

# BREAKING THE SILENCE

Uncovering the History of  
Sexual Violence at Virginia Tech

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...ber 2, 2023, the Virginia Tech Police Department received a report of a **sexual assault**. The survivor...  
...rd Hall (630 Washington St. SW) in the evening hours of September 22, 2023. The survivor and offender were known to each other and are best described as acquaintances. The offender is a Virginia Tech student.

...g hours of September 22, 2023. On Thursday, November 23, 2023, the Virginia Tech Police Department received a report of a **sexual assault**. The survivor and offender were known to each other and are best described as acquaintances. The offender is a Virginia Tech student.

...g hours of January 7, 2024. The survivor and offender were known to each other and are best described as acquaintances. The offender is a Virginia Tech student.

...g hours of January 27, 2024. The survivor and offender were known to each other and are best described as acquaintances. The offender is a Virginia Tech student.

...g hours of March 10, 2024. The survivor and offender were known to each other and are best described as acquaintances. The offender is a Virginia Tech student.

Edited by Marian Mollin

For as long as women have been present in institutions of higher education, they have been sexually assaulted and harassed. Virginia Tech, like other colleges and universities, has not been immune from the power of these larger cultural and sexual trends.

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This volume is an effort to explore how these historical dynamics played out at Virginia Tech. The result is a collection of original essays authored by Virginia Tech undergraduate or graduate students that chart how Virginia Tech students have navigated a challenging sexual climate and culture from the mid-1960s onward.



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breakingthesilence

## Breaking the Silence



# Breaking the Silence

*Uncovering the History of Sexual Violence at Virginia Tech*

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*We want to dedicate this book to the survivors of sexual violence at Virginia Tech. We want you to know you are not alone in your struggle, fight, and bravery. Our hearts are with you, and we feel grateful to bring your history to light.*



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# Introduction

MARIAN MOLLIN

Sexual violence and harassment of women on college campuses has likely existed for as long as women have been present in institutions of higher education. Evolving cultures of misogyny and men's sexual objectification of women in society at large have coupled with distinct collegiate cultures to contribute to campus climates that have too often failed to respect female students as full-fledged sexual citizens with the same rights to bodily autonomy and sexual agency as their male counterparts. Although the particulars of coed life have changed in many ways since I attended college forty years ago, certain dimensions of my students' experiences in the 2020s closely parallel my own. Despite ever-changing dating and sexual mores, rising numbers of female students, the growing visibility of women in positions of student and campus leadership, and the yearly rhythm of "Take Back the Night" rallies and marches, sexual vulnerability and threats to bodily autonomy are ongoing concerns on college campuses.

Virginia Tech, like other colleges and universities, has not been immune from the power of these larger cultural and sexual trends. A land-grant college that began as an all-male and all-white agricultural, technical, and military school in 1872, Virginia Polytechnic Institute (VPI) admitted its first white female students in 1921. Reflecting the gendered expectations of the time, as well as the resentment felt by some members of VPI's all-male Corps of Cadets, the first generations of female students faced male harassment and belittlement from men, in addition to institutional obstacles to full inclusion in campus life. Although ostensibly coed, women made up just a tiny proportion of the student body until 1964, when VPI became a full-fledged, coed, civilian university. At that point, the university grew rapidly, as did the number of female students.<sup>1</sup> Women's increased presence on this formerly male domain forced a new, yet incomplete, reckoning with the dynamics of gender, sex, and power.

This volume is an effort to explore how these historical dynamics played out at Virginia Tech. Inspired by student-led protests against increased incidence of sexual violence in the fall of 2021, and encouraged by participation in the university's Sexual Violence Culture and Climate Work Group (founded by university administrators in response to these protests), the undergraduates in my Spring 2023 research seminar tackled the history of sexual violence culture and climate on campus head-on. Their research took them deep into University Archives, old student newspapers, campus yearbooks, and previously recorded oral history interviews. Some students hit the fabled "brick wall" of research: a lack of sources. This was especially true for those who wrote about the sexual culture within campus fraternities and sororities, since Greek life is notoriously secretive about both its present and its past, although sources were fragmentary and limited in other areas as well. As a result, students had to draw upon their present knowledge and access their historical imaginations in ways that helped them make sense of the records of the past that they could find.

My undergraduate students set the direction of this project: they are the authors and researchers, they drove the choice of topics, they organized the chapters, and they shaped the direction of our conversations about what it means—and meant—to be "sexual citizens" of a campus community.<sup>2</sup> A range of secondary readings helped shape the analytical frameworks they deployed, particularly the book *Sexual Citizens: Sex, Power, and Assault on Campus* by Jennifer Hirsch and Shamus Khan.<sup>3</sup> As the seminar's leader and guiding professor, I served as "head coach," sounding board, and developmental editor. But more than anything, this book reflects the concerns and perspectives of the diverse range of students who participated in this endeavor.

The result is a collection of original essays that chart how Virginia Tech students navigated a challenging sexual climate and culture from the mid-1960s onward. The volume starts with an examination of one of the more widely publicized incidents of sexual violence—the 1994 assault of Christy Brzonkala by several members of the campus football team—and what it reveals about the power and impunity of university athletics. The following two chapters examine the campus culture at large. Chapter 2 looks at general responses to Women's Week events in the 1980s, while Chapter 3 analyzes the symbolic significance of university pep rallies in the 1960s and 1970s. The next three

chapters chronicle how institutional structures marginalized gender and sexual minorities just as they entered the mainstream of campus life. Moving from women in the male-dominated Corps of Cadets (Chapter 4), to the experiences of female students at the moment their enrollment dramatically rose in the late 1960s (Chapter 5), to the organization of gay pride events in the late 1970s and 1980s (Chapter 6), these chapters highlight an ongoing and problematic practice of “othering” members of the campus community. Chapters 7–9 focus on sexual encounters within the relatively secretive and closed social world of Greek life, revealing both the benefits and drawbacks of fraternity and sorority cultures that valorize group loyalty over individual autonomy and personal agency. The final two chapters draw our attention out to the interaction between campus life and national politics. Chapter 10 emphasizes the impact of federal legislation from the mid 1960s until the late 1970s on women’s agency on campus. Chapter 11 also focuses on federal legislation, in this case the 1994 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), but places its attention on the actions of university administrators rather than students. In addressing how VAWA shaped administrators’ responses to sexual violence within the campus community, this chapter also brings readers back to the Brzonkala case that began the volume. The book ends with a student-authored conclusion that draws from the book’s chapters as well as personal experience to recommend steps the university could take to improve the campus climate around issues of sexual assault and harassment. Although the history recounted in this volume is not always easy to read, the authors hope that university administrators and students can use these lessons from the past to pave the way toward a safer and more respectful future for all members of Hokie Nation.

Numerous members of the Virginia Tech community provided the support and assistance needed to launch this project and bring it to fruition. Conversations with Jill Sible, the Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, and Brett Shadle, then Chair of the Department of History, spurred the development of the seminar that this book grew out of. Marc Brodsky and Kira Dietz of Special Collections and University Archives (SCUA) provided invaluable assistance and aided my students in their research. Elhom Gosink, an Alliance for Social, Political, Ethical, and Cultural Thought (ASPECT) PhD student, scoured SCUA’s resources and compiled a detailed database of relevant archival holdings for the class to use. The staff at Virginia Tech Publishing—Corinne Guimont, Caitlin Bean, Joseph Hearl, and Kindred Grey—took

on the final task of editing the individual essays and preparing the manuscript for publication. Of course, the students who wrote these chapters deserve the ultimate thanks. This book was, in every way imaginable, a collaborative project.

## Notes

1. Leslie Ogg Williams, "Access and Inclusion: Women Students at VPI, 1914–1964." (master's thesis, Virginia Tech, 2006), 88–125, <http://hdl.handle.net/10919/34293>.
2. This concept of "sexual citizenship" comes from Jennifer S. Hirsch and Shamus Khan, *Sexual Citizens: Sex, Power, and Assault on Campus* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2021).
3. Jennifer S. Hirsch and Shamus Khan, *Sexual Citizens: Sex, Power, and Assault on Campus* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2021).

# I. Crime and No Punishment

## *The Brzonkala Case, Sexual Culture, and the Power of Male Athletics at Virginia Tech*

WILLIAM CARDULLO

Christy Brzonkala was like many freshmen who arrived at Virginia Tech in the 1990s. Enjoying independence from her parents for the first time, Brzonkala was excited to meet new people, make friends, and find herself. These dreams were destroyed one horrifying night in September 1994 when Brzonkala alleges she was raped three times by fellow students James Crawford and Tony Morrison. After she was assaulted, Brzonkala became despondent: she barely left her dorm, abused drugs and alcohol, and even attempted suicide. Brzonkala did eventually muster the courage to report her assault to Virginia Tech authorities, but Crawford and Morrison, both football players at the university, were allowed to remain on campus.<sup>1</sup> Despite Brzonkala's efforts, Virginia Tech did not take action to protect a victim of sexual assault.

What happened to Christy Brzonkala was not an isolated incident but instead the natural result of a university with a toxic sexual culture. Sociologists Jennifer S. Hirsch and Shamus Khan define sexual citizenship as “the acknowledgment of one’s own right to sexual self-determination and, importantly, recognizes the equivalent right in others.”<sup>2</sup> Male and female students at Virginia Tech during the 1990s displayed a shocking disregard for the sexual citizenship of the women on campus. Misogynistic and sexually degrading comments about women were common occurrences in the student newspaper, and while many students did show support for Brzonkala, her credibility was widely disputed using the same tropes that have appeared in sexual assault cases for centuries. When women are denigrated and seen merely as objects rather than people with their own sexual citizenship, they are much more likely to be the victims of sexual assault.

In this chapter, I will examine the Virginia Tech administration's and the student body's responses to the Brzonkala case from when the case first became public in 1995 until it was finally settled by the Supreme Court in 2000, as well as the sexual culture on campus at the time. I will accomplish this by

analyzing contemporary newspaper coverage of the case, especially from Virginia Tech's student paper, the *Collegiate Times*. Through this research, we can see why the university did not ultimately punish Crawford or Morrison, how the student body responded to such a high-profile sexual assault case on their campus, and why Brzonkala and those who supported her were unable to enact any lasting change. Examining the Brzonkala case reveals how male athletics has a stranglehold on the actions of university administrations that causes them to protect revenue-producing athletes at all costs. This, along with the lack of institutional memory within the student body, makes it difficult to end sexual violence at Virginia Tech as well as at universities across the country.

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The sexual culture at Virginia Tech in the 1990s was defined by casual sexism and the sexual objectification of women. Male students often made light of violence against women, sexually harassed women at parties, and made violent reprisals against feminist displays on campus. When women decried their treatment at the hands of their male peers, they were met with stiff resistance by male and female students alike. This all contributed to a toxic sexual culture that made sexual violence against women both tolerated and expected.

Take, for instance, the "Girls of Tech" calendar that was published in the 1990s. The calendar featured scantily clad female students of Virginia Tech in seductive poses that showed off their "perfectly white skin, straight nose, full lips, large breasts, and thin body."<sup>3</sup> Nothing is inherently wrong with women publicly displaying their sexuality; it can sometimes act as a form of liberation for the women involved. But the *Collegiate Times* op-ed, "God Bless the 'Girls of Tech'" shows that is not how many male students viewed it. "I love the girls of Tech," said the author, Chris Wagenseller. "I mean, I adore the ones who are not in the calendar," he continued, "but they are generally not willing to take most of their clothing off for the sake of photography."<sup>4</sup> The article makes it clear that Wagenseller mostly views the women in the calendar as sexual objects for him to fawn over rather than actual people, especially one woman named Marty Robinson whom he repeatedly claimed to be in love with despite not actually knowing her. The op-ed even opens with a "joke" about how he will not write love letters to someone he has not

met again because of a previous bad experience he had: “There really isn’t much more I can say without violating my restraining order.”<sup>5</sup> Even if this was a joke, it is telling that Wagenseller viewed the harassment of a woman as a subject of comedy rather than a serious issue, and that the student-run newspaper printed his piece.

The sexual culture that viewed women as objects to be gawked at in a calendar rather than equals with their own sexual citizenship often resulted in women being sexually harassed in public spaces. Gary Salyers, a reporter for the *Collegiate Times*, went to downtown Blacksburg one night in October 1994 and asked women about the pick-up lines they had received from men that night. The answers were extremely sexualizing things to hear from somebody you had never spoken to before in your life. “One guy walked up to me and put a quarter in my hand and told me to go call my roommate and tell her I wouldn’t be home tonight,” one woman said. Another woman was asked if she had a mirror in her pants and when she asked, “No, why?”, the man responded, “Because I can see myself getting into your pants.” After one girl took a man’s hat and put it on, he told her “If you want to wear my clothes, you can do it in the morning.”<sup>6</sup> Men were clearly very comfortable saying sexually explicit things to women they had never met or spoken to before.

Some women were fed up with the treatment they received at bars and parties and took to the *Collegiate Times* to vent their frustrations. “The manner in which men treat women socially is by no means acceptable on this campus,” wrote Erin Foote, a student at Virginia Tech. Foote continued, “I sure as hell don’t want some guy staring at me through beer goggles telling me how nice my ass looks when I walk.”<sup>7</sup> The men on campus did not take Foote’s editorial piece well, to put it lightly. Nate Wachob, a freshman in electrical engineering, eloquently rebuffed Foote’s argument by stating “if so many girls did not dress like sluts, much of the problem would be resolved.”<sup>8</sup> It was not just men who took issue with Foote’s article, however; a female student named Ashley Hillyer provided Foote with the helpful advice to simply not go out to parties if she did not want to be sexually harassed. After all, Hillyer argued, boys will be boys, and even “the shy gentleman” will turn into a “pig-headed chauvinistic animal” after he’s had a few drinks.<sup>9</sup> The message that both responses sent was clear: men were going to ignore the sexual citizen-

ship of women and the onus was on women to protect themselves from men rather than on men to change the sexual culture on campus.

The toxic sexual culture not only caused men to behave inappropriately toward women but also manifested itself in vicious displays of anti-feminism. Even something as innocuous as a license plate that read “feminist” could result in a vitriolic backlash. The car in question was frequently vandalized with messages such as “eat me bitch,” “die femi-nazi,” “no means maybe,” and “fuck you, Rush Limbaugh rules.” On top of the misogynistic comments, the car was spit on, had its stickers peeled off, and the air released from its tires.<sup>10</sup> The violence against feminists on campus did not stop at mere property damage. Brian Colligan, opinion editor for the *Collegiate Times*, said that he originally thought that the Take Back the Night marchers were a group of insane radicals who hated all men, but his opinion changed when he saw them get physically attacked by anti-feminists at the 1997 march. The counterprotesters verbally abused the marchers, spat on them, and threw projectiles such as rocks, water balloons, and paintballs at them.<sup>11</sup> This was clearly not an uncommon occurrence as one article in the *Collegiate Times* from 1996 considered it a success that the Take Back the Night march that year had fewer “boos and hisses than previous years.”<sup>12</sup> Also common at Take Back the Night marches were sexist signs such as one that counterprotesters displayed from a window in Cochrane Hall in 1997 that read “NO FAT CHICKS,”<sup>13</sup> or a banner from the 1998 march that showed a female hand holding a severed penis.<sup>14</sup> Violent responses to feminism seem to have been an everyday occurrence on the Virginia Tech campus in the 1990s.

This culture of casual misogyny is what Christy Brzonkala fell into when she moved to Blacksburg as a freshman at Virginia Tech in the fall of 1994. Brzonkala went to a party one night in September with her friend Hope Handley when football player James Crawford called to the pair from his third-story window.<sup>15</sup> Brzonkala and Handley went to his dorm room and began talking to Crawford and his roommate, fellow football player Tony Morrison. Brzonkala and Handley became uncomfortable once the conversation turned sexual and the football players began to ask them if they dated black men. Handley testified that she became so uncomfortable that she left. Brzonkala did not realize her friend had exited the room at first and believed Handley would return shortly so she stayed. Once she was alone, Morrison held Brzonkala down and sexually assaulted her despite her telling him “no” twice.

Brzonkala alleged that Morrison got off her, after which she was assaulted by Crawford and again by Morrison after that.<sup>16</sup> Cornell Brown, another football player, testified at the university hearings on the case that he was outside the dorm room while the assaults were occurring. Brown then entered the dorm, saw Brzonkala on Morrison's bed, and "made an utterance" for Morrison to stop and dispose of the evidence. Morrison then kicked Brzonkala out of his room while Crawford and Brown watched and laughed.<sup>17</sup>

The assault took a massive emotional toll on Christy Brzonkala. In the months following her assault, Brzonkala began to regularly see Morrison when walking on campus, which caused her to hide in her dorm. Brzonkala did not talk to anybody about what had happened to her and began to abuse alcohol to cope with the trauma she endured and even attempted suicide.<sup>18</sup> In April of that year, Brzonkala broke down on a phone call with her parents who convinced her to report her assault to the authorities.<sup>19</sup> Brzonkala decided not to go to the police since it had been so long since her assault that a criminal prosecution was unlikely, and, instead, she went to the Women's Center. There finally seemed to be hope that Morrison would face justice for his crime and that Brzonkala would receive closure and be able to move on.

The report of Brzonkala's assault made it to the administration and an internal judicial hearing was held for Morrison which found him guilty of sexual misconduct and suspended him for two semesters. Morrison appealed the verdict and was granted a second hearing in the summer. The second hearing also found Morrison guilty and suspended him for two semesters, but for abusive language rather than sexual misconduct. Morrison then appealed his punishment and university provost Peggy Meszaros overruled his suspension and instead sentenced him to a one-hour counseling session. Brzonkala discovered that Morrison would return to campus when reading the *Washington Post* in August,<sup>20</sup> and since she feared for her safety with her assailant back on campus,<sup>21</sup> she immediately withdrew from Virginia Tech and filed a lawsuit against both the university and the men who assaulted her.<sup>22</sup> The lawsuit proceeded to the Supreme Court and had huge ramifications for women's rights nationally as well as the sexual climate on Virginia Tech's campus.

The Virginia Tech administration's response to Brzonkala's allegations demonstrated a similar lack of respect for women's sexual citizenship as seen

in the student body. The first “error” that the administration made was its entirely unnecessary decision to accept Morrison’s first appeal and hold a second hearing in the first place. Morrison threatened to take Virginia Tech to court if it did not accept his appeal, but he was on incredibly weak legal ground. Morrison alleged that since the school’s new sexual assault policy that he had been found guilty of was not published in the student handbook in the fall of 1994, he could not be found guilty of it. This is despite the fact that the policy went into effect in June 1994 and that Virginia Tech had already defended itself in court against a similar objection and won. Despite knowing that Morrison’s threat was toothless, two Virginia Tech officials drove all the way to Brzonkala’s home in northern Virginia to inform her that a second hearing was “technically necessary.” Virginia Tech’s decision to grant Morrison a second hearing despite there being no basis for it demonstrates its lack of respect for women’s autonomy over their bodies.

The deck was stacked against Brzonkala at the second hearing. While Morrison and his lawyer were given full access to records of the hearings, Brzonkala was given nothing. Brzonkala was also unable to use any student testimonies from the first hearing unless she obtained affidavits from those students. This was a near-impossible demand as people were scattered all over the country during summer break.<sup>23</sup> Brzonkala participated in the second hearing because she did not think she would be “prosecuted,” but that was how it felt. “I was on the stand defending myself,” she later said.<sup>24</sup> Morrison was found guilty despite all of this, but his offense was now his language rather than his actions. After Morrison assaulted Brzonkala, he told her that she “better not have any fucking diseases” and bragged in a dining room that he liked to get women drunk and then “fuck” them. His punishment was now for cursing, and this trivialized his actions.<sup>25</sup> The entire process of the second hearing was a farce.

Morrison never served his two-semester suspension since University Provost Meszaros commuted his sentence to a one-hour counseling session, which angered the Brzonkala family and many Virginia Tech students. Meszaros stated in a letter she sent to Morrison that “I do not concur in the sanction. . . . it is my determination that the sanction is excessive when compared with other cases.”<sup>26</sup> Brzonkala was taken aback upon finding out that Morrison would return to campus with essentially no punishment. “It was the insult of ‘one hour’” Brzonkala’s mother said, “that’s what made us

so outraged.<sup>27</sup> It was not just Brzonkala who was upset with the university rescinding Morrison's punishment but many in the Virginia Tech community as well. "Everyone I spoke to about it—faculty and students, men and women—everyone felt that the deferment of Tony Morrison's suspension and a one-hour-of-counseling sentence is bullshit," said one editorial in the *Collegiate Times*.<sup>28</sup> However, the administration was steadfast in its defense of Meszaros. Paul Torgerson, President of Virginia Tech, said that he assigned Meszaros to review the case after Student Affairs officials asked for an impartial reviewer.<sup>29</sup> Torgerson also stood by Meszaros's overruling of Morrison's punishment stating it was "reflective of the seriousness of the charge" and that her "review of the case was thorough and her sanction fair."<sup>30</sup> Brzonkala was previously satisfied with Morrison's suspension, but his return to campus prompted her to seek legal action against the university. "I never wanted to get any money out of it," Brzonkala said, "I can't just let it go. He's living his life like he wants to and I'm suffering."<sup>31</sup> Meszaros's action acted as the catalyst for the following legal battle that trudged on for years.

Virginia Tech undermined Brzonkala's right to sexual citizenship during their legal battle. When releasing public statements about the case, university officials were always careful to qualify their positions by offering token words of support to Brzonkala. In an open letter to the *Collegiate Times*, President Torgerson claimed that he and Meszaros "have a great deal of compassion and sympathy for Christy Brzonkala" and that "her suffering is real and we feel for her."<sup>32</sup> Larry Hincker, director for university relations, also had words of sympathy for Brzonkala throughout the various lawsuits and trials. Hincker said that Virginia Tech understood Brzonkala's decision to withdraw from the university due to what students may have subjected her to after her "tragic situation"<sup>33</sup> and that Brzonkala had "certainly been traumatized."<sup>34</sup> Yet these words of tacit support rang hollow. When Hincker would acknowledge Brzonkala's suffering in one sentence, he would besmirch her legal standing in the next. When Brzonkala's lawyer, Eileen Wagner, publicly discussed a proposed settlement she had received from Virginia Tech officials that would require Brzonkala to return as a student, Hincker retorted by saying it was an attempt "to bolster her lagging court case and place pressure on Virginia Tech for a quick payoff."<sup>35</sup> Hincker also bemoaned that Brzonkala's lawsuit had damaged the reputation of Virginia Tech, "especially in the eyes of women's groups."<sup>36</sup> "You can win legally and lose publicly and the university has suffered because of this," Hincker

stated.<sup>37</sup> Hincker also made statements intended to cast doubt on the legitimacy of Brzonkala's assault such as, "This young woman waited 6 months to make her complaint," which is clearly meant to make the reader question why she waited so long to report it.<sup>38</sup> This is despite the fact that 53% of rape victims who report their assault wait six months or more to do so.<sup>39</sup> The simultaneous offerings of condolences to Brzonkala while belittling the wrongdoings she was subjected to speaks to an administration that was more concerned with protecting its own image than achieving justice.

Virginia Tech's actions in the Brzonkala case, from the unnecessary second hearing to the overruling of Morrison's punishment and the attacks on Brzonkala during the legal battle were not mistakes but likely deliberate choices to protect a valuable football player. This is certainly what Christy Brzonkala believed. "Because he's an athlete he got off," Brzonkala said,<sup>40</sup> and she also alleged that head football coach Frank Beamer specifically was responsible for getting Morrison's punishment lowered so that he could continue to play.<sup>41</sup> From then on, her lawsuit acted as "a symbolic gauntlet thrown down to challenge the culture of male athletics, and the money, prestige, and power it commands in higher education."<sup>42</sup> Even the dollar amount she asked for in the lawsuit had symbolic meaning. Brzonkala sued Virginia Tech as well as Morrison and Crawford for \$8.3 million, the same amount that Virginia Tech earned from winning the 1995 Sugar Bowl football game.<sup>43</sup> The purpose of the trial was not just to achieve some form of justice for Brzonkala, but to expose the outsized influence that revenue-earning athletics held at Virginia Tech.

The allegation that Virginia Tech protected Morrison because he was a football player was not mere conjecture from Brzonkala but was supported by academic and legal experts. Jeffrey R. Benedict, author of a 1995 study on male athletes and college sexual assault, said that preferential treatment for Morrison was inevitable. "If there's an exception to be found, it'll be found," he said.<sup>44</sup> Not only that, but Jackson Kiser, the judge who initially dismissed Brzonkala's lawsuit against Virginia Tech, admitted that the evidence supported the conclusion that the lessening of Morrison's punishment was "based on Morrison's athletic status". Kiser only dismissed the lawsuit because he did not believe that Brzonkala was discriminated against for her sex, just that Morrison was preferred based on his being a football player.<sup>45</sup> The charge that Virginia Tech went easy on Morrison since he was an athlete

is not a baseless allegation but is supported by the judge who oversaw the case and a prominent legal scholar.

Beyond the Morrison case, Virginia Tech had a pattern of giving greater leniency to football players than any other students. James Crawford, Brzonkala's assailant who was not found guilty at the university hearings, was charged with felony hit-and-run after hitting a Parking Services employee twice with his car when they refused to give him his car back without paying the towing fee. Crawford was allowed to remain on the football team until another incident where he and Brian Edmonds, another football player, were charged with raping a woman. Crawford and Edmonds claimed that it was false and that the victim told Crawford "You're going to pay me like you paid the white girl [Brzonkala] or I'll ruin your life."<sup>46</sup> Crawford and Edmonds eventually took a plea bargain and were kicked off the football team, but not until a criminal court found them guilty of a serious crime.<sup>47</sup> Cornerback Antonio Banks was charged with assault and battery and not taken off the team.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, quarterback Jim Druckenmiller and linebacker George Del Ricco were involved in a brawl at a local restaurant and Druckenmiller posted bail for \$5,000 while everyone else's bail was \$20,000.<sup>49</sup>

The most egregious example came when 15–20 football players physically attacked a member of the track team on College Avenue and left him with a broken collar bone.<sup>50</sup> Virginia Tech's track coach warned the player not to press charges against the football players.<sup>51</sup> Two of the players involved in the assault were kicked off the team and the others received a one-game suspension,<sup>52</sup> but they managed to avoid a felony assault charge.<sup>53</sup> As one student pointed out, "We are seeing a pattern develop where certain 'prized athletes' are either not charged in the first place, or have charges against them dropped."<sup>54</sup> Virginia Tech was always hesitant to discipline its football players, even when enacted serious harm on their fellow students.

The football players who committed serious crimes still received vocal support from members of the university's administration. When Morrison returned to the football team after having his suspension lifted, he said that "coach (Frank) Beamer stayed with me." Beamer praised Morrison in an interview he gave to the *Virginian-Pilot* newspaper saying that "I thought he really focused in on his academics and on football and had a great spring practice" and "He's working hard to make his life successful."<sup>55</sup> As time moved on and more and more of his players were charged with serious offenses

such as assault and rape, Beamer said “It’s individual cases. I don’t think it’s clear-cut as you might think,” and that “there’s not very many” situations occurring.<sup>56</sup> Athletic director Dave Braine said “95–98 percent of our kids are good kids, but everyone is spending all of their time talking about a very small minority of the players.”<sup>57</sup> Bear in mind, what Beamer and Braine claimed to be “not very many” criminal cases actually numbered in the dozens and involved players as integral as his quarterback.

