesis**

Supervisor: Dr. Eric Silver

Title: Moral Foundations and Rule-Breaking Behavior at Penn State University: An Analysis of the Role of Participation in Greek Life

### **Experience**

#### **Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System**

#### **Office of Inspector General (OIG): Office of Investigations**

*Investigative Intern*

May 2022 - Present

Performed analytic research and investigative support for complex and sensitive federal financial investigations.

Utilize various law enforcement tools including the OIG Case Management System (CMTS) and open-source intelligence databases for use in locating subjects and pursuing investigative leads.

Operate and manage the Hotline Reporting System to catalog potential tips regarding claims of fraud, waste, and abuse within Board (FRB) or Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) programs and procedures.

Co-led a longitudinal data mining project regarding SMS and cellular data usage and implications for Board-wide risk management policy.

Managed criminal investigator training requirements for the 2019-2023 reporting period. Regulated the quarterly firearms qualifications, annual, and semi-annual trainings for agents across all five OIG field offices.

Participated in digital forensic imaging, processing, and analysis, Grand Jury investigations, and subject interviews.

Developed Victim/Witness training in accordance with annual requirements for internal criminal investigators.

Attended use of force and firearms instruction.

#### **United States Department of Homeland Security**

#### **Human Rights Violators and War Crimes Center**

*Student Research Intern*

May 2021 - August 2021

Collaborated with professional staff and partner to research the 2014 Peshawar Army School Massacre.

Assembled 40-page report and presented findings to professional staff regarding the operation overview, public policy implications, social network analysis, and recommendations for further research.

#### **Penn State Competitive Sports**

*Student Manager of Risk Management*

May 2022 - Present

Primary student responsible for enforcing and developing safety protocol for all Penn State Competitive Sports intramural and club sports events, which serve over 10,000 students a year.

Assemble and develop content for trainings, audit risk management policy application and procedure knowledge among staff, serve as the point of contact for the Student Risk Management Committee, and monitor the most common injuries across the Intramural Sports program using statistical analysis for policy development.

CPR and AED Certified.

## **Activities**

### **Liberal Arts Ambassadors**

*President (2021-2022), Vice President (2020-2021)*

Largest College of the Liberal Arts student organization on campus dedicated to supporting the Penn State College of the Liberal Arts through engagement with prospective and accepted students and alumni via panel discussions, student tours, and professional development.

Led 12 Executive Board and Cabinet members, conducted general meetings, and coordinated with professional administrative staff within the College of the Liberal Arts.

Duties as Vice President included leading all recruitment efforts virtual and in-person, culminating in 5 recruitment events and 42 new members from Fall 2020- Spring 2021.

### **Phi Sigma Pi (Alpha Pi Chapter)**

*Primary THON Chair (2021-2022)*

Served as the lead Penn State IFC/Panhellenic Dance Marathon (THON) Chair for gender-inclusive nationally recognized honors fraternity.

Guided a committee of 12 students to plan 30+ fundraisers and attend leadership conferences in preparation for THON 2022, the largest student-run philanthropy in the world dedicated to fundraising and volunteering for pediatric cancer research and treatment.

Contributed a donation of \$26,974.61 towards the THON 2022 total of \$13,756,374.50.