Paul Torgerson also defended the players from public scrutiny, claiming that people were holding Virginia Tech’s football players to a higher, unfair moral standard.<sup>58</sup> Stricter standards for the behavior of football players did come as a result of the onslaught of crimes committed in the 1990s,<sup>59</sup> but it was only due to the fact that Torgerson was worried that “the bad publicity will begin to outweigh the benefits of becoming a football powerhouse.”<sup>60</sup> Virginia Tech was willing to stand by their athletes, no matter how serious or numerous the charges against them were.

It makes sense why Virginia Tech went so far to protect their star football players from punishment. Virginia Tech had long been the subject of mockery from the more prestigious schools in Virginia such as the University of Virginia and the College of William and Mary, and having one of the top ten football teams in the country brought the University not only millions of dollars in Bowl game earnings but also an increase in status and cultural cachet.<sup>61</sup> “The only way Tech is going to get any publicity is our football team,” one student said.<sup>62</sup> With so much on the line for Virginia Tech, it did make economic and political sense to ensure their best players could continue playing, even if it brought harm to the broader student community.

Unsurprisingly given the university’s sexual culture of not respecting the sexual citizenship of women, many students agreed with the university’s actions and did not believe Brzonkala’s story. Shayna Miller, a junior during the 1995–96 school year, lambasted the *Collegiate Times* for its coverage of Tony Morrison. “If I were Morrison, I would sue the hell out of the CT for defamation of character,” she said. Miller also stated that she doesn’t understand how anybody could “question [Torgerson’s] authority.”<sup>63</sup> Many students also questioned the details of Brzonkala’s story with the usual questions that are leveled at victims of sexual violence. Why didn’t Brzonkala scream? Why didn’t she just knee Morrison in the groin and run away?<sup>64</sup> Why did Brzonkala not have any other witnesses to support her story?<sup>65</sup> Why

did she wait so long to come forward?<sup>66</sup> Some went as far as to question Brzonkala's motives for going public with her story. One editorial in the *Collegiate Times* claimed that Brzonkala must have had some kind of personal vendetta against Morrison, who it cast as clearly innocent, and that she was trying to exact vengeance on him by taking his football career away.<sup>67</sup> Another editorial by student Rush Wickes made similar claims, that Brzonkala and her lawyers just wanted vengeance against Virginia Tech over a sexual assault that did not happen.<sup>68</sup> Many students at Virginia Tech refused to believe that a star football player at their school could possibly commit an act of sexual violence.

The number of students who openly disbelieved Brzonkala's story of sexual violence, despite the low likelihood of a woman making false accusations, is the natural result of a toxic sexual culture. As discussed before, when Erin Foote published an editorial complaining about the sexual harassment she received whenever she went to parties,<sup>69</sup> several people wrote back and told her to just not dress like a slut<sup>70</sup> or not go out if she did not want to be harassed.<sup>71</sup> The expectation on Virginia Tech's campus in the 1990s was that men were inherently sexually violent, especially after drinking, and the onus was on women to protect themselves from men. "This is an 18-year-old who has two girls knock on his door at 2 o'clock in the morning," said Morrison's lawyer, David Paxton.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, Morrison had every reason to believe that what he was doing was consensual, even if Brzonkala told him "no" twice.<sup>73</sup> This is reflective of a common belief on campus at the time. If Brzonkala really did not want to have sex with Morrison she would have protected herself more forcefully. Many students did not respect the sexual citizenship of women and their autonomy over their own sex lives, and this prevented them from believing Brzonkala and showing her compassion.

Many other students believed Brzonkala and publicly expressed their support for her. As soon as Brzonkala's story went public, the editorial board of the *Collegiate Times* collectively published an article titled "A Hokie Linebacker's Crime and Punishment" which called for Morrison's immediate expulsion from the university and for Provost Meszaros to be fired. The article also said that Meszaros's claim that a one-year suspension was an unduly harsh punishment for Morrison "is enough to make some females want to transfer."<sup>74</sup> Many other students followed suit in subsequent issues of the paper. One student called for a bonfire on the Drillfield to burn their

student conduct manuals if Morrison was not suspended.<sup>75</sup> Others publicly questioned how they could feel safe walking around on campus knowing that there were potentially more sexual predators who escaped punishment among them<sup>76</sup> and if women would feel comfortable reporting their assaults after Morrison received no punishment.<sup>77</sup> One editorial said that it was alarming that President Torgerson openly scolded the student newspaper for merely reporting the facts of Brzonkala's story.<sup>78</sup> There was also the editorial previously mentioned in which student Sue Daniels stated that everyone she spoke to thought Morrison's "one-hour-of-counseling sentence is bullshit."<sup>79</sup> While there were those who denounced Brzonkala and questioned her credibility, many more students showed genuine solidarity with her and were outraged at the administration's actions.

While it is positive that Brzonkala received so much support from the student body after she went public with her allegations, the support may have been at least partly racially motivated. Morrison's parents certainly believed so, calling the university's judicial hearings a "kangaroo court," they believed that he had been found guilty because he was a Black man who had been accused of rape by a white woman.<sup>80</sup> Assistant Professor Elizabeth Bounds had a similar perspective on the case, comparing the treatment of Morrison in the *Collegiate Times* to the treatment of OJ Simpson in the national media during his murder trial. As Bounds pointed out, there is a long history in the American South of Black men being lynched for supposedly violating the purity of white women.<sup>81</sup> Was it much of a leap to assume that a student body whose culture did not respect the sexual citizenship of women, but did include beliefs that racism was no longer an issue, would believe a white woman over a Black man in a rape case? It seems plausible that racism did play a factor in a large amount of public support for Brzonkala's rape accusations.

However, the more significant factor in student support for Brzonkala seems to come from the widespread criminal activity of the football team making her accusations seem more plausible. When it became a common occurrence for Virginia Tech students to read headlines about the criminal acts committed by their football team, the idea of Morrison sexually assaulting a woman did not seem far-fetched. "A lot of people just think they're thugs," said one student in reference to the football team. Another student who was frustrated with the lack of disciplinary actions for the football team said that

“they get away with murder.”<sup>82</sup> The criminality of the football team became such a frequent topic in the headlines that the student body began to make jokes about it such as “What’s the Tech honor code? ‘Yes, your honor. No, your honor,’” and “Why can’t you score on Virginia Tech? The defensive line is handcuffed together.” The football players themselves began to be impacted by their public image as criminals. One player named Billy Conaty said, “You get a call every, like, few weeks from someone back home saying, ‘What happened now?’” “We’re at the point right now where we have to sit in the house and lock our doors,” said fellow footballer Loren Johnson.<sup>83</sup> With the public image of Virginia Tech’s football team defined by criminal behavior being so pervasive, it is no wonder that many students jumped to Brzonkala’s defense despite the toxic sexual culture on campus.

Despite the widespread outcry, students were unable to enact any lasting change to prevent further sexual violence at Virginia Tech. When the Supreme Court ruled against Brzonkala in 2000, leaving her with no legal remedy for the wrongs committed against her, students organized a protest on campus. Only 25 people showed up. The Supreme Court’s ruling was not even published in the *Collegiate Times*, and what was once a hot-button topic among the students just a few years before received no editorial coverage after 1997.

The issue that prevented students from pressuring the administration into taking sexual violence more seriously was their lack of institutional memory. If a student were a freshman when Brzonkala was assaulted in September 1994, then they would likely have graduated by the spring of 1998. Students who came to Virginia Tech afterward possessed no memory of what it was like to be a student when the news of Brzonkala’s assault broke, and thus were much less likely to be energized into pushing for change. The activists of 1995 and 1996 had a small amount of time with enough momentum and energy to enact significant changes to Tech’s administration, and they failed. The turnover within the student body killed any existing momentum in favor of reform and allowed Virginia Tech to continue business as usual.

The Brzonkala case laid bare many of the social ills that existed on the Virginia Tech campus in the 1990s. The lack of respect for the sexual citizenship and autonomy of women that was so prevalent among both the student body and the administration was made clear for all to see. Despite having enough evidence to convict Morrison of sexual assault during her first

hearing, Brzonkala was railroaded into an unnecessary second hearing that gave Morrison every possible advantage over Brzonkala.<sup>84</sup> The Virginia Tech administration's handling of the case showed that they believed in a hierarchy that valued dignity and autonomy in some students but not others. The Virginia Tech administration was all too willing to sacrifice the well-being and security of students they viewed as less important in favor of students that were more important, particularly because of the revenue and status that they brought to the university. The case also exposed the racial and sexual undertones that existed in the student body, where women were objects that men could sexualize and harass with impunity unless they were Black. The entire rotten underbelly of Virginia Tech was exposed for all to see.

The Brzonkala case also exposed the need for student activists to circumvent the barrier to progress imposed by their lack of institutional memory. Leaders within activist groups need to include freshmen and sophomores in their organizing efforts and act as their mentors to train future generations of activists. Student organizations can improve their institutional memories by writing comprehensive notes on all their meetings, strategies, and plans to preserve their organizational methods for future leaders. If student organizers cannot overcome the lack of institutional memory that comes from a continuously changing student body, then much needed reforms may never happen.

The takeaways from the Brzonkala case are not all negative though. While some students were no doubt racially motivated in their support for her, her case showed that there were many students of all sexes who were willing to publicly stand with a victim of sexual violence and demand accountability from the administration and punishment for those who assaulted her. The throughline of this activism can be seen to this day in the activists who are currently organizing to end sexual violence on Virginia Tech's campus. Brzonkala may have been disappointed in the failure of her lawsuit against Virginia Tech, but she made a significant contribution to the decades-long struggle to make Virginia Tech a fairer and more just university.

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## 2. Women's Week

### *Success or Failure?*

AARON LOWTHER

“Women’s Month recognizes, affirms, and showcases the achievements, concerns, and diversity of women.”<sup>1</sup> That is the goal for Women’s Month according to the Women’s Center here at Virginia Tech, a school with a primarily male student body. Virginia Tech is known for being a great engineering school, and this background, combined with the male-dominant gender stereotype that accompanies engineering, has produced many gender disparities at Virginia Tech. This, along with the Corps of Cadets, also historically male dominated, raises the question: where do women fit in? That is where Women’s Week comes into play. Women were pushing for equality since admittance, and the creation of Women’s Week was a great help in that fight.

Why research Women’s Week in the late 1980s? Women’s Week provided a way to push for change different from previous ways in Virginia Tech’s history. Instead of a typical rally, it was a series of events that happened over the course of a week annually. Women’s Week at the university was a great way to make a push for equality. Furthermore, when a large portion of the population is college students, students can have a big impact on the community. They are crucial to the future of society, and they come from so many different backgrounds. That is why it is important to study the impact of this event on campus climate.

This chapter relies on a mix of different newspaper articles from the *Collegiate Times* and other newspapers within the community to best encapsulate the campus climate. The inspiration of my research was *Sexual Citizens* by Jennifer Hirsch and Shamus Khan. This book explores sexual violence among college students. The two authors define sexual citizenship as “the acknowledgment of one’s own right to sexual self-determination and, importantly, recognizes the equivalent right in others.”<sup>2</sup> By interviewing students first-hand, Hirsch and Khan provide great insight to the sexual violence within college communities, and their research goes hand-in-hand with my own.

Sexual violence is something Women's Week historically tried to combat. The last part of Hirsch and Khan's sexual violence definition, "equivalent to others," means both genders are equal, an idea Women's Week promoted. Along with this, the book gives stories of college students aiming to help people better understand sexual assaults and how to prevent them. While the book may focus on solely sexual assaults, Women's Week has a broader scope to promote and protect women.

This chapter will explore the impact Women's Week had on campus climate at Virginia Tech during the late 1980s. Women's Week encouraged a great push for positivity toward women. However, that objective did not reach everyone. So, how did Women's Week impact campus climate during the late 1980s? The conclusion will come from answering three basic questions: How did the organizers of Women's Week hope the event would shape campus climate? What types of activities did they organize? How did students on campus respond? The answers to these questions suggest that Women's Week was not as successful as the organizers had hoped, and even though it happened every year, active changes were slow to appear.

## Historical Context

Before discussing Women's Week in the late 1980s, it is important to understand how it developed. Women's Week started much earlier than most think. "The Education Task Force of the Sonoma County (California) Commission on the Status of Women initiated a 'Women's History Week' celebration for 1978."<sup>3</sup> From there, it spread throughout the country to eventually become what it is today. In February 1980, President Carter "issued the first Presidential Proclamation declaring the Week of March 8th, 1980, as National Women's History Week."<sup>4</sup> Women's Week taking place in March continues to this day.

For Virginia Tech specifically, women were only recently starting to advocate for change when Women's Week became popular. While President T. Marshall Hahn was head of the university from the 1960s through the early 1970s, he made changes that were beneficial to women, such as creating a Dean of Women position. Additionally, in 1964, the 1944 VPI-Radford College merger

was taken away, which increased the number of women students at VPI and made all classes at Tech available for women.<sup>5</sup> However, not everything was great. It was under Hahn's presidency that a new mandate for residence halls was created requiring that whenever a student entered the room of the opposite sex, the door had to stay open at least six inches.<sup>6</sup> Women were also not allowed to join the Corps of Cadets until 1973.<sup>7</sup> Another change occurred under the presidency of William Lavery from 1975–87, when women were allowed to join the “Highty-Tighties.”<sup>8</sup> Lastly, it was President James McComas who encouraged women to join administrative positions and pursue other similar activities.<sup>9</sup> Women fighting for equality at Virginia Tech was nothing new, and the introduction of Women's Week gave women a great opportunity to be heard. Looking at the twenty years before Women's Week can encourage an understanding of how women were being treated before the late 1980s. Women have been fighting for the same respect as men for years before the creation of Women's Week, but this event provided women with a chance to be louder than ever.

## Shaping Campus Climate

How did the Women's Week organizers hope to shape campus climate? The hope of Women's Week was that there would be equality for women and better treatment of women. However, it is important to know who organized the event. A form for the 1988 Women's Week lists the names of twenty-eight committee members and includes sponsors from the university as well as the Blacksburg community.<sup>10</sup> A few of the sponsors from the school included the Colleges of Business and Education; different departments like Art, Geography, and Political Science; and programs like the Women in World Development program.<sup>11</sup> The event was also sponsored by Beta Alpha Psi, Chi Delta Alpha, and Delta Sigma Pi.<sup>12</sup> Beta Alpha Psi is an “honorary organization for Financial Information students and professionals.”<sup>13</sup> Chi Delta Alpha is “Virginia Tech's oldest all-female service organization open to all women on campus.”<sup>14</sup> Delta Sigma Pi is a fraternity whose aim is to produce the “highest standards of professionalism, service, and scholarship while enhancing people skills to improve individuals as a whole in their personal and professional encounters.”<sup>15</sup> From the sponsors alone, it is evident that Women's Week was

important to not only the university but the community as a whole. One would expect mostly women-only organizations to sponsor the event, but there was only one sorority; the rest were coed.

Women's Week had a different theme each year but the same overarching goal: women deserved to be treated better. For example, an article published April 19, 1987 stated the goal of Women's Week was to "recognize the achievements, concerns and diversity of women."<sup>16</sup> Another article written by Su Clauson titled "Seeking Equality, Social Changes, Theme of Women's Week" stated, "Women need to strive for more than equality with men; they need to transform society with female values."<sup>17</sup> This was something that had yet to be seen. Many articles mentioned equality, but few raised the need to be more than equal and to reshape society. Heather Oughton, in "Women's Week To Begin at Tech," described the goal of Women's Week as to "Recognize affirm and showcase the achievements and diversity of women."<sup>18</sup> Finally, an article published March 29, 1990, titled "Women's Week spotlights concerns, achievements," noted that Women's Week "promotes creative and intelligent thinking about women by educating people about women's worth and potential. It encourages people to treat all women with respect."<sup>19</sup> It continued, "Women's Week programs are planned to appeal to those who work outside the home and those who work in it, to students, and to professionals, to single persons and to those who are married or otherwise with partners, and to those in such fields as business and the military."<sup>20</sup> Although this is from the 1990 Women's Week, this was the best definition of the event. Women's Week was for everyone in the community, not just for women. Although the themes may be slightly different, they all circle back to the common goal: women being treated with the respect and equality they deserve.

An article by Sybil Baker in the *Collegiate Times* titled "Change Requires Action" had many specific reasons as to why the fight for equality was so important. While previous articles had objectives, this article offered both objectives and reasonings behind the importance of Women's Week. The first paragraph says, "gains in women's rights will slide backward unless people fight to restore its status."<sup>21</sup> The fight for equality will only keep growing if people keep fighting. If the community stops fighting, society will return to how it was, thus making Women's Week all the more important. Baker goes on to say that "feminists are made to feel ashamed for only fighting

for women's rights."<sup>22</sup> This quote has proven to be true judging by the fact that Women's Week did not have the effect on the campus it was intended to have.

This article also stood out for its use of statistics. One particularly baffling sentence described how right-wing movements say justice for women will hurt the family and children and that it is right for women to not have equality and justice.<sup>23</sup> Other issues discussed include Title X not being enforced enough as well as the wage gap. Title X is, roughly, the affordable birth control policy. This directly focuses on college students, as they are often financially challenged, as well as frequent sexual assaults and rape that occur on college campuses, something Women's Week tried to stop. Another major inequality for women mentioned was the wage gap. Baker noted that women made 60% of what men made.<sup>24</sup> "Paying women the same amount men earn for a job, would bring women from a stage of poverty and will be one of the biggest fights in the future."<sup>25</sup> What seemed like a rather easy fix remains a problem to this day. Another great point Baker brought up is women in politics. According to the article, "All one sex bodies tend to create a sexist atmosphere."<sup>26</sup> This could be a reason why rallies like Women's Week occur in the first place. Through history, men were traditionally the ones to work outside the home while appearing to do no wrong. That is no excuse for inequality. Times change and people need to learn to adapt. Women deserve equality just like men, which is why Women's Week was so crucial to equality.

The organizers of Women's Week wanted to give women the respect they deserved by fighting for equality and better treatment. Even though each year had a different theme, the consistency of Women's Week and its goal of equality was the main purpose. We can tell by the sponsors that Women's Week did not just impact the university but also the community. Even though there was only one list of committee members and sponsors, it was a good baseline as to who was involved. There were many different activities that made the event accessible for everyone. The organizers emphasized the importance of Women's Week and the goals that were set. Their point was received all throughout the school, for both good and bad.

## What Was Happening?

Women's Week had many activities for people to attend. For example, Women's Week always had a highlight speaker. In 1985, Eleanor Smeal, the former President of the National Organization for Women, was the keynote speaker.<sup>27</sup> Smeal's speech was about the "problems women face in today's politically conservative atmosphere,"<sup>28</sup> a fitting topic because of the location of Virginia Tech in a rather conservative section of Southwest Virginia. In the 1987 Women's Week, feminism theorist and author of two theoretical books, Bell Hooks, was the keynote speaker.<sup>29</sup> The subject of her talk for that year was "Feminism and Self-Recovery: A Black Female Perspective,"<sup>30</sup> which gave listeners a different perspective on feminism than the predominantly white perspective during that time. The following year, Sonia Johnson, a feminist and activist, discussed "her theories on women's ability to change society through alteration of their own individual circumstances."<sup>31</sup> Lastly, there was not a speaker but rather a discussion panel from Swaziland. Titled "Women of Swaziland,"<sup>32</sup> this event hosted a panel of women from the country and presented a discussion on the "emerging role of women in Swaziland." This panel allowed attendees to learn about equality from different parts of the world, not just the United States. Virginia Tech had managed to have speakers from multiple backgrounds that were well known in their respective fields, which was great for promoting Women's Week.

As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. Art exhibits were also a large part of Women's Week every year. The week provided an outlet for artists to express themselves about a topic at the forefront of the fight for equality. Just like speakers, art can have a lasting impact on participants, which is why including art exhibits was crucial to Women's Week. Artwork can be hung for years; it serves as a constant reminder about the problems people were experiencing. In 1987, Carol Hoge organized an art exhibit, and along with this, there was also an art exhibit with art from the women of Swaziland.<sup>33</sup> This art exhibit would contain more than just artwork, though, including pottery, tapestries, and jewelry.<sup>34</sup> Decoration and jewelry is a great and subtle way to educate and advocate for change.

A 1986 article by Keith Kunkle, “Women’s Art Exhibit Expresses Self-Awareness,” makes many great points about how important art was to not just Women’s Week, but the fight for equality and respect. The art exhibit had worked with people nationally and locally with all art on display produced by women.<sup>35</sup> Having only art created by women was a great step for women getting recognition. This was also a great way to stray away from the traditional way men paint pictures of women. For example, a painting by the artist Hersha Evans-Wardell had women reading at her table. She appears “contemplative and at peace.”<sup>36</sup> This was different from the traditional ways men paint women as in the “male version of the female portrait, the woman is not an object of our desire, rather she is a subject—a subject which contains emotions, self-awareness and a personality.”<sup>37</sup> Women breaking the status quo was what Women’s Week was advocating. It was a step forward to see women depicted “at peace” or containing “emotions, self-awareness and a personality.” Art is something that is around for years, and having that ability to exist after the week was over was a crucial step for Women’s Week and the fight for equality.

Music has always been important to American culture, and it was a large part of Women’s Week as well. In 1987, a girl by the name of Hunter Davis performed to close out the week. She started off her set by telling a short but powerful story: “My brother said to me the other day, ‘we have Women’s Week and women’s this and women’s that—so how come we don’t have Men’s Week?’”<sup>38</sup> Davis concluded, “That reminded me of when I was a little girl and asked my momma why there was Mother’s Day and Father’s Day but no Kids’ Day. And my momma said ‘Hunter, every day is Kids’ Day’”<sup>39</sup> Men get praise and recognition every day. Women’s Week finally allowed women to get their deserved recognition. Creating a Men’s Week would defeat the purpose of Women’s Week. Davis performed a folk and blues mix, and it was a hit.<sup>40</sup> The crowd was pleased, and students had great things to say, like this graduate student at Tech: “I had no idea who was going to be playing, but I thought it was great.”<sup>41</sup> Her boyfriend went on to say he was “not disappointed in the least” about the performance.<sup>42</sup> This was a testament of just how important music was to the community. It had the power to bring everybody together and, like art, had a lasting impact. Along with getting messages across, it was a way for people to speak their emotions in a way people are more likely to listen. Having music be the closing event was a great way to end a week of hard work, fighting, and pushing for change.

Along with these, there was plenty more activities throughout the week. A program from the 1987 Women's Week was filled with events. Kicking the week off was a women's walk/run, then throughout the week were programs like a comedy show and seminars like "Child Care: Good Business for Everyone," "Financial Awareness for Women," and "Women's Perspectives on the Legal Profession."<sup>43</sup> There was also a workshop titled "Women's Creativity: The Power Within," poetry readings, films, and a "Famine Banquet."<sup>44</sup> The 1985 Women's Week had similar activities. The first event being a run/walk, then panel discussions, programs that go over sexual assault, and one that "will explore the social, health and economic needs of elderly women."<sup>45</sup> Poetry readings, an international program, a program titled "The Female Sensibility and the Nature of Experience," and a presentation examining "the images of women in film, photography, architecture and academia" were also included.<sup>46</sup> Even though these events were two years apart, there were many similarities in themes. This allowed for consistency throughout the years, thus making sure the goal was obvious: Equality and respect for women, no matter what age, occupation, background, or where they were in the world.

That so many different events were happening ensured a place for everyone to participate, allowing the community to be more involved. Not only did it allow people of all genders to participate, but it garnered Women's Week more support. The speakers, workshops, seminars, music, and more allowed everyone to feel welcomed and encouraged to attend. Being able to get involved was a plus for Women's Week. Finally, it was very accessible to everyone on campus and did not require much energy to go to.

## What Did the People Have To Say?

Most would think that because it was so accessible and had so many activities, everyone would enjoy Women's Week. Unfortunately, that is not true. A few articles expressed discontent, but three stand out: one published in 1985 called "Men Take Revenge," one published in 1988 titled "Women's Problems Unsolved," and lastly, one published in 1996 called "Editorial on the Money Missed Point, Tech Says." The article from 1996 may seem a little out of place; however, it is important to get a wide range of opinions, and having an arti-

cle published years after the late eighties can help us find out if the campus climate had changed since then.

In 1985, Sybil Baker published an article in the *Collegiate Times* called “Men Take Revenge.” She had recently published a piece about things women do not like about men, which angered the men on campus. To combat this, she asked around the *Collegiate Times* office and took a poll of the things men hate about women.<sup>47</sup> She started off the article stating her neutrality with the subject, saying, “Personally, I have nothing against the opposite sex—heck, some of my best friends are males, really.”<sup>48</sup> She also said that this was just an informal poll and that she “report[s] facts, not contribute[s] [to] them.”<sup>49</sup> This changes the context of the article because if she would not have stated her neutrality or if it weren’t a poll, one could have taken it as her being against equality. Obviously, this goes against one of the things Women’s Week advocates; respecting women. This article contained a list of thirty examples of what men hate about women. This list ranges from small to large examples. Reason number one was “They bitch,” a strong way to start off a list in the campus newspaper.<sup>50</sup> There were a few that stood out to me, including reason four, which said “They bitch and moan about being the down-trodden minority, but they’re actually glad of it. If they weren’t a down-trodden minority, they couldn’t always scream ‘Double standards!’”<sup>51</sup> Reason twenty noted that women have Women’s Week and a national organization for women, but men do not get the same.<sup>52</sup> Reason nineteen said how it is not okay to hit women even if they deserve it, and, lastly, reason thirty discussed how it is okay for women to have male friends all the time but men cannot have friends that are women when they are dating someone.<sup>53</sup> These reasons have a wide range of stereotypes. However, no matter how big or small, this was not okay. This article created contention throughout Virginia Tech.

This was not necessarily a negative reaction to Women’s Week, but it goes against what the event was about and exemplifies why Women’s Week was created in the first place. This was just one informal poll asked around an office. If this poll was sent throughout the entire campus, the results may have been much worse. One of the objectives of Women’s Week was for women to gain respect. This article made clear that some men still did not have the same respect for women that they did for their male counterparts. Even though this article was not in reaction to Women’s Week specifically, it

was published around the time Women's Week took place. This article therefore emphasized the importance of Women's Week and working toward a more respectful and equal future.

The second article was published a couple years later in 1988 called, "Women's Problems Unsolved." Even though the article title is very negative, the content inside is quite positive. When referring to gender inequalities, the article starts by saying how the problems "are not being changed at all or at a pace rapid enough to satisfy women's special interest group."<sup>54</sup> The author, Brad Reed, then goes on to discuss how the main issue with women's movements was the "lack of solutions to these problems."<sup>55</sup> This was surprising to me, because personally, I believe there are quick and simple solutions. However, he then goes on to talk about how it is not just men to blame, but women too. He said men lack awareness and are resistant to change, and the main problem was there was a "lack of acceptable changes to those of all sex and gender affiliations."<sup>56</sup> He argues that women are to be blamed as much as men for inequality because "for there to be a sweeping change in equality, solutions acceptable to the courts, U.S. Congress and most Americans must be suggested and marketed just as other worthy causes are."<sup>57</sup> He then ends the article by encouraging people to go to Women's Week with an open mind.

Judging by the title, the article sounded like it would be negative, but while there were some negative takes, there were positives included as well. Not only that, but it also provided reasoning as to why things were not changing and potential fixes, something not really seen before about a controversial topic like Women's Week. This was a reaction to Women's Week that I was not expecting, and it was quite the opposite of the previous article, which was attacking women. The last part of the article was surprising as well. Instead of negatively portraying Women's Week, the author encouraged people to go. He was encouraging change instead of being a bystander. The *Collegiate Times* is student writing, so this being published there shows that Women's Week had an impact, and not a negative one, at least according to Brad.

Finally, there was an article published in 1996 titled "Editorial on the money missed point, Tech says." Importantly, this article was not published by the students, but by someone in the community referring to Women's Week. Further, an article from the nineties is important to include because it shows how reactions changed as time went on. Were there still negative feelings

about Women's Week? This article was mainly about money and the donors helping fund the Women's Week activities. A March 7 editorial, headlined "Money for Sex at Tech" talked about the money the university spent on different speakers.<sup>58</sup> It is interesting to note how Women's Week at Tech had an influence all the way in Richmond, three hours away. The article caused many donors to back out, which President Torgerson was not very happy about.<sup>59</sup> He called the publication a "cheap shot" that caused him to have to explain women's month to three legislators.<sup>60</sup> Getting money from donors was a necessity for universities. So, it had quite an impact when donors decided to back out from funding the activities.

However, with this article published, President Torgerson defended the university. He said, "none of the specific programs singled out in the editorial was funded from this source."<sup>61</sup> While it was a good thing that the donors backing out did not have a direct impact on the funding of Women's Week, it could still end up hurting their future plans. Torgerson thought the week was a major success and said the editorial was not going to ruin the university's reputation.<sup>62</sup> While this editorial had no immediate impact on the campus, it could still influence the morale of the students. This could cause the students to get upset and request that the student body eliminate Women's Week.

## Conclusion

So, how did Women's Week affect the campus climate in the late eighties? It appears there was a more negative reaction on campus climate, and, judging by the lack of articles in response to Women's Week, the week was not as successful as organizers had hoped. The problems brought up in the week were not improving as quickly as the organizers had hoped. Students, particularly men, looked down upon women's sexual citizenship, which is one of the reasons that Women's Week started. Women's Week was about fighting the misogyny that society called "normal." While some reactions were negative and some of the goals were not met, it was still positive that women were stepping up and encouraging a change at a university that had been predominantly male.

The overarching goal of Women's Week was to promote equality and fight for change. A great quality of Women's Week was that it was very accessible. Getting involved was easy, and students had the most effect on campus climate. So, encouraging students to be the change and get involved could be a way to improve the event. For future Women's Weeks, promoting the event through social media and university emails would be the best way to reach the entire campus. At the time I am writing this, Women's Week is around the corner. How will the student body react? Will things finally change? Only time will tell.

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# 3. Techmen

## *Protectors of What?*

JORGE GOMEZ-PEDRAZA

The identity of Virginia Tech is historically intertwined with its Corp of Cadets. At the heart of Virginia Tech's campus is the War Memorial, a monument made up of pylons honoring the core values of the university and the alumni who lost their lives in military duty. These pylons, apart from being beautiful, also reveal that Virginia Tech's identity and values are that of a military institute. *Ut Prosim*, Latin for "That I May Serve," is the core principle that the university has bestowed upon all students, cadets or not. Although today Virginia Tech encompasses people from all ethnicities and genders, it is important to acknowledge that Virginia Tech, for much of its history, was a majority white and male military institute. What this meant for non-cadets, particularly women, was that certain values and behaviors were expected in order for them to gain the protection and acceptance of the aforementioned majority white male cadets. This resulted in the identity of the school being centered around the Corp of Cadets and a campus culture in which they held power.

Apart from acknowledging the role and influence of the Corp of Cadets on campus, it is important to look back and see how the time period and geographic location affected campus culture and power dynamics. Virginia Tech is in rural southwest Virginia, a culturally conservative and predominately white locale. Not surprisingly, many of the values and expected behaviors of students that this chapter will discuss reflect that conservatism. The discussion in this chapter contains unsettling content that may be difficult to process. However, this provides a valuable opportunity to confront painful history that may otherwise have been forgotten in order to learn and become kinder members of society. To do this, this chapter will discuss the sexual culture on campus from the 1960s to the 1980s. During this period, Virginia Tech underwent dramatic changes to its demographics as it transitioned from the primarily male Virginia Polytechnic Institute to the coed Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University as the population of women on campus grew. However, the correlation between the "traditional" values of

the White South and who had power on campus—a power that could shape the sexual relations between women and men—remained constant as time went on.

Sexual assault on campus is a nuanced subject that will need proper terminology and context to be discussed. This chapter will use the terms “sexual projects,” “sexual citizenship,” and “sexual geographies,” concepts borrowed from Jennifer S. Hirsch and Shamus Khan’s 2020 book *Sexual Citizens: A Landmark Study of Sex, Power, and Assault on Campus*.<sup>1</sup> These authors define sexual projects as “The reasons why anyone might seek a particular sexual interaction or experience. Apart from seeking pleasure, a sexual project can also be to develop and maintain a relationship; or it can be a project to not have sex; or to have comfort; or to have children. A sexual project can also be to have a particular experience, like sex in the library stacks, sex can be the goal rather than a strategy toward another goal.”<sup>2</sup> Sexual citizenship is defined as “The acknowledgement of one’s own right to sexual self-determination and, importantly, recognizes the equivalent right in others. Sexual citizenship isn’t something some are born with and others are born without. Rather, sexual citizenship is fostered, and institutionally and culturally supported.”<sup>3</sup> Lastly, sexual geographies “Encompass the spatial contexts through which people move, and the peer networks that can regulate access to those spaces. Space is inextricably intertwined with sexuality. Space has a social power that elicits and produces behavior.”<sup>4</sup> This chapter will also rely on historian Jaquelyn Dowd Hall’s 1983 essay, “The Mind That Burns in Each Body: Women, Rape, and Racial Violence,”<sup>5</sup> to help explain the relation to hate in the hidden message of ritualized symbols, expectations, and behaviors on campus. The use of these tools will frame the complex issue that is sexual assault on campus, particularly in a Southern university, by helping us see why people have sex, who is seen as a person, and where sexual assault happens.

It is the responsibility of Virginia Tech students to serve their community, even if that means discussing history that is hard to confront. The main argument of this chapter is that white women were denied sexual citizenship through a false sense of security established by hierarchical white male dominance, which resulted in a culture of female sexual submission to white men. The sources used in this chapter will be the student yearbook, the student newspaper, and a letter from the Dean of Women to the President of

the University. The student yearbook will show what was most meaningful to students as it was published once a year, the student newspaper will show what daily student life was like as it was published twice a week, and the letter from the Dean of Women will show the administrative stance. These sources will answer the main question this chapter poses: how did white male students assuming the mantle of protectors of white women result in the denial of women's sexual citizenship and resistance to change? To answer this question, this chapter will explore how women gained their place on campus through white beauty, how the sexual citizenship of women and others was suppressed on campus, and how student rituals enforced racial and gender hierarchies on campus. The answers to these questions are not easy to confront; however, to serve the Virginia Tech community, it is important to hear what these stories can tell us, as they reveal much about the history of who wielded power on campus and why.

## White Women on Campus

White men in the South historically expected white women to adhere to the ideals of Southern ladyhood to gain acceptance and protection. This was not particular to Virginia Tech but was a Southern set of values best explained by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall: "If a woman passed the tests of ladyhood, she could tap into the reservoir of protectiveness and shelter known as Southern chivalry. Women who abandoned secure, if circumscribed, social roles forfeited the claim to personal security. Together the practice of ladyhood and the etiquette of chivalry controlled white women's behavior even as they guarded caste lines."<sup>6</sup> In other words, women historically had to comply with gender roles created by men to gain men's protection. If women did not meet this standard, they would lose protection and be ostracized. This can be seen in a passage from a 1968 *Collegiate Times* article called "To a Tech Woman," which states: "Happiness is: Ten pairs of helping hands when you slip and fall on the ice . . . Happiness is Techmen."<sup>7</sup> This emphasis on male chivalry enabled white men to create an environment in which they could control the sexual geographies on campus, where their sexual citizenship and projects ruled, and where women's sexual citizenship and projects either did not exist or depended on the approval of men. This setting provides hints of the pres-

tures and expectations set on female students as they began to find their place on Virginia Tech's campus.

From the 1960s through the 1980s, Virginia Tech highlighted the significance of standards of white Southern female beauty to campus life. The 1966 edition of the student yearbook dedicated a section solely to female "beauty," demonstrating its importance to the student body. In this section, an introduction explains the importance of feminine beauty at Virginia Tech: "Feminine beauty has definitely found a place on the Virginia Tech campus. Until recent years the attractiveness and personality of our coeds have not been fully realized. The most striking examples of pulchritude found at Tech are represented by our reigning queens . . . . Though it took many years to recognize the lovely young ladies at Tech, now this is a reality, and Techmen are extremely thankful."<sup>8</sup> This objectification of women with the use of the word "our" shows the denial of women's sexual citizenship. It implies that men on campus are the ones who should be pleased and that the standard of physical beauty is that of their beauty queens, with no consideration of what women may have wanted. Beauty queens had to be physically attractive; however, they also had to meet the Southern "ladyhood" moral standards. Historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, defined Southern "ladyhood" as "chastity, frailty, graciousness."<sup>9</sup> These characteristics of Southern "ladyhood" can be seen by what were deemed to be the winning interests of Virginia Tech's Homecoming Queen Susan Stoops: "Sue mainly enjoys sewing, dancing, horseback riding, and playing the piano."<sup>10</sup> Sue's interests were what a man would have wanted in a domestic woman, and just like all the other "queens" she was thin, well dressed, and white, highlighting the stereotype of Southern female beauty.

Female students at Tech did not wholly agree with the rules and expectations set by male students and the university. Female students—or as they were then called, coeds—complied with rules such as dress codes, but when polled it was clear that they opposed the rules. In a 1968 article from the student newspaper, students were polled to see their opinion regarding dress codes and whether students should use their own judgment to dress themselves. The results of these polls reveal the interesting alignment of opinion between the Upper Quad cadets and the Lower Quad civilian men in that they agree students, women included, should be allowed to wear whatever they want. However, to a more specific question of the poll, which asked if

women should have the right to wear slacks or shorts in academic buildings or at any time the responses were:

Lower Quad . . . 50 strongly agreed; 52 agreed; 14 were neutral; 18 disagreed; and 11 strongly disagreed. The women answered that 14 strongly agree, 15 agree, 9 are neutral, 5 disagree, and 7 strongly disagreed. The Upper Quad men [men in the Corps] replied that 11 strongly agree, 10 agree, 7 are neutral, 14 disagree, and 10 strongly disagree.<sup>11</sup>

The outcome of this poll shows that women were not unanimously behind the right to wear shorts and slacks and that the majority of the cadets who answered the poll disagreed with that right. Restrictions on what coeds were allowed to wear is significant in that they were denied sexual citizenship, and although not all coeds wanted that right, it is important to remember that the majority of coeds who answered the poll were in favor.

Some female students at Virginia Tech openly voiced their rejection of dress codes and expectations. The dislike for rules and expectations can be seen in a student newspaper article from 1968 called “Techmen – – Are You Fair?” This article shows that coeds were aware of the hypocrisy of the gendered rules on campus but also that they demanded better from male students. The article states: “And for whom are all these virtuous images upheld? For the Techmen who nonchalantly meander into the Chandelier Room of Owens, attired in their best sweatshirts and cut-offs? For the shirt-wrinkled Techman who don’t even straighten out the clothes they have slept in all afternoon?”<sup>12</sup> This article shows coeds’ disapproval of the dress codes and their awareness of the hypocrisy of rules and expectations based on gender.

Cartoons published in the student newspaper reveal men’s opinions of women on campus. One constant in the newspaper from the 1960s to the 1980s is the ridicule of women’s sexuality on campus. Cartoons may present exaggerated messages, but they often provide insight into the attitudes of the author and audience. In a cartoon from 1968, for example, a coed visits a professor in the evening intending to have sex with him for grades, and she is depicted wearing a short black dress with exaggerated cleavage. The cartoon reads: “As I recall, Miss Vernon – you made this late appointment to tell me your plan to make up all the work you owe me.”<sup>13</sup> This cartoon

shows that students believed coeds to be having sex with their professors and that coeds were not capable of handling college work. This sentiment would not go away; a decade later, a similar cartoon was published. In a 1978 cartoon, a similarly dressed coed is shown strumming a spoon on her thigh while an onlooking man says, “WHAT LOOKS! WHAT TALENT! GIVE HER A SCHOLARSHIP!”<sup>14</sup> The continued sentiment that women’s only merit was their bodies shows both the denied sexual citizenship of women and sexual projects of Techmen. Another ten years later, coeds would continue to be objectified in the student newspaper, this time in a 1988 cartoon called “The Love Dogs,” in which the High Techs, the university dance team, are shown through a below-the-crouch camera angle. The cartoon states, “After watching Late Night With Dave Letterman, the athletic director devices the High Tech action cam.”<sup>15</sup>

This objectification of women went beyond students and athletes; staff and faculty were also denied their sexual citizenship. In a 1978 cartoon, an over-sexualized female professor is depicted being observed by university administrators saying, “Stimulating voice, and interesting technique, . . . my ass! It’s them 38’s that brings them in!”<sup>16</sup> Even professors were depicted as sex objects that were on campus to please men. These cartoons show a toxic campus culture in which men found their dominance over women to be humorous. They also show acceptable sexual projects in which men could see all women as bodies to be used and in which women needed men to succeed.

## Invasion of Women’s Sexual Citizenship on Campus

Women were subjected to unfair rules based on their sex since their arrival on campus, yet when their sexual citizenship was violated, it was glorified and tolerated. From the 1970s to the 1980s, men broke into women’s physical living space without much consequence. Regardless of their intention, the intimate conditions of dorms caused the presence of a stranger to be a violation of a person’s sexual citizenship. Break-ins also highlight how neglected sexual geographies on campus created dangerous situations for Virginia

Tech's female students. However, the university and students tolerated break-ins and, in some cases, glorified them in the student newspaper and yearbook.

There is no article of clothing that is more personal than one's underwear. However, when it came to coed's underwear on campus, students in the 1970s and the 1980s organized "panty raids." Panty raids are ritual-like missions to break into the room of a person to steal their underwear. Few places would tolerate such activities except for a college campus whose sexual geographies allow for students to openly disregard the sexual citizenship of others. Both the student yearbook and newspaper glorified panty raids. In a 1978 newspaper a quote underneath a photograph of panties being thrown out of a window reads, "This sequencing of the crowning moment of a Tech panty raid occurred at Campbell Hall last week. The eager recipients below await the trophy."<sup>17</sup> This same photograph would be used in that year's yearbook, in which the photograph would encompass a whole page, but it was not labeled.<sup>18</sup>

Panty raids continued into the 1980s, but in a twist, women began to raid the jock straps of men. In the 1981 yearbook, a section called "Show Us Your Underalls" displays a photograph of a jock raid with a passage that states: "To the average person, underwear is just that—something you wear under your clothes. But to the average Hokie, it is a symbol of status—the owner has successfully participated in a jock or panty raid."<sup>19</sup> It was clear that by the early 1980s at Virginia Tech sexual geographies had few boundaries. One may be inclined to think that because men were also subjected to having their underwear being raided, underwear raids were not a direct encroachment of coeds' rights, but it is important to note that this was done only as a response. Additionally, the coverage of panty raids far exceeded the coverage of jock raids in both student yearbooks and newspapers, and the vocabulary used emphasized women's underwear, showing the glorification of panty raids.

Peeping Toms also embodied male privilege and power on campus. In 1968, the student newspaper published a cartoon poking fun at male students observing women through their windows without their knowledge.<sup>20</sup> Men who participated in this behavior were known as peeping Toms. Peeping Toms were a symptom of a campus in which the sexual citizenship of women was directly violated and in which men ruled the sexual geographies.

According to an article published in the student newspaper in 1977, coeds believed this was an issue on campus. The article “Peeping Toms Cause Question of Safety,” states, “The main security problem that coeds have complained about this year has been peeping toms, according to I.E. Nickols, director of campus security.”<sup>21</sup> As well as revealing the major concern that Peeping Toms were on campus, this article also reveals that security was the responsibility of the coeds themselves. Coeds had to assign door duty in which an individual would watch the door from 1 a.m. to 6 a.m.<sup>22</sup> This method of guarding their dorms made coeds feel unsafe; Beth Klumpus, a Main Eggleston resident, stated that “I’m scared to do door duty. I’m only 4’10”, If three gigantic guys busted down the door there wouldn’t be anything I could do to stop them.”<sup>23</sup> Although at the time Virginia Tech had staffed security, they were responsible for all of campus and were not specifically assigned to guard the coeds’ dorms. This would allow Techmen to freely infringe the sexual citizenship of coeds with little to no consequence.

Break-ins and rapes of coeds in dorms occurred, but the university response was lethargic. Although one would assume Virginia Tech’s administration would prioritize the safety of its female students, the university only responded if it was liable. In the article “Tech’s Liability ‘A Roll of the Dice’ in Rape Cases,” written by Sherry Wood for the *Collegiate Times* in 1977, Wood reported on the legal predicaments of rapes that occur on campus. Wood quotes university lawyer Lee B. Liggett on a hypothetical rape on campus: “Say the lock on the door the intruder used to gain entrance was broken. The extent of the university’s liability would depend primarily on how long the lock had been broke.”<sup>24</sup> This lack of accountability shows that the university only cared about students as far as the law required.

Men were also guilty of displaying a lethargic effort to protect Virginia Tech’s female students. In an editorial from the student newspaper, student Todd A. Jamison wrote: “There is no need for a ‘foreign’ person to come into OUR home and police us at night.”<sup>25</sup> Although Mr. Jamison may be insensitive to his peers being raped, he does bring up a good point that by refusing to handle this issue in-house, the university was inviting someone from outside the Virginia Tech community to their homes. Todd Jamison was not the only male student to be insensitive to why the university was looking to hire security guards. The cartoon displays an attractive coed being choked by the baton of a butch female security guard; in the corner a turkey says, “I can

just see it now . . . . My room & board increased for this luxury!”<sup>26</sup> This cartoon and Jamison’s editorial show that men on campus believed that they should not be inconvenienced for the safety of coeds and that they saw any type of security other than themselves as an oddity to mock. This is perhaps because they believed any security that was not one of them endangered women—as if the Techmen themselves were the only ones capable of taking care of “their” Tech women. Although female students pleaded for help, both the university and male students looked after their own interests, creating a polarizing issue in which female students’ sexual citizenship was ignored.

## Unseen Threat

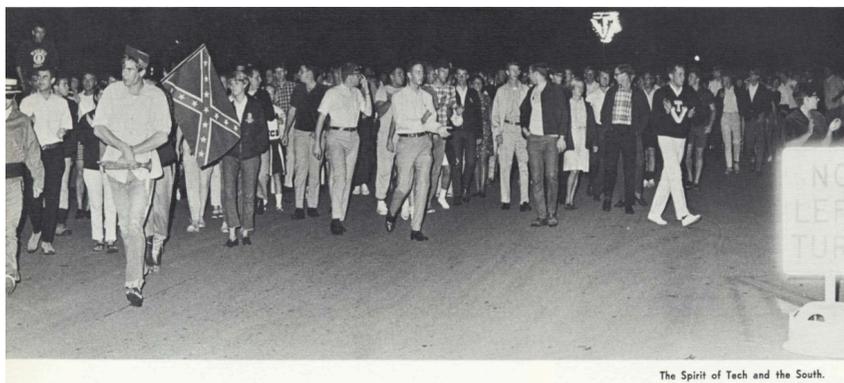
Student rituals at Virginia Tech disregarded the sexual citizenship of minority and female students by invoking values of white supremacist hate groups. This was a legacy of the Confederacy and the Ku Klux Klan. In the 1896 yearbook, an undeniable connection to the Ku Klux Klan and Virginia Tech can be found—the KKK club.<sup>27</sup> This heritage would result in a lasting sentiment of who held power on campus: white men. Much like the introduction of women to campus led to their objectification to preserve male dominance, the introduction of African Americans to campus led to the call to preserve white superiority. Campus rituals began to look like cross-burning Klan rallies, where the Confederate battle flag would be proudly displayed. Terrorism of this kind had racial and sexual implications. In her essay about lynchings in the South, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall states, “It was not simply the threat of death that gave lynching its repressive power. Even as outbreaks of violence declined in frequency they were increasingly accompanied by torture and sexual mutilation.”<sup>28</sup> Lynchings’ primary purpose was to violently tell black men that white women were prohibited, and to violently tell white women that they needed white men’s “protection.” This distressing relation between lynchings and sexual violence help explain how, through student behavior and rituals that lionized the symbols and values of the Confederacy and the KKK, students made it clear that interracial relations were not welcome.



This “Flaming VT” rally took place on campus in front of the War Memorial, showing the similarity to a Ku Klux Klan cross burning. Photo credit: “Flaming VT” featured in the 1973 edition of *The Bugle*.

The “Flaming VT” was a pseudo cross-burning tradition that the university was proud of. The photograph above is found in the 1973 yearbook.<sup>29</sup> The photograph is taken at the heart of the university, at the War Memorial. The Confederate stars and bars waves in front of the pillars of the War Memorial and next to it is an effigy on fire. This is the “Flaming VT.” The T is used to form a cross while the V is placed in front to create a shield, a symbol that looks shockingly similar to those used at Klan cross-burnings. The Flaming VT was a staple in the yearbook from the 1960s until 1987 when the last photograph of a rally was published.<sup>30</sup> Photographs of the Flaming VT in the yearbook were published in either of two sections: pep rallies or Corp of Cadets. As the Corp of Cadets were bestowed the role of protectors on campus, they oversaw the Flaming VT. This signified that Virginia Tech’s sexual geography was ruled by white military men who had power over the sexual citizenship of others, including male African Americans, and could pursue any sexual project they wanted. In the 1972 yearbook, a photograph of the Flaming VT was placed in “THE VIRGINIA TECH CORPS OF CADETS” section. The photograph shows a student proudly holding the Flaming VT with text next to it that states, “The Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets consists of approxi-

mately 600 men destined to be the military and civilian leaders of the future. ... They learn that leadership, honor, responsibility, integrity, and self-confidence are more than just words—they describe an honored Corps tradition that still dominated this organization.”<sup>31</sup> This clearly illustrates the importance and pride of the Corps of Cadets to the university and their intertwined relationship with the Flaming VT.



*This football rally featuring the “Flaming VT” shows a striking resemblance to Ku Klux Klan rallies. Photo credit: “The Spirit of Tech and the South” featured in the 1968 edition of The Bugle.*

Lynch culture and violence on campus was the norm and tolerated. In the 1981 yearbook, a photograph of a hanged man effigy was published. Next to the photograph a quote reads, “These Monteith residents show their discontent with the male race.”<sup>32</sup> This honoring of a mock lynching shows that such a heinous act was not truly understood by students or that they truly believed in such violence. However, such insensitivity towards African Americans can also be seen in an April Fool’s edition of the student newspaper from 1968, titled “Flagpole Protestors Hit by Sniper.” The article states, “A mysterious sniper who took refuge in the tower of Burruss Hall took the lives of 25 students Thursday.”<sup>33</sup> The students referenced, who the article mockingly says are murdered by a sniper, were attempting to lower the flag after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. These students were heckled and forced to leave the flag without lowering it; they were deemed traitors; and in this April Fool’s joke they were shot dead. This blatant intolerance shows that African Americans and their sympathizers on campus had no citizenship or respect. Lynch culture was so prevalent that students joked that even staff could fall victim to a possible lynch mob. In 1967, the student newspaper published a cartoon in which the Dean was depicted as getting lynched

by a mob of students with onlooking older men saying, “Back in th’ good-ole-days’ that was done in ‘effigy.’”<sup>34</sup> The message was clear, if the students saw you as an enemy, they could lynch you. The sexual geographies on campus, although never clearly stated, had violent consequences if breached; however, this violence was mainly directed at African American men and anyone who sympathized with them.



*Wielding the “Flaming VT” was displayed as an honorable and macho act. Photo credit: Image featured in the 1972 edition of The Bugle.*

The symbolic similarities between the “Flaming VT” and the burning crosses often seen at Klan rallies undoubtedly sent a violent and sexualized message to black men, but it also sent a sexualized message to white women. This message is best defined by historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall: “Lynching, then,

like laws against intermarriage, masked uneasiness over the nature of white women's desires. It aimed not only to engender fear of sexual assault but also to prevent voluntary unions."<sup>35</sup> This shows that lynchings not only erased the sexual citizenship of black men but erased the sexual citizenship of white women by making them dependent on, and therefore submissive to, the actions of white men. If white women did not submit to white men's perceived superiority, a violent incident such as a lynching may have occurred.

Virginia Tech was not comfortable with African American students on campus. In a 1967 letter from Martha Harder, the Dean of Women, to Marshall Hahn, the University President, the sentiment of the university regarding interracial dating is revealed. Harder writes, "Realizing that there is no policy at Virginia Tech against interracial dating, I felt that I would be remiss in my position if I did not talk to the girls . . . I tried to take myself out of my position as Dean of Women and talk to them more on the basis of a friend and an older person. I tried to point out that if they were just dating the boys to shock the people at Virginia Tech, then they were doing it for the wrong purpose."<sup>36</sup> This letter shows genuine concern and some support for the students in interracial relationships. However, that the letter lacks any assurance that they will be safe on campus shows that the university understood the possibility of violence. The concern of the Dean of Women was not the act of interracial dating, but rather what the reaction of others will be, and her concern was such that she wrote the University President. This shows that any deviance from the accepted sexual geographies, in particular interracial dating, on campus was seen as controversial and possibly dangerous.

It also shows that the university was unsure of its own restrictions on student sexual citizenship. This uneasiness of African Americans on campus can also be seen in the lack of celebration of African American accomplishments outside of sports. While white beauty and accomplishments of white women's integration into Virginia Tech were celebrated in the yearbook, African American women's accomplishments went uncelebrated. The first African American woman to graduate from Virginia Tech was Linda Paullette Adams, yet in the 1968 yearbook, where she was part of the graduating class, there is no mention of that accomplishment.<sup>37</sup> This shows that although African Americans were accepted on campus, the university was uncomfortable with their presence and especially with interracial dating.

## Conclusion

Virginia Tech was a campus in which white Southern standards of beauty granted white women acceptance. Beauty went beyond something physical, and was also an expected gracious behavior. In particular, Southern beauty was expected of female students at Virginia Tech. Women obliged such expectations and unfair rules based on their sex even if they did not agree with them. However, in return, men mocked their position through cartoons in the student newspaper. These cartoons further denied the sexual citizenship of women on campus and supported sexual projects in which men could have sex with professors and students.

The sexual citizenship of female students was denied by habitual panty raids and a lethargic effort by the university to secure the dorms. Panty raids were glorified in student publications, showing that men on campus had no boundaries and that women's sexual citizenship was not acknowledged. Although men would eventually fall victim to jock raids, the level at which they were glorified would not match that of women's panties being raided. Additionally, more serious break-ins that involved students being raped were not dealt with urgently by the university as it evaluated legal liability. This created a campus in which men had no sympathy for their female peers and resisted the implementation of security guards in dorms, which outright denied the sexual citizenship of female students.

Through pep rally symbols that echoed Ku Klux Klan effigies, white male students enforced racial and gender hierarchy in a campus that was uncomfortable with interracial dating. KKK lynchings were a way to instill fear into African American men and white women to deny them of their sexual citizenship. The "Flaming VT" was a direct reference to Klan rallies, and the Corp of Cadets by invoking such imagery took the role of protectors of white women. This led to a campus in which violence toward students was an acceptable joke, something that was even memorialized in the yearbook. The university's uneasiness with interracial dating allowed for this to happen, as evidenced by the concerns expressed in a letter by the Dean of Women. The University was uncomfortable with interracial dating and did not feel it was necessary to honor groundbreaking women like Linda Paullette Adams. This resulted in a campus in which white men's sexual citizenship and projects

went unchallenged as they were established as the rulers and protectors of Virginia Tech.

As a Techman, this was a difficult chapter to write, but it is my duty to serve my community. Virginia Tech is long removed from activities such as the Flaming VT and panty raids. I can personally attest to this, as a first-generation college student and as a Bolivian immigrant who has been welcomed with open arms. However, the dominance of white men's interests remains. There is no easy solution to this. This is an issue that extends far beyond Virginia Tech's reach. People arrive on campus with learned values and beliefs. However, the majority of people arrive on campus as impressionable young adults, who I believe can be guided to be more sympathetic and respectful of others. The root cause of problems regarding sexual citizenship, sexual projects, and sexual geographies is the lack of consideration of others. I do not believe most people deny others of these rights consciously; I think people have not been able to connect at a level in which they acknowledge other people's feelings. By sharing stories of how KKK lynchings had a twisted connection to student rituals, I hope that we can see that things are more interconnected than they seem. In doing so, we can begin to question why things are the way they are and who they serve. As a Virginia Tech student, I hope that I have served my community, and even if I revealed some of its sad and dark history, this chapter was written with love.

## Notes

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16. Cartoon of oversexualized professor, *The Collegiate Times*, May 18, 1979, 4.
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## 4. A Ghost of a Problem

### *What Goes on with Women in the Corps of Cadets?*

CAITLYN SIMSON

As a child, you might have purchased invisible ink at a book fair. Perhaps you delighted in writing secrets on paper, only for them to reappear under a UV light. Or, if you watched *National Treasure*, you will recall the scene where Nicolas Cage and his colleagues swiped lemon juice across the Declaration of Independence and then added heat to reveal a secret message from the Founding Fathers. Cage and his colleagues carefully scrutinized the historic document for evidence of something beyond the obvious; and, after coming up short, they took a chance—one that exposed age-old secrets. Uncovering gender-based violence and discrimination within Virginia Tech's Corps of Cadets was a similar experience. Suspicions were allayed repeatedly and publicly, but if you use critical thinking as a reagent, different stories surface.

Choosing to include women in the Corps of Cadets was not likely to have been a popular decision in 1973. In documents explored later in this chapter, Virginia Tech's own Corps members voiced their disdain for integration at other institutions, despite having already undergone it at Tech. Surely there should be well-documented dissent, then, from Virginia Tech's decision to admit women, especially prior to its implementation. However, information on this topic either does not exist, has never existed, or is well-hidden, and the paper trail running through the decades to the modern day reads like a mystery novel. Perhaps these instances went unwritten because they were viewed as pieces of the perpetual 'war of the sexes' that we've long trivialized; perhaps the reason is more sinister. Luckily, it is not impossible to piece together another, coexisting truth about women in the Corps, as long as you're willing to read between the lines.

The Corps of Cadets is one of the few university-sponsored military programs in the country. Although it is part of the greater institution, the Corps is as tightly-knit and secretive as any other fraternity, with its own traditions, dorms, and even a separate marching band. If, today, you asked a civilian student at Tech what image the ROTC program invokes, they might

highlight the earnest demeanors of their counterparts, the clean uniforms, the obvious camaraderie and loyalty between members, or the rigorous group workouts that take place at the heart of campus, the Drillfield. Had you asked a student in 1970 the same question, you'd likely be met with a frown; the Vietnam war was unpopular, so much so that "demonstrations were conducted with the aim of halting Corps drill." Two halls were occupied by protestors, a third was set ablaze in suspected arson, and over 100 civilians were arrested in that time. Corps enrollment dropped so low that drastic measures had to be taken. How else would the program retain its prestige and its funding?

To give you an idea of what is meant by "reading between the lines" in this chapter, consider this paragraph taken from the web page titled "A History of the Corps of Cadets":

The post Vietnam years saw the Corps numbers decline and reorganization to a two-battalion size regiment. In 1973, Virginia Tech was one of the first Corps of Cadets in the nation to enroll women, assigning them to L Squadron. In 1975, the first female cadet was assigned to the Band Company. In 1979, L Squadron was disbanded and female cadets integrated into the line companies. In 1981, the Cadet dormitories became coed. Naval ROTC was established in 1983. The cadet regiment expanded to a three-battalion structure in 1998. Today the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets is one of only six senior military colleges outside the five federal military academies. Virginia Tech is one of only two large, public universities in the nation that maintains a full time Corps of Cadets. The other is Texas A&M.<sup>1</sup>

This paragraph is kept whole and unaltered, which means that immediately preceding the sentence that purports the introduction of women into the Corps is an admittance that Corps enrollment had been extremely low. This, in a paragraph that chronologically details the expansion and increasing prowess of the program, leaves little room to wonder why Virginia Tech might have made such a momentous decision, even if it is never explicitly stated. This is an interesting start to a coed Corps which, as is touted by the institute, was one of the first, in a time where such a decision was incredibly contentious.

Laura Jane Harper, Ph.D. said as much in her 1980 speech, “Against All Odds: Women at VPI.” Historically, Virginia Tech hadn’t been very progressive; according to Dr. Harper, Tech was “the last of 5 or 6 land-grant colleges in the US to admit women.” She also claimed that the colleges most hesitant to accept women were those in southern states that had a compulsory military program, and then suggested that the Corps of Cadets only did so to bolster enrollment.

The goal of Dr. Harper’s speech was to highlight the adversity women faced at Tech and in the Corps, and the possible causes for this. But why, seven years after women had been admitted to the Corps and one year after the full integration, did Harper call out her school? For the same reason we aim to do it today: Dr. Harper pointed to a lack of evidence of the experiences of women at Virginia Tech, believing the hardships were “hidden in an undocumented history.”<sup>2</sup>

Over forty years later, we have more instances of hidden hardships, even dating past 1980, which we hope to bring to the surface. With a little heat and lemon juice, you just might discover that the attitude toward women in the Corps of Cadets was generally poor, despite Virginia Tech’s best efforts to prove otherwise. Although several articles uphold a generally positive attitude toward women in the Corps, a smaller amount of media supports the idea that this was a bigger problem than purported.

So, why does this matter? Regardless of background and demographic, the treatment of women on both a personal and institutional level affects us all and goes beyond Virginia Tech. Attitudes toward women in the Corps are generalized feelings that affect a specialized environment. This means they develop before college and go beyond it, and may reflect attitudes held across our military and other male-dominated careers and spaces.

These sentiments are detrimental, leading some to believe that they deserve or should accept certain treatment based on their personal attributes. As long as institutions profit off the promotion of positive narratives, they will continue to sweep these issues under the rug. Virginia Tech is not solely guilty of this; it is a familiar story, that an organization that relies on its constituents publicly betrays them privately.

Armed with a reagent in one hand and a magnifying glass in the other, in this chapter I will answer the following questions: How were women treated in comparison to male cadets? How did women react to this treatment? And how did Virginia Tech publicize the inclusion of women in the Corps?

## How Were Women Treated in the Corps of Cadets?

In the winter of 1974, just one year after the L squadron had formed, William C. Burleson wrote a comprehensive piece on it that described the backlash from male cadets, the creation of the female cadet uniform, the inner workings of L squadron, female cadets' sentiments about the Corps, and, lastly, the recruiting benefits of the coeds. Burleson was a writer employed by Virginia Tech and would write and edit many publications during his 30-year career with the school.<sup>3</sup>

Instead of opening his report with a short history on the female cadets, Burleson began 'The Ladies of L Squadron' with this:

“The women members of the Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets haven't eliminated all of the reservations that their male counterparts held about admitting females[,] but they have made giant strides[.] [T]he 25 members of L squadron are united in their determination to gain the respect of their fellow cadets—and they are doing it in a way that draws praise from some of the male cadets who were their harshest critics.”<sup>4</sup>

Burleson also noted that preferential treatment and the breaking of unwritten rules or “traditions” were the major grievances of male cadets. He quoted Corps leader General David Henderson as saying that, although a few meetings were held to address complaints the male cadets had, “They weren't major items, but we didn't want them to become problems.”

The preferential treatment the male cadets dreaded were the coed uniforms. Unbeknownst to the men, female cadets had not been afforded overcoats at first, and thus were wearing their own. Burleson did not write whether

or not the male cadets begrudged the rest of the women's uniform, which was made to be "attractive[,] economical[,] and fashionable when worn by a group of women who come in a variety of shapes and sizes." This meant that the coed uniforms were visually appealing and flattering, and did not prioritize function or comfort. The male cadets were concerned that the women were receiving a special privilege and changing tradition.



*L squadron, circa 1974. Photo credit: The L Squadron, ca. 1974, Women in the Corps of Cadets, RG 8/4/4a, University Special Collections Virginia Tech.*

Pictured here are L squadron in their beautiful uniforms, circa 1974.<sup>5</sup> The high-heeled shoes, which grew uncomfortable after hours of use, and the skirts, which may cause chafing, were not conducive to long-term activity. Nor was their revealing nature conducive to the physical activities required of cadets. As a result, many alterations would be made to coed uniforms over the years.

Thankfully, the "ladies" loved the Corps all the same, wrote Burlison. The friendship and camaraderie unique to the Corps were listed as its most favorable attributes. Though the women admitted there were "problems

being the first women in the Corps[.]” they called them “minor.” The biggest problem the coeds had was early morning formation, wrote Burleson. The other problems faced by the women were not named, although perhaps Burleson was referring to the minor backlash they’d faced in the first few weeks when they unwittingly broke traditions.

The women’s love for the Corps would prove to be useful to the institution. Senior cadet Russell Sypolt praised the women, adding that “they will help us a great deal in our recruitment program. Their presence has aroused a lot of interest.” Sypolt and his fellow male cadets had a lot to be thankful for—who knows how much longer the Corps could have gone on with its dwindling enrollment, had it not been for the women who joined and the people they would help recruit?

There are some obvious issues with Burleson’s report. First, although it is written from his “perspective,” Burleson was employed by Virginia Tech at the time, creating potential for bias. Whether or not it affected his writing, Burleson did not take any investigative liberties with this piece. He wrote about “problems” faced by the female cadets but only named trivial ones he could make light of, such as the cold mornings on which formation took place. He did not dig any deeper to uncover deep-seated issues that may have reflected poorly on the Corps or on Virginia Tech as a whole.

While ‘The Ladies of L Squadron’ is a historic document, it is also a vanity piece, highlighting the good and skimming the bad, refusing to address any issue of substance. This phenomenon repeats itself in many of the articles that were selected for scrutiny in this chapter: the elusive ghost of a problem, never to be named.

One article, however, stands out for its colorful depictions of the treatment of women by their male counterparts. On February 3, 1996, the local paper, *The News Messenger*, announced the death of Ruth Louise Terrett Earle. Earle enrolled in the college in 1921, the first year VPI admitted women. She was one of five women who would join the Corps that year, but, despite the compulsory nature of the program, she and her female cohort were excluded from military courses. According to the newspaper, the male cadets “opposed the admission of women and continued to harass them once they arrived.”<sup>6</sup> This mistreatment included dumping buckets of water on the coeds, verbally harassing them, excluding them from extracurricular orga-

nizations, and attending women's sports events to cheer for the opposition. The women even had to create their own yearbook because the traditional one, *the Bugle*, refused to include them.

*The News Messenger* wrote about Virginia Tech often but was not affiliated with the school; while it may have served other biases, it had no reason to cater to the institution as Burleson had. This article was written 75 years after the incidents of harassment it detailed, long after they were of consequence. As Laura Jane Harper suggested, much of the coeds' experiences are buried beneath time, most having never been documented at all. Not for a lack of searching, this short article is one of few found in the process of uncovering the truth about women's experiences in the Corps that provided notable examples of gender-based violence.

One undeniable, unifying fact about the Corps of Cadets is this: from admission to graduation, the road for any cadet is daunting. That isn't to say it's fruitless, but Virginia Tech's Corps is very honest about its challenging nature, and the trials begin before admittance is even offered. Virginia Tech aims to bolster enrollment by use of an "astute, aggressive plan" geared toward high school upperclassmen. Those who embody the Corps theme of *every cadet a scholar, every cadet an athlete, every cadet a moral person* can expect cajoling. 'Athleticism,' however, is measured differently for women. These were the fitness requirements for prospective cadets in 1997:

- Run 1.5 miles (12:20 minutes men, 14:25 minutes women)
- Pushups (42 reps men, 18 reps women)
- Situps (52 reps men, 50 reps women)<sup>7</sup>

There is a clear difference between what was required of a man and what was required of a woman to be considered for the Corps. Did this mean women were inherently weaker; and if so, did they compromise the entire mission of an elite corps (and military)? Or was physicality not so important that standards couldn't be altered for some Corps members; and if so, then what about men who measured up to the women's standards but not the men's? Did this make admissions easier for women than for men, and was that unfair or sexist?

This chapter will not debate or attempt to explain any nuances of these questions, or pose any solutions to them; rather, they have been highlighted as possible reasons why male cadets feared inequality. Couple this train of thought with the Corps's "desired percentage of women and minority group members,"<sup>8</sup> and it may have caused resentment from male participants who viewed the equitable standards as unfair. Additionally, it could be argued that the reason for equitable standards has nothing to do with uplifting minorities and everything to do with meeting diversity quotas, which is harmful rhetoric itself.

Once a cadet has been offered admission and has then matriculated, he or she must learn to adapt to the Corps lifestyle. Listed as one of the more difficult facets is loneliness due to the cadet's unique lifestyle.<sup>9</sup> If you've ever accessed a military base, the same concept applies: the cadets eat, drink, work, sleep, suffer, and celebrate together. The "base," or buildings within the Corps's quad, are inaccessible to civilians, owing not only to their geographical isolation but also their strict curfew and visitor rules. It is also required that cadets spend an allotted amount of time with their respective company, which leaves little room for external socialization or leisure. This is especially true for freshmen, who, as outlined in other chapters in this book, are most vulnerable and susceptible to physical, emotional, mental, and sexual peer pressure.

When a program with such rigid rules isolates a group, those marginalized within it have fewer opportunities to express dissenting opinions, which is why it is so easy to silence them.

## How Did Women Respond to Their Reception?

The need to reassure the public that coeds are and have always been cherished by the Corps did not begin with Burleson, nor did it end with him. In 1987, Denise Shuster became the first female Regimental Commander. As such, she became the subject of much attention and publicity, especially from Virginia Tech.

“I don’t think a woman has to look or act like a man to be strong,” says Denise Shuster. This 5-foot-5-inch, hazel-eyed blonde speaks from experience.

A finalist for Homecoming Queen last year, Shuster has worked her way up through Virginia Tech’s Corps of Cadets to the rank of Cadet Colonel. Last year, the Naval ROTC member became the first woman to hold the top student rank in the Corps when she was chosen Regimental Commander.

“I don’t consider myself a devout feminist, but I do believe that, in many situations, women are equally qualified for positions as men and should take advantage of the opportunities available.” She adds that her determination to succeed in a leadership capacity coupled with a desire to retain her femininity has posed a few problems, but that today’s women who struggle for balance between the various facets of life continue to build a foundation for those who will follow.

Shuster always has met challenges head-on. The Falls Church, Va., native attended George Mason High School where she was student body



Article written by Gina Ferolino. Photo credit: Gina Ferolino, *The right stuff: determination drives first woman commander, Women in the Corps of Cadets, RG 8/4/4a, University Special Collections Virginia Tech.*

Gina Ferolino, an editor employed by Tech, began her article with a quote from Denise Shuster: “I don’t think a woman has to look or act like a man to be strong[.]”<sup>10</sup>

In the next paragraph, Ferolino wrote about how Shuster’s desires for leadership and to retain her femininity posed problems. She wrote of these ‘problems’ again: “But while most male cadets are supportive[,] women in leadership positions within the Corps still experience some problems[.] These problems stem from within themselves[.] She [Shuster] said, ‘Many women (in the Corps) feel they have to be tougher, work harder, and prove themselves.’”

Although the term “problems” is used repetitively throughout, neither Ferolino nor Shuster put a name to what those problems were. The specifics of “controversy” within the Corps are never explicitly stated, and the closest Ferolino’s article comes to giving an answer is stating that “most,” and not all, male cadets were supportive of their female counterparts. In fact, instead of exploring this idea more, Ferolino quoted Shuster in placing the onus on the women to do better and claimed that female leaders were too harsh when trying to command male cadets.

An important question Ferolino fails to ask is, why? Why were male cadets difficult to command? Why did female cadets feel the need to prove themselves and overcompensate? And what did retaining femininity have to do with it? Instead of addressing these “problems” or their sources, Ferolino swept them under the rug and cast them as a reflection of the victim.

This is the same sentiment Stephanie Romero expressed to the *Collegiate Times* in 2013, when women were officially allowed to fill combat arms roles in the military. Of the policy change, Romero said that she would no longer have to worry about missing out on promotions because of a lack of opportunities within her branch.<sup>11</sup> As far as the Corps of Cadets went, though, Romero claimed this: “[T]he Corps has always gone out of its way to make sure females are given leadership opportunities[.] Sometimes they try so hard to do so that they’ll give females positions that females don’t deserve.”

Unbeknownst to Romero, the Corps was not *always* a champion of feminism. This misinformation makes one wonder where she first heard this. Historically, women have not held many major leadership positions, but whether or not the Corps gave those positions to unqualified women is another matter entirely. If it is true, the Corps itself is partially responsible for backlash from scorned male cadets and for fabricating the idea of equality amongst cadets in the name, but not in the spirit, of progressivism. If it is untrue, Romero exposed her own internal biases, whether they were instilled by the Corps or others or exaggerated in an attempt to overcompensate, and falsely accused the university of preferential treatment, an allegation that it tried hard to avoid. Either way, Romero placed a target on the back of her fellow coeds by undermining them and confirming the longstanding fears of male cadets.

Romero was likely completely unaware of the impact her statements could have. Still, the Corps of Cadets has always been fearful of opinions such as these being expressed; perhaps this was the reason they seemed to double down every chance they got.

According to Nicole Eley, 2005 marked a “new age” for the cadets; Christina Royal had become only the fourth woman to be named Regimental Commander of the Corps of Cadets.<sup>12</sup> She was also the first Black woman to achieve this. Though the article was meant to be about Christina and her accolades, it paid special attention to identifying her by her gender and race as a way to uplift the institution. It seems that, when interviewing a female cadet about her experiences and accomplishments in the Corps, there must also be a disclaimer or reminder that women are treated equally and fairly, thanks to Virginia Tech.

The article was laden with praise for Tech for having more female cadets than its competitors. In it, staff member and former cadet Richard “Rock” Roszak claimed he did not see race or gender when assessing Royal’s accomplishments. It also assured readers that Royal herself did not “look at it as I’m a Black female in this position, but that I’m a leader just as any of my other counterparts or peers would be.” Royal also said, as those before her had, that “Our male peers hold us up to the same standard as they would the next guy.”

Had a white male achieved the same accolades, it is unlikely that these same statistics would have been provided, that a reminder of fair treatment would be included, or that his gender would be highlighted. While it is important to honor these women for their roles, it is also indicative of the political importance of doing so for the institutions they were a part of. And, in the same way that these differences are touted in positive ways, they were also weaponized in the past. These point to the very real ways women were distinguished from men in the Corps of Cadets, rather than always being considered equals within the institution. There are thirty-one years between Burleson’s piece and the article on Christina Royal, and yet there was still a need to both justify and laud female involvement in the Corps of Cadets and disguise it as an innocent celebration of this.

Earlier in the chapter, I quoted Dr. Laura Jane Harper's speech. It should be noted that, by 1980, Dr. Harper had been the dean of the College of Home Economics for twenty years, had just been named professor and dean emerita, and her speech was actually a Founder's Day address. A women's rights activist even after her retirement and the namesake for Virginia Tech's Harper Hall, the topic of her speech was not likely to shock anyone. However, its content might have; perhaps that is why she waited until the end of her tenure to remind Tech of its anti-women policies.<sup>13</sup> Although she wasn't a former cadet or faculty for the Corps, she was the head of the Home Economics department at the time the original L squadron uniforms were created. She presented the notion of Corps enrollment as a question, but it's clear she had an answer in mind.

In her speech, Dr. Harper told an anecdote about her former advisee, Patricia Hodges, née Miller, class of 1959. It had been a lifelong dream of hers to be commissioned, just as her father had been. Though she signed up for military classes each term, she was denied because she was a woman. Still, she persevered, and after being accepted by the Army's Medical Specialists Corps, she was allowed to be commissioned with the cadets. When Dr. Harper expressed concerns about student and alumni response to Miller breaking tradition, Miller assuaged them: the Surgeon General would be in attendance to show his support. That day, it seemed to Dr. Harper that all of Hillcrest, the women's dormitory, showed up for her, despite the record heat.

Of the ceremony itself, she said, "If I remember the order of commissioning correctly, first commissioned were those for the Army, then for the Air Force, then for the Navy, then the Marine Corps, followed by the Coast Guard. By this time, the women students from Hillcrest were furious. Why, they asked, did Pat have to be the last one? My answer was: "Those men must get a head start on her; even with that she will overtake them."<sup>14</sup>

This is a story of camaraderie, not between cadets but between women, who supported each other when their institution would not. Dr. Harper's point in exposing the Corps's history of misogyny was this: it required a powerful voice to elevate the rest. Had it not been for the Surgeon General's support, brave Patricia Miller may have met backlash; had it not been for Dr. Harper, her story may have been lost to time. It is also anecdotal evidence that it takes a concerted effort from many women to make change in the face of misogyny, and just one man to subdue his counterparts enough to allow it.

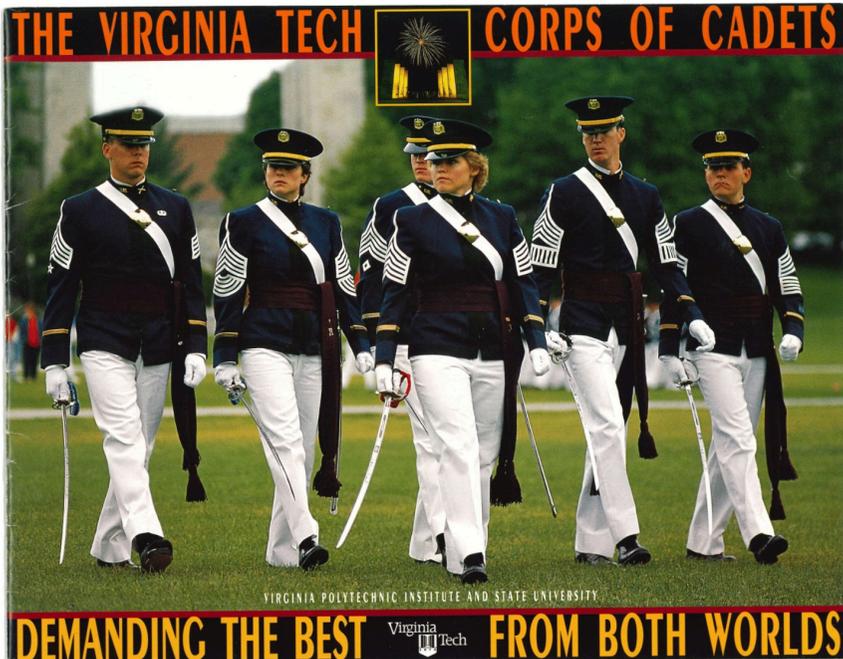
One might not find issue in Miller's exclusion from the Army commissions, believing it to be a logistical matter instead. Why, then, were women excluded from the company band until 1975, two years after they had been accepted into the Corps?<sup>15</sup>

Another female response to Corps life was the First Annual Women of the VTCC Breakfast, arranged by cadet Amanda Schultz in 2011. Schultz "started off in a women's studies class and wanted to bring what [she] learned to the Corps. Females respond in different ways than males do to the cadet training program, and providing for the specific needs of these differences in the hope of improving female retention rates motivated me to get involved."<sup>16</sup> *The Corps Review*, the magazine that published this story, also added that information sessions would now be held for freshman women to adjust to the Corps, and for upperclass women interested in leadership positions.

Without more detail, one cannot be certain of what exactly Schultz felt the Corps was lacking, but based on the event itself, it can be assumed that female cadets were not receiving adequate information (or training) to prepare them for the Corps and beyond. Perhaps the Corps, which once underscored the differences between men and women, was now overcompensating by downplaying them. Whatever the case, it required a student, taking a class about women, to try to reshape the woman's experience. Schultz also points to trouble with female retention because of these issues. While Schultz accomplished a great feat, the issue of female retention due to the Corps's inattention should have been addressed by its leaders, and long before 2011. Clearly, there were needs previously unmet by the Corps, despite decades-long assurance that women fit in just fine.

## How Did Virginia Tech Publicize the Coeds?

While many of the aforementioned documents were used as forms of publicity for Virginia Tech, its best material comes in the form of its pamphlets for prospective students. Recruiting has been a vital part of keeping the Corps alive.



Undated booklet meant to garner interest in the Corps of Cadets. Photo credit: The Virginia Tech Corps of Cadets: Demanding the Best from Both Worlds, RG 8/4/4a, University Special Collections Virginia Tech.

Pictured here is the cover of an undated booklet meant to garner interest in the Corps of Cadets.<sup>17</sup> Although a date was not listed on the pamphlet itself, the woman on the cover is Denise Shuster, class of 1988. Does the picture look familiar? It is almost identical to the one published earlier with Gina Ferolino's article.

On the first page, this pamphlet lists the benefits of joining the Corps. Among them is listed: "Women make up about 20 percent of the Corps (a higher percentage than at any other military college program, including service academies), and they have held every leadership position in the Corps."

If this pamphlet comes from 1987, the year Shuster was named First Commander and the same year Ferolino's article was published under Virginia Tech, there is a disparity between statistics. Ferolino wrote, "Of the 700 members in the Corps, about 100 are women." This is roughly 14.3 percent of the Corps.

A *Collegiate Times* article about Shuster from 1987 listed the number at 90% male.<sup>18</sup> This statistic cuts the original figure in half. Which of the three is correct?

To give more context to the statistic in relation to the time frame, the figure in 2023 is also 20%, per Virginia Tech's webpage.<sup>19</sup>

If the undated pamphlet was produced later than 1987, Virginia Tech was reusing old pictures for promotional material—it could be that they had little content on the other “unremarkable” coeds, and thus only tokenized and publicized its leaders. If the pamphlet was produced in 1987, there are three possibilities: either the number is a misrepresentation, a coincidence, or the Corps has had such a strict recruitment policy that it always just meets its quota. Using the word “about” provides quite a bit of wiggle room.

Another example of good publicity is Marty Gordon's double feature in *The News Messenger*. Gordon produced two articles on August 19th of 1995 which were published together on the front page. Both were about the Corps of Cadets' coed policy. It is a little odd to see them side by side, considering they broach the same topic: the Corps's reaction to Mary Faulkner, the first woman to attend The Citadel. Both articles show an interesting relationship between the institution of Virginia Tech and the women in the Corps.

In the first article, titled “Coed Corps: It's nothing new at Virginia Tech, and it works well,” Gordon wrote that the coed controversy had “never really been seen here”<sup>20</sup> and that the program had far fewer problems than both the Virginia Military Institute and The Citadel. The idea that a coed Corps had always been successful without a hitch is untrue, but perhaps, over 20 years after women had been accepted, it was easy to stretch the truth. This would have been particularly easy by the overwhelmingly favorable material that had been released over the years by Tech, such as Burluson's “The Ladies of L Squadron.” (It may also be the reason *The News Messenger* was able to label Tech the first military college to accept women.) Paired with noncommittal phrases such as “never really,” the paper could directly contradict the experiences of women like Ruth Louise Terrett Earle and Patricia Miller and get away with it.

Major General Stan Musser bolstered Gordon's sentiment, claiming that women “not only” worked with the men, they also lived in the same dorms.

Though women had come to work and live with the male cadets in recent years, this argument does not provide any evidence that sexism within the Corps was not a problem; if anything, it suggests that there was a lack of understanding regarding the nuances of sexism.

One coed interviewed for the article was Mary Flaherty. Flaherty found the coed situation desirable overall, though she admitted women had to work harder to gain the respect of men. She added, “[M]ost females are harder on other females.” Though the article was published eight years after Ferolino’s piece on Denise Shuster, the issue of overcompensation resurfaces as an issue, though this time it is directed at other women.

After much praise for Virginia Tech’s Corps, the article pivoted to Mary Faulkner’s attempt to join The Citadel. Cadet Mary Razor complained that Faulkner, the first and only female at The Citadel, was receiving special treatment. Razor said Faulkner was receiving attention because she was a woman and because she required special housing. Gordon purported, “Razor believes The Citadel should remain all-male, and [fellow freshman Lisa] Wnek agreed, saying there are so many other opportunities for females.”

The second article echoed the first, and also featured Corps Leader Major General Stan Musser’s opinion. Gordon wrote, “Musser is quick to state the media’s attention to both military cases—VMI and The Citadel—has placed more emphasis on the corps and showed women that there are real options out there for them. ‘Females can find alternatives at places like us,’ he said.”<sup>21</sup>

Gordon’s articles are a strong example of internal bias. The women in the cadet program were subjected to male-positive messaging and programming. This was dangerous because it allowed men in power to elicit the support of women against women’s own interests and opportunities. Though this was likely the same rhetoric that kept women out of the cadet program at Virginia Tech just a few years earlier, these women are regurgitating it in favor of other non-inclusive programs.

As far as publicity goes, this chapter previously established that *The News Messenger*, which would publish Ruth Louise Terrett Earle’s obituary one year later, was not affiliated with Virginia Tech. However, it was based in the Blacksburg/Christiansburg area, whose businesses directly benefit from

Tech's student population. Considering the Corps's unusual front page double feature and Musser's comment about recruiting, it is not unthinkable that the publication was mutually beneficial. If parroting misogynistic beliefs can only harm women, a good reason for doing so is the benefit it provides the Corps; if Virginia Tech remains one of the only coed institutions, they have a lot less competition when recruiting.

How other college students felt about women joining the Corps of Cadets is not well documented. In fact, despite going through every 1971–1974 *Collegiate Times* article available in Virginia Tech's Special Collections, there was little to be found on the topic.

In a 1973 *Collegiate Times* article titled "Girl's Corps are 'Mice'", we are met with a powerful first line. Saron Deal wrote, "The new addition to the Virginia Tech campus is the Women's Corps of Cadets and has stirred up a lot of controversy and the equal amount of misconceptions."<sup>22</sup> What follows is confusing. Deal wrote about Virginia Tech being one of the first coed military ROTC programs, then listed the number of women, what careers they are pursuing, and where they live on campus, and then details their "rigorous training" at bootcamps. Never were the controversy or misconceptions explicitly named or dispelled, and the article itself is a mere nine sentences long. Still, there are clues that indicate some opinions held by the student body.

Virginia Tech freshman cadets are referred to as rats. The female cadets being referred to as mice shows an "othering" of them as weaker, smaller, and less intelligent than their male counterparts. It also proves that there was a difference both seen and felt between male and female cadets, which is further supported by the fact that the women were originally their own Corps. Because the article closed out with an explanation of the women's training, it is possible that the misconceptions were based around the idea that women being less physically capable meant they would receive easier, and therefore unfair, training. How do you appease male cadets worried about preferential treatment? Call their adversaries mice.

*Collegiate Times* articles were not always so mild. On April 22, 2004, the *Collegiate Times* web page published an article titled "Cadet faces sexual assault charges." A sexual assault had been committed in Brodie Hall, a cadet dorm. The victim had reported Jan-Michael Walker, aged 21, to authorities on two occasions: once on March 27, in which she accused him of sexual battery,

and again on April 14th, when she woke up to find him in her room, where he allegedly penetrated her with an object. Following a five-day investigation, Walker was arrested. Lieutenant Colonel William Stringer, who was the deputy commander of the Corps, claimed that Walker would be punished as both a cadet and a student if convicted; Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs Edward Spencer said that management of cadet dorms differed from civilian ones.<sup>23</sup>

Although it is never explicitly stated, because the victim was a resident of Brodie Hall, she must also have been a cadet. Both assaults happened between cadets and on cadet property, meaning they were geographically and socially isolated. According to the allegation, Walker allowed himself into her room, meaning he had access to it while she was asleep.

There is no reason why Corps dorm policies and training should be different from that of civilians. Would the alleged victim have fared better under civilian rules, under civilian management? As this was the second report, such speculation is not entirely uncalled for. Both online and physical searches on this incident and its outcome lead nowhere. We may never know what became of the victim or of the perpetrator; perhaps the information will be released decades from now, long after it has been forgotten.

Compare this to Virginia Tech's more recent report of a sexual assault: "On Nov. 11, 2019, the Virginia Tech Police Department received a report of a sexual assault that occurred in New Cadet Hall, 310 Alumni Mall, on Nov. 2, 2019. The survivor and suspect were acquaintances, and both are Virginia Tech students."<sup>24</sup> This is the standard notification given by Virginia Tech any time a crime is reported. Once again, the survivor and suspect are students of Virginia Tech, but, given that the crime occurred in a cadet dorm, at least one of them must have been in the Corps.

There may be legal reasons behind Virginia Tech's bare-bones message that the *Collegiate Times* may not be beholden to. However, the point still stands that student and institutional reports are vastly different, and that the less information given to the public, the better it looks for the school—and for the Corps.

No matter who you are, the experiences women in Virginia Tech's Corps of Cadets have affect you. This hush-hush culture, which is protected and

therefore encouraged by the greater institution, is not unique to the Corps of Cadets; it exists in other male-dominated spaces on campus (such as fraternities) and off.

Instilling fear and forcing silence upon others in these spaces begins much earlier than college. In November of 2022, a hearing was held before the House of Representatives. The occasion?

“A *New York Times* investigation concluded that within the past five years JROTC instructors have been criminally charged with sexual misconduct involving students at a rate that is, quote, ‘far higher than the rate of civilian high school teachers.’ The investigation also found that many other JROTC instructors have been accused of misconduct but never charged.”<sup>25</sup>

Because this behavior is not completely exposed and stamped out in college, a time for trial and error and growth, who is supposed to keep it from occurring and being covered up on a corporate level? Only highlighting the positives of programs, and therefore omitting their flaws, makes it less likely for victims of discrimination to come forward. It diminishes trust and makes addressing problems taboo, so that victims who report incidents of gender-based (or other forms of) violence must be brave to do so. For this reason, it is all the more sinister that Virginia Tech, both as an institution and as a student body, has avoided tackling the issue publicly.

So, what can be done about it? First, institutions should be honest and transparent about incidents and difficulties faced by their students. This will encourage them to come forward and discourage perpetrators from continuing their behavior. The accountability taken by the institution will not only change the mindset and outlook for the student body, but can expand the support system for those affected. This is what this book intends to do.

Secondly, the institution should take into consideration the perspectives of affected students. Evidence shows that many of the problems that were ignored, such as possible female overcompensation in the Corps, persisted through the years. Identifying and accepting the culture and climate of the Corps is the first step in changing it.

We cannot allow history to be erased, lest it be forgotten and the hardships, lost to time, repeated and perpetuated. Allowing a cycle of abuse to go unno-

ticed is to consign it, to ensure it will continue, so that those who might otherwise have come forward do not. When a victim's voice is snuffed out before they can even speak, how can we know to protect them? Who will protect your loved ones? Who will protect you?

It is important to note that the leaders and members of the Corps are people like everyone else. This means that they make mistakes and have flaws too—except, because of their pedestal, their misdeeds would be scrutinized so severely that maybe Tech felt they were better erased instead.

We can appreciate that Virginia Tech has to walk a fine line when dealing with sensitive matters, and it is easy to overcompensate and consequently make mistakes anyway. This is true of any institute, particularly ones that are as old as Tech and have undergone as many generational and societal growing pains. However, pretending these incidents never happened and that Virginia Tech has been perfect since its inception is a lie, one which puts undue pressure on victims to uphold their school's image. This is especially the case when they are part of a self-labeled 'family' or 'brotherhood' during a time in their lives when they are most vulnerable and alone. Virginia Tech has a responsibility to the women whom they both laud and advertise. Neither Tech nor the Corps of Cadets need another publicist, but they *can* afford a few critics.

It is also important to note that we do not attempt to speak for anyone or to misrepresent any experiences coeds had. To do so would be hypocritical. Women cadets who attended Virginia Tech at the same time could have had vastly different experiences—and they did. Patience Larkin graduated just one year before Denise Shuster. Larkin said of her time in the Corps: “Before the Tailhook scandal,<sup>26</sup> sexual harassment was not addressed, in the Corps or in the active military. Many males had 'girlie' posters up in their rooms, raunchy jodies were sung, etc. So, to fit in and not be singled out was difficult, we ladies put up with that kind of stuff during those years.”<sup>27</sup> In comparison, Shuster felt “incredibly fortunate to feel welcomed in the Corps from day one. I never had the experience of feeling somehow different because I was a woman.”

This chapter may appear to have cherry-picked the worst incidents and ignored the good; we are not arguing that there is not much good about joining the Corps of Cadets. They have a rich history, exciting opportunities, and

create a sense of camaraderie felt by all on campus. Rather, we wish to highlight its faults, as Laura Jane Harper had, to memorialize those who were forgotten and protect those who will come.

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## 5. Cover Those Midsections

### *The Struggle Over Bodies, Conduct, and Sexuality During the Long Sixties at Virginia Tech*

KAYLIE DUTY

While dining halls are for chowing down and socializing, the students at Virginia Tech in 1968 were using them to fight back against the disproportionate and uncompromising dress code regulations for women on campus. With so many strong opinions circulating through the country in the late 1960s, it is not surprising that we saw cries for change just like this one at Virginia Tech. At this time the driving force behind the social movements of the era—from civil rights to antiwar protests to women’s liberation to the counterculture—was the younger generation, more specifically college students. Young people everywhere were fighting for significant cultural and social change, and where would be a better place to practice free speech and civil disobedience than a college campus?

College campuses all over the nation were home to many acts of protest and demonstrations, all because this younger generation of people wanted not only to make change, but to be the change. It didn’t come all that easy for college students during the 1960s, especially since there was some resistance coming from older generations who wanted to keep things the way they had always been. When it came to being on campus, there were quite a few rules that interfered with students’ personal lives, most of which overstepped many boundaries. Why exactly were the universities in America—including Virginia Tech—dictating their students’ dress codes and social interactions? And why, in particular, were female students the targets of so many of them?

Virginia Tech can sometimes be a few years behind widespread trends and cultural shifts. Nevertheless, it appears that during the 1960s Tech students were well aware of the issues and changes happening throughout the country. Most movements were happening nationwide, which meant that each cause required contributions from many different places to form the entire movement. Even at Virginia Tech, students did their part to participate in a

range of these efforts, including the sexual revolution. There is a clear indication that the bodies, conduct, and sexuality of women on campus during the Sixties were policed far more than those of their male counterparts. Primary source documents from the University Archives paints a rather interesting portrait of how students participated in the sexual revolution during this decade by breaking rules and pushing boundaries.

Rather than making sure that all students were aware of their bodies as well as their personal boundaries, the University instilled numerous rules and regulations upon its female students to limit their sexual expression.<sup>1</sup> There was a common feeling of frustration among young people across the country over their lack of power to determine the contours of their sexual geography, a term that pertains to the relationship of comfortability and the space around a person.<sup>2</sup> After leaving home and going away to college, students found it difficult to set the terms of their sexual geography when so many rules and regulations regulated their every move. It was hard to explore and experience new things on campus, both of which are very important to set boundaries as a young college student.

While attitudes about sex were based on moral opinions and traditional values, the younger generation hoped they could change things up and put a little less shame on sexual interactions. The sexual revolution of the 1960s targeted the existing morals and attitudes towards sex, no matter one's age or marital status.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the 1960s, young people everywhere wanted to change the minds of the older generation, by showing them they didn't have to have such a prudish view of sex and sexual related activities. But, like other universities of the time, Virginia Tech resisted the sexual revolution and policed the sexual geography of its students in a range of ways, from the clothing students wore on campus, to who they spent time with after curfew.<sup>4</sup> So how exactly did the difference in policing of the students from Virginia Tech during the 1960s play a role in the sexual revolution and its attack on traditional opinions about sex and gender?

The sexual revolution wasn't just about running around and sleeping with whomever one pleased; there was a deeper societal meaning that would sweep across college campuses. Historian Beth Bailey states that the sexual revolution "grew from tensions between public and private—not only from tensions manifested in public culture, but also from tensions between private behaviors and the public rules and ideologies that were meant to govern

behavior” During this time, society still viewed women as the lesser sex, which meant that men held higher status in pretty much every social situation. Men had premarital sex with women of lower status because the “good girls” were the ones good enough for marriage. This is exactly what the sexual revolution combatted: the disproportionate views society had about sex in terms of gender. Women were done taking the backseat while making sure they were presentable enough to be marriage material.<sup>5</sup>

With traditional gender roles being attacked across the nation in “scandalous” ways, Virginia Tech operated “*in loco parentis*” meaning “in the place of a parent.”<sup>6</sup> While the university wanted its students to present themselves in a distinguished manner, it also wanted to keep its students safe at all times. By acting *In loco parentis*, Virginia Tech tried to enforce as many rules as possible to keep its students safe while also holding them to the highest social and moral standards. Unfortunately, by taking on this supervisory role, the university was more excessive with the rules for the women than they were for the men. By speaking up and fighting back against the copious numbers of rules for the women on campus, students participated in their own sexual revolution against their overbearing parent, Virginia Tech.

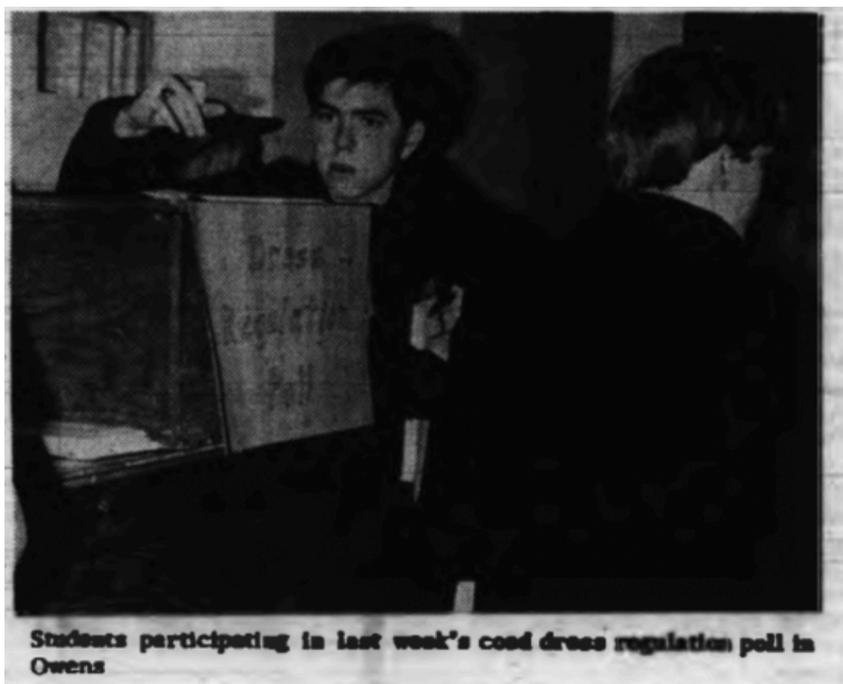
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When it gets warm outside, students enjoy dressing comfortably to relax outside, what harm could have come from wearing simple summer attire. On March 31, 1967, the vice president of student affairs, James W. Dean, sent a letter to a Miss Rita Nott that referenced the new rules that would be in place for the outdoor region behind Hillcrest Hall, a women’s dormitory. The letter states that the university had approved a sunbathing area outside of Hillcrest for the women who lived there, but also delineated rules that the women needed to follow in order to keep this newly gained privilege. The letter advised that the women wear either one-piece or a two-piece swimsuits that covered their mid-section (abdomen), and it specifically stated that no bikinis were allowed.<sup>7</sup> Modern-day college students would not dream of asking permission to go outside and get a little sun, let alone ask permission to wear a certain article of clothing. It raises the question of why the Vice-President of Student Affairs sent out memos about bathing suit regulations for female students? The exact same letter was sent out to the President of Eggleston House, another women’s dormitory, the same day, although this

letter was sent by the university's Dean of Women, Martha Harder. The letter states that the area behind Main Eggleston Hall would be a designated sunbathing area, "effective immediately", which is exactly what the letter discussing the area outside of Hillcrest Hall said, however this letter had an extra slice of information. Martha Harder asked if the House Council as well as the Resident Assistants could "help watch the situation and impress upon the girls that it is now up to them as to whether they should keep with privilege or not."<sup>8</sup> This shows that the purpose of these letters was to make sure all of the Residence Assistants were aware of this new policy, and that they would make sure all rules were upheld.

When strolling through a college campus today, there would be tons of students hanging around outside soaking up the sun. But in 1968, whether or not students were wearing summer attire, trying to work on their tan, or simply getting some vitamin D, Virginia Tech found a way to intervene in their social matters. It is fascinating that the women on campus during the 1960s had to be cautious about what they wore on a nice day, just because the university wanted to uphold its proper dress code. There seemed to be no written rules about sunbathing on campus until these letters were sent out to each of the women's dormitories. The comments on the attire were the most striking because not once did they mention a designated dress code or a different area to sunbathe for male students on campus. While male students were free to wear whatever bathing suit they pleased in whatever area of campus they wanted, female students were constrained to the areas behind their dormitories.<sup>9</sup>

These letters were clearly a response to behavior that campus administrators opposed, whether it was how women dressed or where they chose to sunbathe. And even those the new codes granted students had this new "freedom," they still had to follow rules and regulations if they wanted to keep this "privilege."<sup>10</sup> To keep the right to lay out and catch some rays, the women on campus had to follow the rules exactly as they were stated. Part of following the rules and being on their best behavior was making sure they did not display their bodies in a sexual manner nor draw attention from male students. University administrators thought if they gave the women the privilege then there would be no need for any further uproar, but the administrators were still going to get their way by policing social activities down to the clothing on students' bodies.



*"Students participating in last week's coed dress regulation poll in Owens." Photo credit: "Free Dress Movement' At Tech Sees Generally Favorable Opinion." The Virginia Tech. January 17, 1968, VOL. LXIV edition, sec. No. 24.*

By the late 1960s, it did not take much to start up a small uproar of student activism on a college campus, especially if it was something everyone agreed with. During the lunch hours of January 11, 1968, another situation occurred regarding the dress code but this time it involved the buildings on campus. A group of four students—B.W. Lawton, Robert D. Meredith, Cecil Pettus, and Jane Baldwin—had established the “Free Dress Movement.” These students distributed about “370 questionnaires on the lower quad and 100 on the upper quad” with concerns about the student dress regulations set forth in the university’s Student Life Policies. On this questionnaire were four “yes or no” questions, two of which centered around the policies regarding women. The questions read, “Was the section on dress in the Student Life Policies satisfactory? Should women have the right to wear slacks or shorts in academic buildings at any time? Should women students have the right to wear slacks or shorts in the dining halls at any time?” The final question asked, “Should students use their own judgment concerning dress?” These students wanted the freedom to dress however they wanted on campus, and they

wanted to make sure that administrators heard their opinions, and those of the rest of the student population.<sup>11</sup>

There seemed to be no wiggle room when it came to the dress code at Virginia Tech, it was either one extreme or the other. “Students entering the dining halls are required to dress appropriately; i.e., shirts, trousers, shoes, socks for men; skirts, blouses, etc. for women. Female students will not wear shorts on campus. Females may wear slacks on campus as approved by the Office of the Dean of Students during inclement weather.” The freedom to dress comfortably or however you please is something that everyone should have, especially college students. This section of the Student Life Policies was the main cause of the “Free Dress Movement”, and about fifty-five percent of the students who received questionnaires also had concerns about the dress code.<sup>12</sup> The first thought I had when reading this dress code was, why is there one sentence worth of rules for men and three aimed towards women? The dress code was obviously disproportionate in the fact that the men could wear whatever they pleased as long as they were covered, while the women had to travel across the seven seas just to get the approval to wear slacks, weather permitting. So why was it that the women were forced to cover up when sunbathing, but they had to ask permission to wear pants around campus?

During the 1960s, good student conduct was more than just abiding by the dress code; what students did on and off campus during their free time represented not only the student but the university as well. When students did not uphold good conduct, they were disciplined however the university saw fit. At the same time, there seemed to be a difference in the monitoring of the students in their free time. In the early morning hours of February 3, 1968, Mr. Dwight Waverly Smith, a student, was found in his car with a female student from a neighboring school; both students were “in a state of undress.” This incident resulted in Smith receiving a letter from J. Gordon Brown, Dean of Men at Virginia Tech, that informed Smith he would be put on disciplinary probation for breaking the Student Life Policies, and if he wanted to be removed from this probation then he would have to write a letter requesting his removal. This was the normal procedure if a student was caught breaking the rules on campus. However, it’s what the Dean of Men said to Smith in the letter that I find the most interesting. The Dean stated that he hoped Smith

had learned from his mistakes and that the incident would help him become a better person and student.<sup>13</sup>

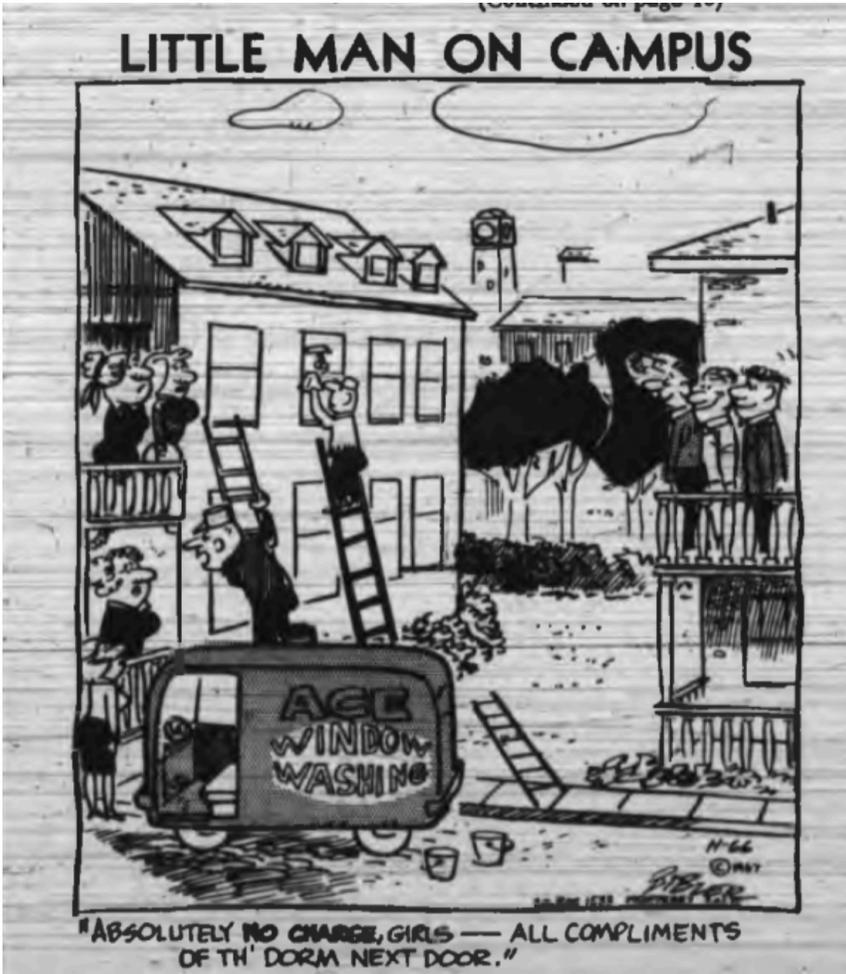
While Smith received words of encouragement, however, female students were being monitored very closely by their Resident Assistants. On February 21, 1968, for example, just weeks after Mr. Smith's incident, Miss Sue Cash received a letter from the Dean of Women, Martha Harder. Harder stated that Cash was nowhere to be found on the night of February 17, 1968, and had been located later that night by her roommate in Blacksburg. According to the letter, the two students returned to Hillcrest Hall around 11:00 pm, and then Cash left again around 1:00 am without signing out or telling anyone about her departure. The second time she left, she headed all the way to Alexandria, Virginia, to visit her parents.<sup>14</sup> In today's college setting, there is no signing out to run around Blacksburg or even to go home and visit loved ones, but female students in the 1960s had a whole different set of rules. One could say that the signing in and out of the dormitory was for the women's safety, but no one stopped Cash on her way out, and authorities only disciplined her after the incident occurred.

There was a clear difference in how the university handled the situations of Sue Cash and Dwight Waverly Smith. While authorities caught each student in the early morning hours doing something that violated student conduct, the letter to Cash was way longer held more strikes against her than the letter to Smith, reflecting the simple fact that the women had more rules to abide by on campus. The written reprimand Cash received instructed her to sign out if she was going somewhere and to be back in her dormitory by a certain time. The Dean of Women mentioned that she also had an issue with the fact that Cash had been with a man the entire evening.<sup>15</sup> If the curfew and signing-out rules were intended to keep the women safe, the emphasis on Cash's male company raised the question of what female students were to be kept safe from. Interestingly, the letter to Smith made no mention of breaking curfew or signing out, and rather than coming down hard on the rules to be followed, gave him warm wishes and a way to get himself out of the mess he had created.<sup>16</sup> Both male and female students had to write to the Dean to be moved off of disciplinary probation, but was it the same circumstances that put them there?

While the disciplinary probation cases differ, both students were held to the same standards when it came to getting themselves out of trouble. Never-

theless, there was a big difference in circumstances as to which the two students would be receive disciplinary probation. This is seen within the dress code rules, as well as the curfew rules that were put in place in the women's dormitories. There was a much higher chance of female students like Cash getting into trouble because she had to follow so many more rules than male students like Smith had to. It seems as if the two students had the same plans for the evenings: they were out on the town, each student had a date, and neither one of them wanted to stay on campus. This is where there is heavier policing on the women on campus, because Smith never had to sign out of his dormitory, he was caught by coincidence. There is no question as to whether or not Cash was going to be caught that night, because there was always someone hot on her tail due to all of the rules that were in place for the female students.

The student newspaper provides repeated examples of men who got to act however they wanted while women had a laundry list of rules to follow. In an article published in *The Virginia Tech* titled, "Gobbling scoreboard, floats prevail at H'coming '68," author Archie Roark wrote about the homecoming floats in 1968. One specific float seemed to exemplify the sexual geography at Virginia Tech during this time, and that float belonged to Pritchard Hall. In 1968, Pritchard was an all-male dormitory and the way that the float was decorated made that fact apparent. The 1968 homecoming theme was "It's a Changing University," and Roark stated that "Pritchard tried to steal the show by running a striptease version." The float included women's clothing draped over a privacy dressing screen – and not just any kind of clothing, but specifically "brassieres and panties."<sup>17</sup> If the women on campus had displayed this type of float, there is no telling as to what kind of fuss the University would have made. However, these were the distinguished men of Virginia Tech, so no one thought to bat an eye towards this demonstration of scandalous behavior.



"Little Man on Campus." Photo credit: "Little Man on Campus." The Virginia Tech. October 16, 1968, Vol. LXV edition, sec. No

"Boys will be boys" is a common saying, however is it a proper excuse for offensive behavior? Staying within the realm of the student newspaper, there was a rather objectifying comic from the same week as the Archie Roark article. The comic depicted a window washing company cleaning the windows on the female dormitory, while men watched from the neighboring residence. It was titled *Little Man on Campus*, which makes sense with the caption that read, "Absolutely **no charge** girls—all compliments of th' dorm next door."<sup>18</sup> In the cartoon the men stared with cheeky grins while the women looked a bit uncomfortable, making it clear that a boundary had been

crossed. When comparing the two pieces from the 1968 Homecoming edition of the student newspaper, there is a distinct difference between the way that the university expected men and women to behave. While women watched what they wore and reported where they were going, men were almost encouraged to behave however they pleased, even if it involved portraying women as sexual objects.

While the university enforced dress code and disciplinary probation at an high rate for its female students, the moral opinions of the administrators were showcased behind the scenes. Normally the university is not supposed to get involved with a student's personal life unless they pose a threat to their own life or someone else's.<sup>19</sup> However, on May 11, 1967, Martha Harder, Dean of Women, sent a letter to Dr. T. Marshall Hahn, Jr., that interjected herself into the personal lives of two female students. This letter is about two female students who had interracial relationships with local Blacksburg men: Sue Cash was the White student and Freddie Hairston was the Black student. Each woman was dating a man of the opposite race. In her letter, Harder stated that while there were no rules against interracial dating, she found it necessary to give the girls her unsolicited advice. She advised the girls that "they could find themselves completely ostracized from other women students."<sup>20</sup> This is a direct reflection of Harder's own morals on interracial dating, and raises the question of why, if there were no rules against it, why even bring it up to the students?

The involvement of the university with the personal lives of its female students in the 1960s can be considered a bit overbearing, almost like a helicopter parent, except the University had no obligation to be these students' parental figures. When Martha Harder interjected her own opinions onto Sue Cash and Freddie Hairston, she likely did not think of herself as intruding on their sexual identities. This ties back in with Virginia Tech's policy of "*in loco parentis*." As an institution, Tech felt responsible for everything their students were involved in, including their romantic lives. In a modern sense, since this is way too far, Harder couched her letter as just trying to steer the girls "in the right direction".

It seems as if the university had created rules just to intervene in their students' personal lives, while also simultaneously respecting them by not sharing private information. This is the second time we see Sue Cash come up with issues involving school policies, however there were no rules broken

this time. That's why this piece of information proves to be very interesting, because it presents a record of the university putting its nose where it didn't belong, in its students' personal sex lives. Harder even mentioned that she was conflicted on whether or not to tell the girls' parents, but decided that it would break the rules pertaining to the preservation of private information.<sup>21</sup> We see this in the first letter addressed to Miss Cash, where Harder ostracized her twice for her own personal life decisions that the university should have had no part in. There could have been an easier way for the university to go about this "incident", however it went with heavy policing and a stern conversation.

It's clear that campus authorities watched over their female students every second of the day, while male students were free to do whatever they pleased with just a few simple rules to follow. This case of interracial dating can be seen as a violation to student privacy as well as a violation to sexual freedom amongst the female students at Virginia Tech during the 1960s. It is safe to say that many female students did not adventure sexually as much as they could have in their college years. With so many rules prohibiting them, there was not much room to stretch in terms of intimacy. Yet, we can use the interracial dating situation to see the sexual revolution's side of things. Both students knew that they would be getting some unwanted opinions, not just because of the Universities long list of regulations. The time of the civil rights movement, and the questioning of values that had existed for many years. Martha Harder interjected herself in the personal and sexual lives of these students because of her own moral opinions towards sex and race.<sup>22</sup>

Words can spread fast, especially when there is a shared unhappiness about a common situation. Each university prides itself on its students, and there is no pride to be shown if your students aren't up to the university's standards. If they couldn't make it a rule, then they would find some way to involve themselves in an "educational" way to have influence on their students. This is seen in the dress code that required students to dress modestly, as well as in the disciplinary probation letters which expected students to act cordially. Both of these situations were based on the rules that the university enforced year after year, which means that there was always going to be a little hesitation when breaking these rules. With interracial dating, the school didn't know where it could use its power to influence these students. Both students were aware of the choices they made and knew they were not breaking

any university policies<sup>23</sup> by expressing and exploring their sexual identities. The boundaries were being pushed just like they were with the “Free Dress Movement,”<sup>24</sup> because there were no rules on questioning the opinions of their peers. Each student thought they should have the freedom to be whatever they wanted even if that meant wearing a different style of clothing from time to time.

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Virginia Tech students of the late 1960s understood that Student Life Policies infringed upon their personal rights and sexual autonomy. There is still a question on whether or not they picked up on the fact that the university policed women way heavier than men, but they could tell that there was something wrong with the amount of social and sexual freedom the university granted. The students had little to no control over their own bodies, conduct, or sexuality while they were in school, and they wanted to see change. Unfortunately, it is hard to completely riot when there is an education on the line, and the university made it incredibly difficult for women to break rules and not be punished. Still, even with all of the restrictions, students found a way to show that they were displeased, in ways that highlighted their understanding that the university policed female students far more than their male counterparts.

It seems a bit odd that these students were being confined to the standards of the administration when people preach that college is about finding out who you are. However, this was a new way of thinking in the 1960s. With “*in loco parentis*”<sup>25</sup> running rampant throughout campus during a time of dramatic social and sexual change, students had no other choice but to participate in the sexual revolution. While the men on campus were free to express themselves and their opinions, female students were under so many rules that it was almost like the witness protection program. Virginia Tech was in desperate need of a sexual revolution, there needed to be more education and leeway for students to feel equal and have better opportunities of creating their own sexual geographies. There were no slacks to be seen when women were walking around campus, and they wouldn’t have even gotten out of the door to try to break the rules, because they had to sign out. Each student at Virginia Tech during the late 1960s just wanted to be free and be themselves, and if they were men then this could be accomplished, however

if they were women, they were probably worrying about keeping their mid-sections covered.

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# 6. (Queer) Pride and Prejudice at Virginia Tech

ROSA MATA

I am disgusted!! Not so much against the people who initiated Denim Day, but more against those who took it so seriously. . . . It will be a cold day in hell before I let a gay or anyone else influence my dress.<sup>1</sup>

These were some of the responses that queer folks were met with after Denim Day in 1979. During the week of January 15–19, the Virginia Tech Gay Student Alliance held the first Gay Awareness Week, a multi-event effort to promote awareness of gay and lesbian people throughout campus. The high point was Denim Day, which called on all students, faculty, and staff to show their support of gay rights by wearing denim.<sup>2</sup>

Queer folks have long been a part of our society, and it is no surprise that they have existed in a heteronormative space like Virginia Tech. As the years have progressed, the queer community has overcome adversity at Virginia Tech, but, as this essay's opening quote suggests, their state of simply existing was met with backlash in the past.

The concepts of gender and sexuality have often been used in the same context when discussing homophobia. It is important, however, to differentiate between the two. Gender has been defined by the social constructs of being male or female as expressed by cultural distinctions and differences, rather than biological ones. Meanwhile, sexuality has been defined as a person's sexual preference and/or orientation. There can be an intersection of the two, and both affect the sexual citizenship of said person. Jennifer Hirsch's and Shamus Khan's book *Sexual Citizens* (2020), which examines the causes of sexual assault on college campuses, makes it clear that sexual minorities are unsafe in heteronormative environments. An intersection of queerness and sexual citizenship should thus be explored.

The time periods I will analyze were both periods of importance for LBGTQ+ movements. In the 1980s, the gay community was met with the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States, which came with harmful assumptions about

the community. In the early 2000s, both gay marriage and sodomy laws were on the voting block, both important for the civil rights of such members. I will be analyzing the 1980s and the early 2000s and what they meant for queer folks at Virginia Tech. Using collegiate newspapers and oral histories, I will be answering the following questions: How were homophobic sentiments in the 1980s and the 2000s reflective of the sexual culture at Virginia Tech? How did the HIV/AIDS epidemic affect queer people at Virginia Tech? How did an era of conservatism affect queer folks at Virginia Tech in the 2000s, and how did it alienate their sexual identity? Finally, what has been Virginia Tech's response, through both time periods?

Universities are often places where students pursue self-exploration, and this can include sexuality or gender identity. Given the ongoing historical, if closeted or unrecognized, existence of queer men and women, one can safely assume that the presence of queer folks at Virginia Tech can be traced back to the establishment of the university. Crucial to understanding queer experience at Virginia Tech is the concept of sexual geographies. Sexual geographies can be defined as the spaces through which people move that are essential to understanding both sex and sexual assault. Access to space and control over who can and cannot enter that space is a critical way power works. And power is critical for understanding assault.<sup>3</sup> Queer students, like their straight counterparts, were entitled to the concept of sexual citizenship and safe sexual geographies in the 1980s.

The 1980s was a time of much historical importance for queer people, even outside of Virginia Tech. In this time period, gay men were profoundly affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Since early victims were predominantly gay men, the stigma attached to homosexuality in medical, governing, law enforcement, and ecclesiastical institutions became a barrier to understanding, prevention, and treatment.<sup>4</sup> These sentiments were also present at Virginia Tech.

The concept of Denim Day was created by the queer community to celebrate and raise awareness among people that identified with the LGBTQIA+ community. Denim Day went past the act of simply wearing jeans but provided an opportunity to show pride and allyship. The first Denim Day was hosted in 1979<sup>5</sup> as a part of the first "Gay Awareness Week" (shortly before the AIDS epidemic began). It is said that only dozens out of the 20,000 people on cam-

pus decided to wear denim as a sign of support. This first statistic serves as a lens through which one can see the sexual geography at the time.

The backlash for Denim Day occurred almost instantly, as some of the student body did carry homophobic attitudes with them. “The dorm should be painted pink making it easily recognized and avoided by people of the ‘normal lifestyle.’ Maybe a better solution is for the gays to just stay in the closet and consider themselves lucky,”<sup>6</sup> wrote Gary Bray, a freshman at Virginia Tech in 1979. Bray’s letter to the *Collegiate Times* gives us an example of heterosexual students trying to control the campus’ sexual geography, in this case through intimidation. The power of sexual spaces went to the individuals who controlled it (heterosexuals at Virginia Tech), and heterosexuality felt like it was threatened.

Many students tried to make it a point that denim was not to be used to display pride and allyship.



*Students at Virginia Tech wore skirts as a form of retaliation against Denim Day. By refusing to wear denim jeans, they opted to wear skirts to show that they did not support the queer community on campus. Photo credit: Minton, Randy. “Gay Day Draws Record Response,” *Collegiate Times*. Jan. 19, 1979*

“We feel [the heterosexual students] that it is not fair to play on people’s preference to wear denim. Observation of students will show that a very large percent normally wear denim and, therefore it is unfair to assume that those students wearing denim are gay or are in support of gay rights. . . . Let

it be known that we, the undersigned, and most other normal people, do not support G.S.A., and will not recognize a denim day, therefore, will continue to wear our jeans.”<sup>7</sup> These students felt as if the claim on denim was unfair; further, the claim on Virginia Tech was unfair. Some even protested Denim Day by wearing skirts or corduroy instead. By going out of their way to wear skirts, they expressed that they were not interested in actively supporting an event that brought awareness to queer lives. Instead, they mocked the queer community by wearing skirts as a way to insinuate that gay men were not real men.

As the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) attempted to create a day where people were aware of the problems that gay people encounter, it was not embraced by Virginia Tech’s administration. Negative reactions to Denim Day in 1979, inspired pushback the following year. In 1980, the Gay Student Alliance was denied permission to sponsor Denim Day by the Commission on Student Affairs. The chairman of the Commission told the CSA that he would fight the Gay Student Alliance’s efforts to sponsor Denim Day that year. Chairman James Dean noted he received “25,000 pieces of mail opposing Denim Day” and that it took him “5-6 weeks to answer all of it.”<sup>8</sup> As we analyze the previous patterns, it is no surprise that the GSA was simply told to pray for their oppressors in response to this negativity. The Virginia Tech administration subsequently banned the Gay Student Alliance from meeting on campus, further claiming the sexual geography to be heterosexual.<sup>9</sup> The support from the university seemed to be performative in this sense as there were limitations to their support.

For gay people to exist or even feel supported at Virginia Tech, they had to look elsewhere for a sense of welcomeness at their university. Tom Bronson was a student at Virginia Tech who had to face the harsh realities of being a gay man in Blacksburg during the early 1980s. He decided to speak on his experiences as a gay man and the community responded in a violent manner. As many college students do, he went to the bar for a fun night out. As he was dancing with his friend, Bronson had the police called on him and his friend because they were two men. Bronson recalls that the only other person he remembers being out was murdered and castrated, as his genitalia was found in his mouth. Bronson himself was also attacked by a group of cadets and had his tires slashed. “In retrospect, it was a brutal time. . . . There wasn’t any place, you could go to Greenwich Village, or you could go to

Dupont Circle, San Francisco, and find places and you could maybe feel comfortable but even there it was hidden and it was secretive.”<sup>10</sup> The accounts of one gay student give us insight into what life could have been like every day for local members of the gay community. Despite these hardships, Bronson recounted his time at Virginia Tech overall as good because of the positive friendships he made along the way.<sup>11</sup> As we listen to the stories that Bronson told, we are reminded of the real dangers that people of the queer community could have faced in Blacksburg during this time. Yet, Bronson still found hope and love through times of hardship.

During this period, the gay male community suffered greatly because of the AIDS epidemic. As a community that was going through great losses, they were still not being supported by their educational institutions. As a portion of Virginia Tech’s student population suffered through an epidemic, nothing was done directly by Virginia Tech to raise awareness and prevention. Lambda Horizons (a student organization not sanctioned by Virginia Tech) was one of the only organizations actively informing gay individuals about sexual safety. The lack of organizations or representation at the time tells us about the sexual geography on campus. “It really impressed me how it seemed that Lambda Horizon formed, and then they jumped into AIDS education. It was formed, and by its charter, it seemed like a group to get a positive image and a social group. Then I guess because the AIDS situation was so serious, and they just felt that they had to— They did this strong work in advocacy, I guess because of that.”<sup>12</sup> The fact that gay students were not accepted on campus by the administrative university and were not given clear guidance on safe sex until 1986, tells us who controlled the sexual geography in the 1980s, and how it could affect gay individuals in the years to come.

Lambda Horizons was a space where the gay community could be informed, yet it did not mean the university supported them. In 1986, Lambda Horizons hosted the “Virginia Tech AIDS Education Forum” in McBryde Hall.<sup>13</sup> Lambda Horizons brought experts and patients from around the country to discuss the virus and how it was transmitted. The forum highlighted that once you contracted this virus, the thing to do was to await death. According to Mark Weber, a Lambda Horizons organizer, “the university was supportive of us doing this effort, and at the same time, the university was concerned that we were bringing people with HIV AIDS here. They were worried there would be

some kind of emergency accident and we were required to have ambulances stationed outside of McBryde during this forum.”<sup>14</sup> As Lambda Horizons transitioned its space back onto campus, they provided this forum and it was a service to the university, yet the prejudice still lingered.

As we set the scene of the 2000s, we often hear the phrase “It is the twenty-first century,” alluding to the modernity of the times, to say that we as a society are more accepting. However, we must acknowledge that the early 2000s was a period where conservatism was the mainstream culture. As the legality of gay marriage was on the horizon, we saw conservative pushback and it was very present, even at Virginia Tech. In 2003, Virginia still outlawed certain consensual sexual behavior between adults for “crimes against nature.” Code section 18.2-361 defines participating in anal or oral sex as a class six felony.<sup>15</sup> As this law invaded the privacy of Virginians, it provided law enforcement with a means to abuse their position.<sup>16</sup> This law can serve as a premise for homophobic policies, further solidifying the conservative scene, not only in Virginia Tech but in Virginia as a whole. Looking at policies such as these, we are reminded that colleges and universities are not magically progressive with time, but rather with effort.

The level of homophobia present on campus did not only affect students but faculty too. In the fall of 2002, Shelli Fowler and Karen DePauw became victims of this dynamic. Virginia Tech had recruited Karen DePauw to become the new dean of the Graduate School. Karen DePauw was Virginia Tech’s first openly lesbian administrator. They also took into account that her partner, Shelli Fowler, had previous experience in the English Department at Washington State University and they decided to offer her a tenure-track position. It was assumed that after the job offer, the Board of Visitors would rubber-stamp the tenure and approve; however, the Board refused to offer Fowler a tenure-track position. In this process, Fowler and DePauw were subject to homophobia in a very threatening email. “Danny- the guy who was killed in 2000 at the park in Roanoke. I forget his last name, but Danny was, I believe, his first name. It sent a little link to that story and said that this would happen to you if you come here.”<sup>17</sup> DePauw was referring to Danny Overstreet, who was murdered in a hate crime in Roanoke. Overstreet was targeted, along with others, because of his sexuality. The perpetrator opened fire in a space that was for queer people, and this threat toward Fowler and DePauw was

very direct.<sup>18</sup> Fowler and DePauw serve as prime examples of the conservative agenda that was alive and well in the early 2000s.

Throughout the 2000s, queer students on campus were not even safe in the only space that they could call “theirs”— their dorm rooms. In attempting to provide an effective “Roommate Intervention Strategy,” Virginia Tech distributed a handout that can now be classified as problematic. As a part of the general considerations for “straight” students, the handout stated the following:

1. Do not underestimate the intensity of their emotions. Remember the college age group is in the process of establishing their sexual identity. The presence of gay can be extremely threatening
2. Demonstrate acceptance of their feelings but gently challenge their beliefs. Role model appropriate behavior, language, and feelings.<sup>19</sup>

In a space where they were supposed to spend so much of their time (while at Virginia Tech), queer students were stereotyped and ostracized because they were seen as “threatening.” As the university attempted to provide a handout to benefit the queer students living on campus, it ultimately failed.

In the Spring of 2003, the LGBTQ+ campus community was met with a surprising decision by the Board of Visitors. The Board of Visitors removed sexual orientation from the university’s anti-discrimination policy, claiming that Virginia Tech simply complied with federal and state laws. “The Tech administration was also shocked by the Board’s decisions,” the administration claimed. In addition, two national anti-affirmative action groups, the Center for Equal Opportunity and the American Civil Rights Institute, filed a complaint with the federal Department of Education’s Office. Both organizations claimed that Virginia Tech (among other universities) has administrative policies granting unfair preference to racial and ethnic groups.<sup>20</sup> “It is baffling that Virginia Tech insists on continuing to run racially exclusive programs,”<sup>21</sup> said Linda Chavez, the president of the Center of Equal Opportunity. “We were pleased when the BOV voted to stop using racial and ethnic preferences,”<sup>22</sup> said Roger Clegg, the general counsel for the Center of Equal Opportunity. Not only was Virginia Tech now allowing discrimination to roam free in the context of sexual orientation, but it was also cutting back opportunities for people that were racially and ethnically diverse. These

policies are important to highlight because it further solidified the sexual geography of the university to remain white and heterosexual.



*Protestors marching against the controversial decision of the Board of Visitors in 2003. Photo credit: Byron, Kennerly. Collegiate Times, SSPS, Mar. 14, 2004.*

Virginia Tech's decision on both policies was met with denunciation from politicians, political organizers, faculty, and students. It was understood that every appointee to the University's Board of Visitors was expected to operate with the best interests of the university at the forefront of their mind,<sup>23</sup> yet the university failed to do so. "I am extremely concerned about the policies adopted earlier this week by Virginia Tech's Board of Visitors. . . . The benefits of diversity and equal opportunity are especially important on the campuses of Virginia's colleges and universities,"<sup>24</sup> said Governor Mark Warner. Approximately 500 protestors were angry about this decision and took their concerns to the steps of Burruss Hall. "I'm disgusted, but I'm not tired. . . . I'll fight to the end to defend my basic rights," said Nicole James, president of the black graduate student organization.<sup>25</sup> After everyone had spoken many of the protestors stormed the president's office in Burruss Hall. The anger sparked by these policies showed that the sexual geography of Virginia Tech was changing, and there were desperate grabs to stop it from evolving into a shared space.

Incidents that negatively affected the queer community in the 2000s often prompted organization and activism. In 2005, the LGBTQA office was vandalized as someone decided to glue bible pages to the door. “They ripped the Bible pages out that had those verses in them and glued them to our door and highlighted or circled the passages, and they took a sharpie and wrote on the door ‘God hates fags’ ‘Fags burn in hell’ ‘You’re going to hell’ and all that stuff. So I mean that was real vandalism that had to be scrubbed off the door and the Bible pages were glued so people had to scrape the glue off and stuff. The university didn’t respond to it.”<sup>26</sup> The queer community did not stay silent about this issue; they organized and demanded action. They started the “Give a Damn” campaign where they had students from all over campus submit stories of incidents of bias against them. “And we delivered them all to the administration being like, look at all these different things that your current students have happened to them.”<sup>27</sup> This incident eventually led to the creation of the SafeWatch program at Virginia Tech. According to their proposal, Safewatch was to help provide an immediate and effective response to a reported violation. Safewatch was also to encourage engagement within the community.<sup>28</sup> As the privacy of queer people were threatened, their advocacy still stood for everyone on campus, even outside of their community.

It was clear that activists were more open to organizing against the university that was supposed to foster their safety and failed. “These incidents indicate the campus climate is not healthy. Any community that openly discriminates against lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people, or anyone else for that matter, needs to progressively work to change the atmosphere of hatred and fear... At this university, however, things are not moving forward, they are moving backward.”<sup>29</sup> We can infer that the queer community at Virginia Tech was not satisfied. After years of continual homophobia and exclusion, it seemed like the 2000s were one of the biggest points in which the queer community attempted to claim their space at the university.

When we look at these periods, 20 years apart, there seems to be continuity. While it is important to highlight the advocacy work that was done by queer people at Virginia Tech, we must highlight that the sexual climate was not safe for them. During the 1980s the homophobia that was discussed seemed to be directed toward gay men. Meanwhile, the anti-queerness and homophobia in the 2000s seemed to affect anyone who identified with this com-

munity. While the target of this homophobia evolved, the purpose of it remained the same. This homophobia seemed to reflect heterosexual individuals keeping control of the sexual spaces at Virginia Tech.

The 1980s demonstrated how misconceptions about gay men were damaging to the point that they were being run off campus. The gay community suffered the loss of friends (who might have been in the community), and they also suffered because of the perception that others had of them. We must acknowledge the HIV/AIDS epidemic when speaking about homophobia in the 1980s because of the stereotypes that developed alongside it. While the university appeared to be supportive on a front, we learned that support was faulty and carried discriminatory biases. For gay men at Virginia Tech, the 1980s were ostracizing, and this was largely due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the misconceptions surrounding it.

In the 2000s, Virginia Tech created committees that diversified the geography of the campus. Looking at Virginia Tech through the same lens, the 2000s were a crucial period for the queer community, because the legalization of same-sex marriage was on the horizon. It was clear that homophobia at Virginia Tech had also affected those who were anything other than cisgender men. Virginia Tech ultimately reversed both policies that affected the queer community, but this only occurred after the public backlash that the Board of Visitors received. Following the controversies that Virginia Tech had a spotlight on, the university created a new commission of “Equal Opportunity and Diversity,” which vowed to serve students who were not cisgender, heterosexual, or white.<sup>30</sup> We can see that the organization and advocacy of queer individuals were effective at this time and fought for a safer campus. Even as civil rights were threatened for this community, they still fought for their claim throughout the country, because they deserved marriage rights too.

When we analyze queer history at Virginia Tech, we must also look at the national stage. It is clear that in both sets of periods, the queer community felt empowered enough to organize, inform, and fight back. Perhaps, this momentum was fueled by a national movement of queer liberation or maybe they were fighting for their rightful space at Virginia Tech. As we continue to analyze the intersections between gender and sexuality and what they meant for these periods, we must remember the component of race too. For students, faculty, and community members, Virginia Tech was histori-

cally part of the problem of homophobia. This research suggests that anti-LGBTQIA+ policies and sentiments do not occur overnight, but are cultivated into the culture, and we can see the same happening throughout the country at the same time.

While homophobic policies and attitudes happened as a result of the years that preceded the 1980s and 2000s, we must acknowledge that it is a series of events—not spaced-out incidents with nothing to do with one another. The rate at which this community has been affected by hate has occurred on a large scale at this university. Motives and direction have varied greatly, yet the community continued to fight against their hardships. As the community continues to fight to claim its space on campus, it can serve as a reflection of the changing sexual geography. As many differences as these two eras had, we see a continued theme: A university that attempted to keep its sexual geography as heterosexual, with no space to share for anyone who identified differently. The conclusions that we can make on these two time periods is that there was a national sentiment that was anti-queer, and it was present on campus as well through both decades.

Not all of these events are explicitly homophobic but continued to feed into a dangerous precedent that may have contributed to the amount of sexual violence that was occurring on the Virginia Tech campus. “A generous interpretation is that they may not be sexist or homophobic or racist, but rather that they are resisting their domination by embracing misogynistic, homophobic, or racist violence and language.”<sup>31</sup> Not every action needs to be considered violent to be a valid experience. As the conversation of queer people at Virginia Tech continues to grow, we must keep in mind the intersection of gender and sexuality, and how such incidents at Virginia Tech affected both of these traits. “For other students, regardless of what they might have known or not known about sex, their consent practices reflected their feelings of precariousness at college—not so much whether they had a right to have sex as whether they had a right to be there at all”<sup>32</sup> Though the quoted statement was explicitly about Columbia University, it is still relevant for the culture that was occurring at Virginia Tech—homophobia was the result of exclusion and a factor in sexual violence. Both the 1980s and the 2000s can show us how the sexual climate and geography at the university have contributed to a sense of sexual violence. This happened through isolation and continued to occur 20 years later because the university does not begin to

share a safe space in its sexual geography with members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

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## 7. Partying Like It's 1989

### *The Culture of Status, Secrets, and Sex of Virginia Tech's Greek Life*

MADELYN NOGIEC

Friday nights are not just the end of a work week; they are a time of social interaction, boozing, partying, spending time with friends, and pursuing sexual projects. Greek life was a hub of social interaction for those deemed cool enough to be let into a secret society, such as Greek life in the late 1980s and 1990s. It is easy to think of college in the '80s and '90s as a completely different world—a time before iPhones, Facebook, and Google. While so much has changed, people have largely remained the same. College has not drastically changed. Students still drink, smoke, and have sex. Technology has evolved; human nature and culture have not.

Greek life in the late-twentieth century was an insular, exclusive community that existed within the broader contours of university life. Now as then, fraternities are secret societies of men organized under a common code and philanthropy, and they associate themselves with Greek letters. Sororities are the female version of fraternities. Together, they form a Greek life community, and within every community there are intricacies. What brings sororities and fraternities together are shared values. Greek life is unique to college in the sense that it is a collective. While there are stereotypes about any community, there is no designated major, personality type, or background to Greek life. It is hard to judge a community as a collective. Bad apples exist. Like any group of individuals, some will stand out for their exceptional contributions to the community. At the same time, there will also be individuals who negatively influence those around them. Together, the members of Greek life form a culture of support, status, collaboration, philanthropy, and secrecy.

It is hard to write about secretive organizations because the sorority and fraternity chapters keep their secrets so well. It is thus impossible to completely know the full scope and history of Greek life's sexual culture from research alone. The process of beginning research was blind. There is no

database with lists of fraternity parties from 1995 or access to notes from sorority chapter meetings. Greek life's penchant for secrecy means that little is available in the written record. I was able to find sources by digging around in cardboard boxes in Special Collections, Virginia Tech's library basement that houses primary sources, and by flipping through vintage newspapers, trying to find narratives hiding in plain sight. This chapter's research is an analysis and a woven narrative of historical and contemporary information. Secret organizations are secretive for a reason. This chapter aims to understand why.

Greek life culture has a deep, rich history with many facets. College students are away from their families often for the first time, and they use college as a time to experiment, drink, party, and find themselves. Greek events are frequently a place for people to pursue their sexual projects in a place they feel free. Sexual projects are the reason people have sex. Do they want to hook up, find a committed relationship, or simply not want to do anything with another person? Greek life provides a sexual geography that plays into the sexual culture of the more extensive Greek and Virginia Tech communities. Sexual geographies are places where people have sex or sexual encounters. A dorm room, fraternity basement, off-campus apartment, or even the library's stacks can be counted within the sexual geography of campus if a sexual encounter happens there. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the sexual culture of Greek life in the 1980s up to the late 1990s through research in historical articles and newspapers, the use of analytical frameworks from Jennifer Hirsch's and Shamus Khan's book *Sexual Citizens* (2020), and inference about the past based on present-day knowledge of the Greek system at Virginia Tech. This chapter will explore how status, secrecy, and the sexual projects of Greek members shape the sexual culture of Virginia Tech, which leads to a predisposition to sexual violence among Greek life members and the people who attend their parties.

Fraternities and sororities do not exist just to party but to provide their members support, friendship, and community. Fraternities and sororities also work together to form a sense of community to help one another with philanthropic missions. Greek relations are supportive, with men and women standing up for one another. Interconnections between fraternities and sororities have long existed; for example, inducting women as "little sisters"<sup>1</sup> into fraternities as well as dating between fraternity and sorority

members. These connections form familial bonds. If an act of violence occurs, it is harder for someone to accuse a member of their family. The interconnectedness of the Greek community was helpful for friendships and family but is thus a hindrance when it comes to justice.

As an association of secret organizations, Greek life has an aura of status around its organizations. There is a clear “in” and “out” between the haves and the have-nots. Unless a person is a member of the Greek organization, they will always be an outsider. They will not know the secret handshakes, rituals, or codes of honor that bond members. Greek organizations are selective with their members and can pick and choose whom they allow into their parties. Because the organizations are exclusive, they can be selective in whom they choose to allow into their parties, brotherhood, and sisterhood. In newspaper postings for fraternity parties, some of the postings would say “list only,” which meant that the person’s name had to be included on a guest list in order to be allowed into the party.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes the ads would include a phone number to contact about the list, but more often than not, getting on the list required knowing a brother who would add you.<sup>3</sup> In the late ’80s and ’90s, organizations were selective and thus able to enforce secrecy and control their reputation and status.

Status is a compelling and underlying theme in the culture of Greek life. People and organizations are not the same thing. People may not inherently think about status nor how status fits into the nature of organizations. Organizations, however, must account for status. They have a reputation to build and maintain. When people join organizations, they submit themselves to the group to uphold the level of status the organization has. It may not be immediately important to people, but status is a driving factor to organizations.

Greek life immediately gives status to its members based on their involvement. Harvard and Radford are not seen as equal universities even though a student could obtain the same degree from both. Greek life is the same. People will always covet the sorority with the prettiest girls, or the fraternity with the best parties. With so many organizations, hierarchy will always exist within Greek life, because one organization will always be seen as having a higher level of status than another. Although motivations of people in the past cannot be easily determined from primary sources, it is easy to infer from the modern Greek life system that hierarchy and organizational structure does play a role in the recruitment of new Greek life members.

Status does not appear out of thin air. Exclusivity creates status. Exclusivity develops by showing people what they cannot have. With Greek life, some of this exclusivity was not intentional but accompanied advertising and spreading the word about organizations. However, there are always underlying methods and reasonings for people's actions. For example, in the *Collegiate Times* (Virginia Tech's student newspaper) in the 1980s and 1990s, virtually every single classified section had a Greek notes section within it. These notes would include messages from fraternities to sororities or vice versa thanking each other for hosting parties or sisters congratulating new members. For example, in October of 1998, an ad in the classifieds from Delta Gamma congratulated Sigma Phi Epsilon for making them breakfast before a social (party where only the members of the fraternity and sorority are allowed) between the two of them directly next to an ad for spring break vacation plans.<sup>4</sup> The exclusive team of only having these two organizations together brings them closer as friends and possible sexual partners. Fraternities and sororities flaunted their relationships in the newspaper, read by a majority of the student population at Virginia Tech. Everyone knew about these relations, therefore giving them more status, and people pursuing status had more incentive to join.

A message in the *Collegiate Times* in 1989 from the fraternity Sigma Chi said, "Thanks for wearing out our beer bong last Saturday night it was a blast!!!!";<sup>5</sup> alluding to what many fraternities derive their status from: parties. Every fraternity's goal is to have the biggest parties with the hottest girls and the most memorable nights. Most fraternity parties, however, are limited to the members of the fraternity and women. This status and exclusivity put women in a position where the only men they are surrounded by are men who belong to a single fraternity with a common mindset and, likely, common sexual projects. On a single classified page in 1998, there were three listings for parties from three different fraternities: Sigma Phi Epsilon, Theta Chi, and Sigma Alpha Epsilon.<sup>6</sup> These fraternities compete with one another to have the best party, but that competition creates a space of alcohol and possibly misconduct in spaces that these fraternities control. Women come to the parties and inevitably use a beer bong or some other form of alcohol or other means to be intoxicated with men with possibly now inflated egos. Joining an organization can change a person's sense of self and self-worth, especially when in a space they control and in which they are intoxicated.

Fraternities are not the only group guilty of posting parties in the paper. Sororities list out all men invited to crush parties or date parties. Crush parties are parties in which dates are anonymously invited to a party by sorority women who have a “crush” on them. Date parties are parties where every woman in the sorority brings a date, and everyone goes to a party with their date. These lists are forthright with who is and is not invited, further separating the people who are in a social circle and who are outside of it. For example, in September of 1998, Alpha Delta Pi<sup>7</sup> and Alpha Chi Omega<sup>8</sup> posted in the *Collegiate Times* lists containing the names of around a hundred men invited to crush parties held by the sororities. People within the same circle will fraternize with one another and create sexual relationships and encounters. The same people who go to sorority crush parties likely also go to fraternity parties and form relationships. The bond and friendships created led to sexual encounters and ultimately formed a sexual culture.

To add another layer of status to the relationships between sororities and fraternities, women could be “little sistered” into fraternities.<sup>9</sup> Little sistering is when a fraternity member recognizes a woman who is either a girlfriend of one member or a close friend of many brothers in the fraternity. It is a way of recognizing, honoring, and flaunting women. In modern-day Greek life, women seek after little sister positions, now coined “sweethearts.” It is not too far off to assume that women also see these positions, especially at higher-tiered fraternities, as ways to gain status or to flaunt themselves. Sorority-published newsletters highlight these women in their chapter, congratulating them for achieving this status.<sup>10</sup> Sororities can also induct men as “Big Brothers.”<sup>11</sup> In a newsletter from Zeta Tau Alpha in 1998, fraternity and sorority connections are highlighted on a back page that shows how there are two “Big Brothers” from Tau Kappa Epsilon and fifteen “little sisters” from Zeta Tau Alpha, belonging to various fraternities.<sup>12</sup> This was a way to build Greek relations between sororities and fraternities and elevate the status of individual members.

Status cannot only be found in parties; it can also be found in calendars. Phi Kappa Sigma made a series of calendars of women that spanned at least seven editions going back to 1979.<sup>13</sup> Most of the pictures are tasteful, though questionable in the summer months, but that can be boiled down to the outfit choice due to the weather. These calendars are intriguing because they objectify women with their consent. The women in these calendars volun-

tarily allow the fraternity to photograph them and have their pictures sold to hundreds of men at Virginia Tech to hang on their walls. There is a sexual factor to these calendars, even if the women are not outwardly showing lots of skin. The phrase “Hump at TOTs” (TOTs or Top of the Stairs, a popular, local bar in Blacksburg) is written on every Wednesday calendar square of every month.<sup>14</sup> The models knew men were sexualizing them for being in the calendars. Lisa Covington said to a reporter, “[I] was glad [I] was the September model because that would mean [I] would be off the dorm walls quickly.”<sup>15</sup> A likely factor of why these women possibly chose to objectify themselves in this way is to gain status.

Greek life, hierarchy, and status are deeply intertwined. How many girls can you get to your party? How cool of a frat is your boyfriend in? Which tier organization are you in? Greek life flaunted its exclusivity as shown and created for people to want to be a part of it. Exclusivity is not always harmful or wrong or denying another group with malintentions. Exclusivity makes communities. Only some people can attend these events, and the people that do get to know one another, form communities, and uplift one another. Fraternities and sororities compete in each other’s philanthropies and have homecoming events with one another. For example, the brothers of Delta Sigma Phi and the sisters of Phi Mu took out a quarter-page ad in the paper to wish a sister luck with homecoming elections.<sup>16</sup> These connections are uplifting and supportive. There is a sexual culture to Greek life, but there is also a sexual culture to dorms, the Corp of Cadets, and many other communities. Status pulls people in and builds the sexual culture, but it is not a completely isolated and harmful phenomenon.

Greek organizations are secret organizations. So naturally, organizations keep secrets from the general public about them, their inner workings, and sometimes their members. Secrecy makes it even more exclusive and scary because these are large organizations with significant social power. A way to uphold this secrecy is hazing. Hazing is the subjection of new members to forms of humiliation, abuse, and dangerous behavior, which could involve alcohol, sexual acts, or violence. Fraternities bond over hazing to form their brotherhoods and build member respect.<sup>17</sup> Hazing also implies a secret bond of protection and secrecy to keep sexual assault contained within the organization. Hazing is not just reserved for fraternities. A fraternity member alleged that two unnamed sororities had made their members dress up in

blackface during imitation rituals in 1988.<sup>18</sup> It is critical to note that I did not find confirmation of these claims. Hazing is horrific and, unfortunately, is still common practice in Greek life today, even with efforts by Virginia Tech titled “Hokies Do Not Haze.” The program’s effectiveness has yet to be seen by the student body.

Greek life comprises many different fraternal and sororal organizations that function as little societies within the more prominent Greek life population. Populations form communities, and communities form cultures and subcultures. Each organization is different and operates under different guidelines and standards. Sororities send out newsletters detailing the business and drama of their organizations.<sup>19</sup> These newsletters talk about the sorority’s upcoming events, congratulate sisters on their accomplishments, talk about parties, and address issues within the sorority.<sup>20</sup> Different organizations have ways of communicating secret information, which will live trapped in the ’80s and ’90s.

Notably, during the research for this chapter, two prominent case studies emerged that addressed the issue of secrecy. The revelations of these instances are rare because members do not often break secrecy. In mid-November 1989, eight new members, often labeled as pledges, from the Virginia Tech chapter of the fraternity Delta Kappa Epsilon (DKE), were forcefully removed from a party at Kenyon College in Ohio.<sup>21</sup> The fraternity members told the pledges to “do something unusual” and bring back photo evidence.<sup>22</sup> One of the white Delta Kappa Epsilon pledges kissed a black woman at the party and then had his pledge brothers take a photo of him.<sup>23</sup> They were escorted off of campus by the police and then returned home to Virginia Tech to lots of backlash from the Black community.<sup>24</sup> Kenyon University notified the President of Virginia Tech, and ultimately, Virginia Tech charged DKE with hazing.<sup>25</sup> The NAACP became involved and demonstrated in protest against DKE,<sup>26</sup> and the fraternity lost its university affiliation.<sup>27</sup> The outwardly racist action was a sexual act demeaning black women and defining them as “other.” The willingness of these men to treat a woman as an object to complete a task is dehumanizing. It calls into question to what extent did their hazing go to the point where they thought it was okay to use women?

Hazing is a secret part of the fraternity process that is only for the members, and pledges are allowed to know about it. Hazing can be sexual in that full

members may sexually harass some of the brothers during the process, like in the DKE incident. It can consist of brothers giving pledges tasks that require a sexual component to complete. Fraternity chapter's charters are lost over hazing frequently, and brothers are even charged with crimes relating to hazing. The state of Virginia criminally charged a member of Pi Kappa Alpha with providing alcohol to minors after the fraternity hazed a pledge into drinking alcohol until his blood alcohol level was near lethal.<sup>28</sup> There are many instances of hazing, and only a few have truly gotten the recognition they deserve. The act of hazing, which is fueled by the desire of young men to earn the approval of their fraternity brothers, causes harm not only to themselves but also to others. Additionally, the secrecy surrounding fraternities often conceals hazing incidents from public knowledge. It is a painful part of the fraternal culture that can sexually hurt themselves and others.

On September 20th, 1998, members of Phi Kappa Sigma lured a sex worker to their fraternity house pretending to be five professors wanting a lap dance for a bachelor party.<sup>29</sup> The exotic dancer, 18-year-old Mischelle Russell, showed up at the fraternity house with a male escort, David Cheresnowsky. After refusing to perform a dance in a private room, the brothers held them against their will for 30–40 minutes.<sup>30</sup> The brothers lied about who they were, meaning they either had premeditated intent to hurt her or they knew that Russell and Cheresnowsky would have refused to go if they knew they were going to a fraternity house. Blacksburg police arrested and charged six brothers with counts of indecent exposure, sexual battery, and kidnapping.<sup>31</sup> Russell and Cheresnowsky experienced half an hour of sexual harassment and violence at the hands of the fraternity brothers.

The fraternity men did not act alone in either of these instances, nor in the other instances found but not discussed. It raises an underlying hype-up culture at play. When people are in a group for so long, they start to take on characteristics of one another and want to impress each other. They hype one another up for their “accomplishments.” Do fraternity men commit acts of sexual violence to make themselves seem cooler and impressive to each other? Assault becomes a spectator sport and a way to connect with the brotherhood. The men of Phi Kappa Sigma in 1998 are essentially trauma bonding themselves to each other via a violent sex crime. Had Russell and Cheresnowsky not gone to the authorities, it is almost certain the kidnapping would not have made it out of the brotherhood lore. The scandal would

not have tarnished the fraternity's secrecy, and what they did would not have been revealed.

The secrecy of sexually violent fraternities is what keeps them afloat. If an outsider leaked their actions to the press or the authorities, the fraternity would lose its creditability and status as an active chapter. DKE lost its status as a university-affiliated organization because of the racial hazing incident.<sup>32</sup> Brothers band together and protect one another. The story of DKE would have never emerged if the President of Kenyon University had not notified the President of Virginia Tech.<sup>33</sup> They are bound to one another because of hazing. They committed heinous acts of hazing each other that could put the chapter's charter security in jeopardy.<sup>34</sup> These men do not rat each other out because the brother they call into question could expose the chapter's secrets. A pledge for the fraternity Pi Kappa Alpha developed alcohol poisoning and spent three days in the Montgomery Regional Hospital.<sup>35</sup> The university did not learn of the event until the following week because of secrecy.<sup>36</sup> The protection of the fraternity was more important than the pledge because the fraternity was already on probation for a previous social infraction.<sup>37</sup> The same can be said for the secrecy of acts of sexual violence. To what extent does secrecy override the victim's well-being?

According to Hirsch and Khan, sexual projects are "the answer to what sex is for."<sup>38</sup> Sexual projects are unique to a person because one's own experiences shape them.<sup>39</sup> It is impossible to understand the sexual projects of another person because it is often hard for them to understand their own projects. College-age students are sexually-driven people and have sexual projects of their own. Culture, status, and gender separate fraternities and sororities, ultimately impacting the sexual projects of their members.

The sexual projects of men and women are often different due to societal gender roles. Nevertheless, to what extent do men seek fraternities to access women and parties or a brotherhood? It is impossible to know the true intentions of someone when enjoying Greek life, but through research, I found the system of parties has been fraternity-centric. The structure of Greek parties at Virginia Tech, and in most, if not all, Greek institutions, is that fraternities will host parties and invite women and sorority sisters to these parties. Then they interact with music, alcohol, and possibly drugs. These parties are not necessarily secretive. They are printed in the newspaper's classified section, which thousands of Virginia Tech students read

weekly. On Friday, October 16th, 1998, three fraternities, Sigma Phi Epsilon, Sigma Alpha Epsilon, and Theta Chi, all promoted parties in the classified section, with SAE promoting a special appearance from “DJ Saggy.”<sup>40</sup> What could be more fun than DJ Saggy?

The sexual projects of women and men are usually very different. Many women operate under the politics of respectability. The politics of respectability is a term from the late 1800s, and it describes how women try to enact social change by being respectable women. They could not be called out based on their looks or sexuality because men would use that to shift the conversation away from the woman’s actual point. Many women are called derogatory names in college for practicing their sexuality, and, naturally, they want to protect themselves against those labels. Women operate under different judgment criteria than men, and in the same actions of a man and a woman, while both can be wrong, society often sees the woman as a worse person. In order to protect their reputation, women often act defensively.

Sometimes the politics of respectability can put women against one another. The *Collegiate Times* shows correspondence between women discussing and arguing about the Phi Kappa Sigma kidnapping case. On October 21st, 1998, a month and a day after the incident, thirty-three women published a half-page ad in the *Collegiate Times* titled, “The Following Women are Proud to Support the Men of Phi Kappa Sigma.”<sup>41</sup> After Phi Kappa Sigma was accused of kidnapping, it was a bold and unlikely move by these women to show such adamant and open support for fraternity men who were facing legal charges. It raises the question, was it because of the status of these fraternity men? This is the same fraternity that created the calendars of women in the '80s.<sup>42</sup> Did this popularity continue into the late '90s, and is that why women supported these men? Or was it out of friendship? It is impossible to know but easy to speculate on. Another reason could be that they genuinely felt these men were innocent. The *Collegiate Times* published many articles covering the kidnapping over this period of around a month, so it is safe to assume that the majority of Virginia Tech’s campus knew about the incident; for these women to publicly state their support with their full name is astounding.

In response to the ad placed in support of Phi Kappa Sigma, a senior named Josie Mulvihill, majoring in interdisciplinary studies, wrote a letter to the edi-

tor of the *Collegiate Times* headed, “Violence to Women Is Not Allowed.”<sup>43</sup> Her letter is damning and explicitly calls out the women for showing support for men accused of sexual violence against their own gender. She dismantles the respectability of the thirty-three women who put their names in the ad. Josie even goes as far as to claim that the women in the ad are possible victims of sexual violence themselves because sexual violence is a largely gender-based issue.<sup>44</sup> Josie’s letter is bold but likely not entirely unwarranted, as the status of fraternities can keep people from speaking out against them, possibly silencing voices that may have things to say.

In response to Mulvihill’s letter, Carole Zdobysz, a senior majoring in marketing, and Erin Murphy, a senior majoring in English, wrote letters to the editor upholding and defending their decision to publish the ad. Zdobysz’s letter headed, “Supporting friends under fire not bad,” directly responded to the other open letter and maintained that while the ad did not support sexual violence against women, she stands by her friends and implies the allegations are false.<sup>45</sup> Murphy’s response is similar to Zdobysz’s and is headed, “Sorority not condoning sexual assault.”<sup>46</sup> Murphy highlights the importance of “innocent until proven guilty” and subliminally jades Mulvihill for her response.<sup>47</sup> It is important to note that the title of her letter mentions the word “sorority.”<sup>48</sup> It is reasonable to imply that women belonging to a particular sorority were responsible for the ad, even though a specific sorority is not explicitly named. A sorority, or more than one sorority, supporting a fraternity shows how deep roots Greek life relations are.

The ad, the response, and the responses to the response in the *Collegiate Times* by these women feel like a vintage Twitter thread. It is as if these women are having an argument to the tune of a diss track. Zdobysz and Murphy, who responded to Mulvihill, are outwardly protecting their respectability. By responding to the ad in a way that they are angry and almost accusatory toward Mulvihill is a way of protecting not only their friends but themselves. Mulvihill called their reputation and respectability into question, so naturally, they felt the need to defend themselves. These friendships that occurred between sororities and fraternities run so deep that women are willing to fight one another in the press, which is now being talked about and read in 2023, which is remarkable and shows the extent that Greek relations run deep.

Parties show the sexual virility of men and fraternities. These men create sexual geographies to draw women in. Often these parties are fun; sororities even post thank you notes in the classified sections thanking the fraternity men for a wonderful time and saying they cannot wait to see them again soon. The women in Gamma Phi Beta posted on the Greek notes section of the classified page thanking the men of Delta Chi for a party.<sup>49</sup> There is also a power play that takes place when women are forced out of their spaces and into male-only spaces for alcohol or parties. Sexual projects are carried out in these spaces. It is quite easy for a man in the fraternity to be at a party his organization throws, talk to women, and have consensual and sometimes non-consensual sex with them.

The power exchange when women go to fraternity parties is even more intense when it comes to sororities. Sorority houses are dry, and women who live in sorority houses are not allowed to have or consume alcohol in these houses, even if they are over the age of 21. While many women break those rules, they risk getting in trouble or even losing their charter. To be able to drink and party with their friends, they must leave their own space, which they have control over. They have to leave their breadth of control and enter into male spaces. The mixture of women and alcohol becomes more dangerous when women do not control the situations and the geography of sorority houses, at least at Virginia Tech, funnel women out of places they control and into the backyards of fraternity houses where they are at a power disadvantage. The overarching theme of sexual projects in Greek life is that fraternities want sex from women and invite women to their parties with alcohol for a good time, both platonically and sexually. Sororities are after places to drink and party while likely also wanting to have sex.

The sexual culture of Greek life at Virginia Tech in the '80s and '90s is fascinating in the sense that it seems relatively similar to the sexual culture of Virginia Tech in 2023. There are different organizations on campus than from 40 years ago, but the culture they uphold is relatively intact. The sexual culture, for the most part, is uplifting. There are still hazing instances and issues with alcohol, but is that necessarily shocking? The culture of Greek life and its sexual crevices are community-based. It slowly grows and changes with the community. It is part of an overarching system of power dynamics and Virginia Tech history.

Sex is a social behavior, not a cognitive behavior. Cultural change is not impossible but extremely hard. It is especially hard when the sexual geographies of universities do not change and the same places for assault are available 40-plus years later. Greek life is predisposed to sexual violence because of status, secrecy, and the nature of having a close community with separate but interconnecting sexual projects.

This research used dynamics of the present day to infer the past with the use of historical documents. This chapter is not an indictment but rather a historical review of a past culture. It is inaccurate to generalize about all men or all women, as individuals may vary in their attitudes, experiences, behaviors, and sexual projects. People have always and will always continue to hurt one another. This chapter is not trying to villainize the members of Greek life, as the author is a proud member of a Virginia Tech sorority. The purpose is to analyze and evaluate the sexual culture of Virginia Tech Greek life through the sources found in Special Collections. Institutional systems and their members are more likely to be subjected to assault carried out in Greek life.<sup>50</sup> Their geography is not an excuse for committing sexual violence.

This climate for sexual assault is complex and begins with education and individuals. Members of Greek life and freshman are more likely to be sexually assaulted.<sup>51</sup> There needs to be education for vulnerable people because they may be unfamiliar with Greek life, where social understanding is fundamental. There also needs to be in-person education surrounding alcohol and alcohol's effects on a person's decision-making and motor function. At Virginia Tech in 1991, alcohol was a factor in 90 percent of sexual assaults.<sup>52</sup> That number is staggering. Education could have saved people from being victims of sexual violence in the past. Within a university with such plentiful resources as Virginia Tech, it is disgraceful that sexual violence occurred within VT Greek life 40 years ago and is still a prevalent issue faced by the university today.

## Notes

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2. "Greek Notes," *Collegiate Times*, October 16, 1998, 95 edition, sec. Classifieds, Vir-

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  4. "Greek Notes," *Collegiate Times*, October 30, 1998, 95 edition, sec. Classifieds, Virginia Tech Archives and Special Collections, Virginia Tech University Libraries.
  5. "Greek Notes, Sigma Chi," *Collegiate Times*, September 22, 1989, 86 edition, sec. Classifieds, Virginia Tech Archives and Special Collections, Virginia Tech University Libraries.
  6. "Greek Notes," *Collegiate Times*, October 15, 1998, 95 edition, sec. Classifieds, Virginia Tech Archives and Special Collections, Virginia Tech University Libraries.
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  10. "Hi from Eta Xi! Zeta," Spring 1988, Folder RG 31/12, Virginia Tech Archives and Special Collections, Virginia Tech University Libraries.
  11. "Hi from Eta Xi! Zeta," Spring 1988, Folder RG 31/12, Virginia Tech Archives and Special Collections, Virginia Tech University Libraries.
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  13. "Phi Kappa Sigma Coed Calendar 1986-1987" (Virginia Tech, 1987 1986), Folder RG 31/12b, Virginia Tech Archives and Special Collections, Virginia Tech University Libraries.
  14. "Phi Kappa Sigma Coed Calendar 1986-1987" (Virginia Tech, 1987 1986), Folder 31/12b Virginia Tech Archives and Special Collections, Virginia Tech University Libraries.
  15. Brian O'Neil, "Calendar Girls," October 10, 1981, Folder RG 31/12, Virginia Tech Archives and Special Collections, Virginia Tech University Libraries.
  16. "The Sisters of Phi Mu and the Brothers of Delta Sigma Phi Wish Debbie Barksdale the Best of Luck with 1998 Homecoming Court Elections," *Collegiate Times*, October 9, 1989, 95 edition, Virginia Tech Archives and Special Collections, Virginia Tech University Libraries.
  17. Jim Roberts, "DKE Charged with Hazing," *Collegiate Times*, November 18, 1989, 86 edition, Virginia Tech Archives and Special Collections, Virginia Tech University Libraries.
  18. Jim Roberts, "DKE Charged with Hazing," *Collegiate Times*, November 18, 1989, 86 edition, Virginia Tech Archives and Special Collections, Virginia Tech University Libraries.
  19. "Hi from Eta Xi! Zeta," Spring 1988, Folder RG 31/12, Virginia Tech Archives and Special Collections, Virginia Tech University Libraries.
  20. "Hi from Eta Xi! Zeta," Spring 1988, Folder RG 31/12, Virginia Tech Archives and Special Collections, Virginia Tech University Libraries.
  21. Larry Bingham, "Tech Ousts Fraternity for 4 Years," *Collegiate Times*, November 19, 1989, Virginia Tech Archives and Special Collections, Virginia Tech University Libraries.

22. Jim Roberts, "DKE Charged with Hazing," *Collegiate Times*, November 18, 1989, 86 edition, Virginia Tech Archives and Special Collections, Virginia Tech University Libraries.
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## 8. Who Is the Victim?

### *Greek Life Sexual Culture: Changing the Narrative of Victimization in the 1980s to 1990s*

AMANDA TALBOTT

You are at a fraternity party in the 1980s–1990s. A fraternity brother is bumping music through speakers with the bass turned up too high. It is dark with a few light spots to see where you are walking. You have just entered the Greek life bubble, where stories of power, sex, and status determine who you are. Being a part of this bubble is sacred and exclusive. You do not want to mess it up. But someone sexually assaults you. What do you do? Well, maybe they were just drunk. Do you want to ruin everyone’s fun? This could look bad on your organization, let alone your social status. And what if you are not believed? What if the offender gets sympathy since someone made allegations that cannot be proven? How would this make you feel?

The process of reporting a sexual assault or rape has been seen as damaging to one’s life. Reporting makes survivors of sexual assault relive their trauma over and over again. Some people do not even consider their sexual assault or rape as sexual assault at all. In Jennifer Hirsch and Shamus Khan’s *Sexual Citizens* (2020), the authors interviewed students that mentioned it is easier to say it was “borderline” sexual assault or rape.<sup>1</sup> Survivors have been discredited since evidence for sexual assaults has been limited, which tends to make people feel bad for the offender. This makes the offender become the victim of the crime they committed.

Power and status have played a role in sexual assault or rape not being reported. Greek life, specifically fraternities, holds a lot of power within the Virginia Tech community. Fraternities host the big parties off campus in frat houses or satellite houses, which get advertised to a wide array of groups in the school newspaper. Satellite houses refer to a house that has only the fraternity brothers living there and is utilized for parties, socials, etc. This power of controlling sexual geography is utilized to bring more girls to the parties or to recruit the “best” guys. Sexual geography is a term created by Hirsch and Khan through stories of college students. The term describes how

one's location, like a fraternity house versus their room, can determine how much control they have over their sexual experience or how someone views their sexual citizenship. The power that fraternities hold translates to status by terming the "best" and "hottest" to "mean the most exclusive, with members who are supposedly the most attractive, with the highest value as sexual partners."<sup>2</sup> This puts survivors who want to speak out at a disadvantage, since the fraternity may have a more elevated social standing that can affect the survivors' own social status.

By looking through a lens created by *Sexual Citizens*, I will examine how Greek life shaped Virginia Tech's sexual violence climate in the late 1990s. How did these organizations contribute to the on-campus sexual culture? How did those contributions affect the conversation about sexual violence? Finally, how did the campus community at Virginia Tech respond to Greek life's framework on sexual violence? Examining articles and the student newspaper demonstrates how Greek life's sexual culture impacted the sexual violence discussion on campus in the 1980s to 1990s, which shows a shift of focus from the survivor to the offender.

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Without cellphones or portable computers, what did the daily life of a 1980s–1990s college student look like? Students must have kept paper planners and wall calendars to keep deadlines and activities organized together. The world was not a digital one, which can be hard to imagine. Nobody was "canceled" in the '80s or '90s, and people generally got their information from newspapers. Campus culture was shown through the newspaper ads, editorials, and cartoons. This shows that everyone was reading the *Collegiate Times* to know what was happening around the Virginia Tech community.

The majority of the Greek life parties at Virginia Tech were publicized in the school newspaper, which affected people's sexual geography. Greek life at Virginia Tech had a strong presence in the school newspaper in the 1980s and 1990s. Greek life had their own section where the organizations would communicate back-and-forth in the public eye. This showed who had a higher status by how many organizations "talked" to them daily. There were articles on sexual violence and awareness as well as people responding to sexual violence through the letters to the editors. The community newspa-

per also included pieces on Greek life and Virginia Tech students, which contributed to the narrative as well.

Since the newspaper was widely consumed by the Virginia Tech community during this time, it could affect where someone might go on the weekend for accessible drinking. Fraternities controlled a segment of the party scene at Virginia Tech because money is paid to the organization from the members to hold these events. Since people got in trouble when drinking in dorms under the age of 21, most people sought places they would not get in trouble for drinking. In *Sexual Citizens*, Hirsh and Khan discuss how freshmen change their sexual geography—which makes them vulnerable to sexual assault—to get drunk, to lighten the newly found stress of college life, and to try to talk to more people.<sup>3</sup> It is likely that in the 1980s and 1990s, as now, bars were strict about fake I.D.s. For those involved in Greek life, fraternity basements became the next best place. This disadvantaged women's sexual geography by situating them in a place they had never been before with the lights practically turned off, music blaring, and people crammed into a basement filled with men and women touching nonstop. Because one could look at the newspapers in the 1990s to find these parties, it was easily accessible for women to find and enter this risky sexual geography.

Sexual culture is how a community shapes their sexual atmosphere. Virginia Tech had a sexual culture created by the Corps of Cadets, regular students, and those involved in Greek life. Each of these groups contributed to the sexual culture in different ways; however, Greek life's segment of sexual culture was bolstered with status and power created by their secretive hierarchy. *Sexual Citizens* presents an interesting concept about how status plays into sexual violence and how people perceive their sexual violence. Wealthy people often have some sort of elevated status, and with status comes power.<sup>4</sup> Fraternities and sororities have monetary dues associated with their organizations. This is to have their events paid for, which look different between sororities and fraternities. During sorority recruitment, a pamphlet was released that shows the dues for sororities. The new girl dues for the 1998 recruitment process ranged from \$600–\$2,000 for the first semester.<sup>5</sup> Dues were then paid semesterly, which decrease a little, but this does not account for dues going up for any other semester. This means that being in the Greek bubble cost a decent amount of money. Therefore, to be a

part of the Greek community in the 1990s was to be able to afford semesterly dues.

Hirsh and Khan mention how “sororities can’t serve alcohol at their events; some can’t even have alcohol in their houses.”<sup>6</sup> The authors mention that this distribution of alcohol then gets put into the hands of wealthy men, which can give them more status and power. In the realm of fraternity life, having the best status is important. Oftentimes, the fraternities with the higher status have a larger chapter of men and/or may cost more to join. Much like sororities, fraternities have their set semesterly dues; however, during their rush process, they do not provide financial transparency. This money mostly goes to parties throughout the semester, which includes alcohol and sometimes illegal substances. This framework provides insight into how Greek life, status, and power can contribute to sexual culture at Virginia Tech.

A fraternity, Pi Kappa Alpha, created a yearly calendar that featured twelve women that went to Virginia Tech. Pi Kappa Alpha called the calendar “Calendar Girls.”<sup>7</sup> While all proceeds went to their philanthropy at the time, the women were considered “coeds” or “girls”, which undermined their personhood by infantilizing them. Most of the women in the calendar were people considered to be of high status like the homecoming queen and captain of the cheerleading team.<sup>8</sup> This was not a mistake. The calendar, the first year it was released, was planned for a year before. The fraternity brothers of the organization made intentional decisions and had the status to obtain these women.

As the calendar goes on throughout the years, it mostly stays on the safe side of photos, but also plays with some risqué ones. One of the spreads included a woman in a bathing suit with a “seductive” look. The woman was more than likely asked to pose in a suggestive way wearing a bathing suit.<sup>9</sup> This might have been overlooked since it was a summer photo of a woman. The calendar was sold in many places across Blacksburg, including the Pi Kappa Alpha house.<sup>10</sup> This public objectification of women by Greek life shaped Virginia Tech’s sexual culture.



Selections from Moler's calendars. Photo credit: Kathryn Thompson, "Exploitation? Calendars," October 2, 1981, *Collegiate Times*, pg. 1.

The calendar made by Pi Kappa Alpha led to a similar calendar that was more risqué.<sup>11</sup> The calendar ran with the same theme of being "Girls of Virginia Tech"; however, the shots included the women posing topless or in more suggestive poses. The calendar was sold in the bookstore, much like the Pi Kappa Alpha calendar, but the women were not able to choose which pho-

tos would be released in the calendar.<sup>12</sup> One of the women told the newspaper, “That’s really not me on the cover,” she said. “There were so many more pictures he could have chosen.”<sup>13</sup> Hirsh and Khan write, “treating the other person like an object, or [ . . . ] by a mutual acceptance of a one-way flow of pleasure, trains young people to overlook other’s sexual citizenship.”<sup>14</sup> The authors include that this is what “paves the way” for assault.<sup>15</sup> This shows how Greek life at Virginia Tech created the sexual culture to take advantage of women’s sexual citizenship through objectification.

Moler, organizing his calendar, created a circulation of three different calendars at Virginia Tech that exploited women’s sexual citizenship.<sup>16</sup> The calendars started to become controversial on campus once Moler began selling his version of the coed calendar. Moler recruited women based on applications submitted to him and reaching out to a select number of women.<sup>17</sup> The fraternities, Pi Kappa Alpha and Phi Kappa Sigma recruited “high status” women like the homecoming queen and cheerleading captain.<sup>18</sup> Moler had to pay his models “between \$50 and \$100” while the fraternity calendars “recruited girls on a volunteer basis.”<sup>19</sup> Fraternities had more status than an average student trying to produce a calendar, so taking advantage of high-status women to pose for a calendar was easier for fraternities. When Moler was interviewed, he noted that “the other calendars have not been banned from the bookstore and they were no more or less provocative than mine,” which he attributes to his calendar being in color, which, “had a lot more impact.”<sup>20</sup> The calendar was approved to be in the bookstore, and only when it had sold 300 copies was it taken off the self.<sup>21</sup> By looking at the covers of all three calendars, it is noticeable that some look a little “sexier” than the others— these happen to be Moler’s calendars. By paying the women to be in his calendar, he took over their sexual citizenship and objectified the women sexually. Fraternities did the same with their calendar, except they were exchanging status for the women’s sexual exploitation. This further created a sexual culture at Virginia Tech of objectifying women for status.

Opposition to objectifying women started to rise in Virginia Tech culture. Women began to question the exploitation and objectification in the three calendars. One woman, Dottie Geare, commented on the dangers of creating this kind of culture at Virginia Tech. In a letter to the editor that was powerful and stood against the calendars, Geare wrote, “Keeping women in the

role of sex objects maintains the illusion of male superiority and a sense of control over women.<sup>22</sup> When examining how fraternities were exchanging status for the women's bodies, it is shown that the fraternity men looked at these women as objects. Geare went on to add, "A culture that says it is okay for women to be exploited for their sexuality simply because males enjoy it, creates the kind of conditions where the abuses of sexual harassment can flourish . . ."<sup>23</sup> In other words, creating a sexual culture of objectifying women at Virginia Tech creates a sexual culture of violence and exploitation.

The impacts of Virginia Tech's sexual culture started to relate to women's sexual citizenship. Sexual citizenship is defined by stories in *Sexual Citizens*, which the authors describe in relation to assault: "Assaults are contexts where one person is inattentive to the other person's right to sexual self-determination: their sexual citizenship."<sup>24</sup> At Virginia Tech, a sexual culture that objectified women created an environment where people stopped valuing women's sexual citizenship. Greek life affected how people perceived the sexual citizenship of the survivor at Virginia Tech. A story headliner in the *Roanoke Times* read "GN'R: Hanging out in Blacksburg," which initially seemed like a puff piece in the newspaper but quickly shifted narratives in the article.<sup>25</sup> GN'R stood for the famous band, Guns N' Roses. The band members started up conversation with sorority members of Pi Beta Phi at a local Blacksburg restaurant.<sup>26</sup> The band visited different members' houses and the Pi Beta Phi sorority house, after which the musicians awarded the sorority girls with backstage access to their concert in Roanoke.<sup>27</sup> The language used to describe the situation made it seem the sorority members should be grateful for this interaction. When the members of the sorority go house-jumping between members' homes and the sorority house itself, it is written like a ritual—a status ritual. Showing off the band members, even to their own sorority members, gains the women a sort of status, which can elevate their sense of sexual citizenship.

Toward the end of this seemingly light and fluffy piece, the story takes a very dark turn. The article reported that a woman, who asked to be identified as Jane, reported, "a roadie for the band 'took me back there and pulled my top down and rubbed ice on my breasts. The other pulled up my shorts, making, like a wedge."<sup>28</sup> This woman was more than likely seen as an object; someone they could do anything to, which means they did not see her as having any sexual citizenship. The article also distinctly mentioned that all band

members were present except Axl Rose, who in 1985 had rape of a minor charges against him. This distinct exception of the band member seemed eerie since he had previous charges against him. The story was then followed by the band members denying that this ever happened and that people “will do anything to get backstage.”<sup>29</sup> But how did one get backstage by speaking out about sexual violence in the 1990s? This shows disregard for the woman, as no one looked into the accusation. It also shows how easy it can be for men to sexually exploit a woman and deny what she accused, which inevitably gets taken as the final conclusion to the story. After her story, the article ends on what it began on: Pi Beta Phi girls getting tickets backstage. This demonstrates how Greek life is used to sexually exploit and objectify women.

Through creating a sexual culture of objectifying women, Greek life contributed to the narrative of sexual violence by focusing on the offenders. In October 1998, Phi Kappa Sigma, a fraternity on the Virginia Tech campus made headlines in the *Collegiate Times* for two weeks and even spilled into the local newspapers for a day. In the first article, only one person, Ryan Worch, was arrested on charges of kidnapping two people: an exotic dancer and her escort.<sup>30</sup> Both of them were from a business in Roanoke called Always Amber escort services. But how did one person kidnap two people? The short answer was he was not the only one. A group of the fraternity brothers requested the services of the exotic dancer under false pretenses that it was a professor’s bachelor party.<sup>31</sup> Normally the business does not service Blacksburg; however, the owner said “Worch was extremely persistent.”<sup>32</sup> Ryan Worch would call Always Amber several times stating that everyone was professional, and it was only five men, who were all professors.<sup>33</sup> The co-owner, Penny Wells, usually takes strides to verify the clients, but the business was unable to verify due to there being no caller I.D. when Worch called.<sup>34</sup> Even though the woman and her escort quickly realized upon arrival that the address was an on-campus fraternity house, the woman continued with the services the fraternity men paid for. However, this was not enough for the drunk fraternity men. They wanted more. They asked the dancer to perform a full-nudity strip, which she declined.<sup>35</sup> Once she declined their request, things escalated. The dancer and her escort were trying to leave; however, the six fraternity men would not let them. One of the fraternity brothers, Nicholas DeSarno, was charged with indecent exposure and sexual battery.<sup>36</sup> The officer who investigated the case, Jerry Olinger,

said, “[DeSarno] exposed his private parts to the young lady, and tried to remove her garments (during the dance).”<sup>37</sup> He was not charged with abduction since Officer Olinger could not pinpoint his whereabouts when this was occurring. The fraternity men did not see her as a woman doing her job, but an object for them to exploit.

In the spring semester, everything seemingly went back to normal. Instead of the Greek organization—Phi Kappa Sigma—being ostracized from the community, like the previous semester, the organization was back to their original status. With no repercussions from the school, Phi Kappa Sigma was able to start recruiting new members. The Greek notes section of the classifieds started to reappear with them having socials with other Greek organizations. Then, the headlines came: “All Charges Dropped.” The article states that the situation was a “miscommunication.”<sup>38</sup> The police officer on the case stated the “denials and lack of cooperation from the fraternity and its members following the initial complaint gave the police only one side of the situation,” which was the victim’s side.<sup>39</sup> When all the charges were dropped, one of the fraternity members, DeSarno, talked to the *Collegiate Times* about the situation where he states the victim “didn’t even show up to court.”<sup>40</sup> The language he used and the lack of empathy showed he only ever thought of her as an object that “was not what we expected,” which is why they wanted their money back.<sup>41</sup> Once the charges were dropped by the fraternity men speaking against the allegations, the semester returned to normal and the sexual culture of objectifying women was unbothered.



Thirty-three women paid for an ad spot to “support the men of Phi Kappa Sigma.” Photo credit: “The following women are proud to support the men,” October 21, 1998, *Collegiate Times Newspaper*, pg. 1.

Once the Phi Kappa Sigma story hit the *Collegiate Times* in the fall semester, the Virginia Tech community reinforced the narrative of the offenders over the survivor. On October 21, 1998, amid the Phi Kappa Sigma brothers getting arrested, thirty-three women paid for an ad spot to “support the men of Phi Kappa Sigma” under the Greek Notes section in the newspaper.<sup>42</sup> Though the ad did not display many words other than support, it spoke volumes to the Virginia Tech and Greek communities. The ad reinforced the idea that women will also support the offenders by upholding their narrative over that of the survivor.

Even though such narratives reinforced the offender’s side, one person pushed back. A week later, a woman, Josie Mulvehill, wrote a letter to the editor reacting to this ad. Mulvehill wrote about how women have been looked down upon in status since the beginning of time.<sup>43</sup> She writes, “this dominance was often achieved by violent means,” namely, she includes assault and rape. This parallels Geare’s 1981 letter to the editor in which she warns

against the sexual culture of objectifying women and the outcome of said culture, which seem to come true less than ten years later with a new twist of victimizing the offender. Mulvehill points out that the people in the ad may have been friends of the people who were arrested and want to show their support for them, but she also made note that these women did not understand the implications they were making.<sup>44</sup> Mulvehill then claims that “those that do not denounce gender-based violence only perpetuate the problem.”<sup>45</sup> This shows that some people at Virginia Tech were trying to push away from the offender’s narrative.

While Mulvehill showed a great understanding of the issues around her, more letters to the editor were written in response to Josie that showed support and defense for the offender. Erin Murphy wrote that the ad was not to denounce anyone who has been through sexual assault but rather to serve as encouragement to the Phi Kappa Sigma brothers who “have been made victims of a media whirlwind that is jumping at yet another opportunity to fraternity/sorority bash.”<sup>46</sup> By calling the offenders a victim, victimization starts moving from the survivor of the assault to the offenders and their supporters. Murphy wrote that these men accused of the crimes are “innocent until proven guilty,” which discredits the survivor’s story.<sup>47</sup> Carole Zdobysz wrote in response to Josie that she was one of the coordinators of the ad and expected people to react differently. She wrote, “The only implications to come from the ad were a little happiness for the men, and the upset of liberal feminists that do not believe that women can support men accused of sexual violence against women.”<sup>48</sup> By ostracizing a group of women, Zdobysz tried to uplift her position, which discredits objectified women by standing in support of men accused of sexual violence. She continued that she would think people would be more critical of what they read in the news and know everything is not true. This furthers the narrative that the victim is lying without any physical proof of what the fraternity men did. While she claimed the ad was nothing more than support, she is discrediting the survivor of sexual violence by saying to be more critical of what you read, writing, “innocent until proven guilty” in regard to the fraternity brothers like the prior response.<sup>49</sup> By supporting and defending the offenders, the women also victimized the offenders, thereby taking power away from the survivor.

In the 1980s–1990s, Greek life’s status hierarchy started to make a difference in the sexual culture at Virginia Tech. With no cell phones and no social

media, Greek life was successfully able to create a status hierarchy through sexual geography. Greek life controlled a segment of the party scene and was able to publicize their parties to the whole Virginia Tech community. This made controlling sexual geography based on status easy. If a fraternity was highly regarded as top-tier, then people would go to their parties where they controlled the environment, or sexual geography. The abuse of status of these fraternities then created a sexual culture of objectifying women.

In the 1980s, Greek life changed sexual culture by allowing the objectification and exploitation of women at Virginia Tech. Fraternities created calendars with high status women, which were picked up by any ordinary guy outside the fraternity. Where the non-Greek man used money to objectify women on his calendar, fraternities used status and favors to obtain their calendar girls. These men exploited and objectified these women by selling calendars to make a profit, and ultimately nothing serious was done about it. Women, however, spoke out against this objectification and brought insight that this sexual culture would create an environment for sexual violence to thrive. This aspect of taking over a woman's sexual citizenship became embedded into the sexual culture at Virginia Tech.

In the 1990s, the sexual culture of Greek life at Virginia Tech allowed the victimization of the offender instead of the survivor to bloom. Greek life encouraged a sexual culture at Virginia Tech to objectify women and overtly sexualize them through calendars that were sold in the Virginia Tech bookstore. A deeper understanding of how status comes into play with sexual violence in *Sexual Citizens* can be applied to these 1990s Greek life frameworks of sexual violence. When six people are arrested with charges of kidnapping, indecent exposure, and sexual battery, and no one gets convicted of any crime, the sexual culture bonds of objectifying and exploiting women for the pleasure of men are deepened. It also encourages support for the offenders by making the men of Phi Kappa Sigma the victims of their own crime. Ultimately, Greek life shifted narratives of sexual violence at Virginia Tech so that the narrative of victimization applied to the offenders instead of the victim.

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## 9. Who Holds the Power?

### *VT Greek Life's Battle over Social Autonomy and Sexual Citizenship*

HANNAH ZIAII

Historically, Greek life organizations have been their own secret worlds, founded specifically to serve as secret societies for individuals in colleges and universities. These organizations fostered complex relationships by challenging individual autonomy and sexual citizenship (the notion of feeling as if one even has the right to their own body, or feeling as if they can say “yes” or “no”).<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, fraternities have been hot spots of sexual victimization, which can be heavily attributed to the drinking culture associated with fraternity and sorority life. Thanks to the National Panhellenic Conference—the national governing body of sororities and sorority experience—Greek sorority organizations were (and still are) barred from distributing alcohol or sponsoring alcohol-related events to create and promote safer environments for their members. Although an inspired idea in theory, this situational layout significantly and historically complicated the way which sexual projects (the intent for which sex was used for) and sexual citizenships could play out.

Before I delve too far into my introduction, I should note that my analysis provides a deeper understanding of the dynamics present within Virginia Tech Greek life, as I am a member of this community. Although my experiences with Greek life exist within a different timeframe, my observations and insight are invaluable because of the community’s “for life” stance. Nationally and locally, this “for life” position emphasizes the notion that once a member becomes initiated into their respective Greek organization, they are forever a member of that organization, adopting hundreds of brothers or sisters; past, present, and future. This tradition carries through Virginia Tech’s Greek life culture, further upholding particular behaviors and stigmas, both negative and positive. This dogma could influence impressionable students who truly seek communities and support throughout their college years.

When reading Jennifer Hirsch's and Shamus Khan's *Sexual Citizens* (2020), I discovered that sexual victimization occurs at higher rates within Greek life communities, and that those incidents largely either go unpunished or unreported.<sup>2</sup> *Sexual Citizens* claims that the privilege of these institutions upheld their continued culture of sexual victimization,<sup>3</sup> but I posit that the lack of autonomy that individuals possessed within their Greek organizations also perpetuated their culture of sexual victimization. In this chapter, I intend to show how Greek life at Virginia Tech has challenged notions of individual autonomy, whether intentionally or unintentionally, through an analysis of the "Greek experience" found in the Virginia Tech *Collegiate Times* and other Greek-related publications from the 1990s.

Greek life at Virginia Tech stood as its own established institution. All individual organizations made up this Greek world and contributed to its influence and social culture. During the 1990s, a little peephole into the secret world of Greek life existed within the *Collegiate Times*, Virginia Tech's student-run newspaper. Like all newspapers, the *Collegiate Times* contained a "Classifieds" section where students could pay to have mini-advertisements posted. The "Classifieds" section contained subsections as well to better organize the ads published, like: Automotive, Employment, For Sale, Wanted, Musical, Rooms, Notices, Personal Notes, etc.—but with an unusual addition: Greek Notes. The Greek Notes subsection differentiated the messages posted by Greek Organizations and their affiliated members from the rest of the Virginia Tech community's postings. The existence of the Greek Notes subsection suggests how deeply separated Greek life was from the rest of Virginia Tech. The section consisted of communication among members, showing their affinities for one another as well as for fellow organizations.



could find acceptance and encouragement during their college years. Sororities relied on this foundation of sisterhood to create tighter bonds. To do so, they frequently applauded their members in ads in the *Collegiate Times* in many different forms: congratulations to new pledge classes (the group of students who become initiated into the organization together), academic achievements, philanthropic achievements, and so forth.<sup>6</sup> They established the notion that *these are your sisters, and they always will be your sisters*. By publicly acknowledging their members by name in advertisements and postings, these Greek organizations set the standard that their members were no longer their own individual persons (or autonomous selves), but real representatives of their respective Greek organizations. They must now be loyal to their sisterhood—their chosen family.

This sisterhood effect has always been present in these institutions here at Virginia Tech, dating back to the inception of Greek life. As 1979 rushee Claire Dawson stated, joining a sorority made her realize “the feeling that there’s a unique bond that you can’t get anywhere else than from a sorority.”<sup>7</sup> Although a positive expression about what it meant to be in Greek life, Dawson’s sentiments reveal a toxic culture that would have darker implications down the line. Eighteen years later, the Greek Notes include different sororities welcoming girls into the inner “circle,”<sup>8</sup> an open example of the exclusivity and secrecy they would soon be entering. Here arose the following issues: How did these Greek organizations and their interconnected web on campus affect individual members’ sexual citizenship? How did they affect individuals’ own notions of self-autonomy and self-worth? How and why did Greek life foster this type of environment? What could happen when the bonds of brotherhood or sisterhood were at risk? Members of Greek organizations commonly take on the persona of their respective organization, ultimately having conforming effects on the individual and for those around them.<sup>9</sup>

Sororities and fraternities alike, survive and thrive on the secrecy that they were founded on. Once initiated into a Greek organization, members quickly come to realize that the exterior appearances of an “inner circle” are not false and simply for show, but shallow interpretations of something much stronger and more connected. Members of each pledge class must participate in sacred rites and rituals, bonding to one to another, and ultimately to the rest of the members of their organization. Adding another level of solemnity, fraternal ceremonies contain religious undertones and prayers, con-

structing their “bonds” under God. Presented with rituals, members must swear oaths of secrecy and allegiance to their fraternal organization.<sup>10</sup> These sacred rituals are meant to deconstruct the notion that their individual members are their own individual selves. They are the organization and are accountable to upholding the values and identity of their organization.

Still looking at the *Collegiate Times*, there were not only bonds within these organizations and their members, but also across Virginia Tech’s Greek life community altogether. Fraternity and sorority organizations often communicated with one another in the Greek Notes, trying to hype each other up for upcoming socials, which were parties between one fraternity and one sorority—always hosted by the fraternity; thank-you notes for those very socials (typically expressing how much fun was had the night before),<sup>11</sup> and even postings inviting Greek life members to Crush Parties<sup>12</sup> (parties that members brought a date to). These back-and-forth messages between the fraternities and sororities highlight their reliance on one another, which was used to endorse and uphold the social environment that Virginia Tech’s Greek life thrived in during the 1990s.

Living in an environment of nonstop partying and constantly flowing alcohol, Virginia Tech’s Greek life community prioritized partying in the 1990s. As seen repeatedly in the Greek Notes, Virginia Tech fraternities regularly held parties, either hosted for individual sororities or hosted as an event open to those who dared to breach the closed-off walls of Greek life for a monetary price.<sup>13</sup> This emphasizes the heavy drinking and partying culture that was part of Virginia Tech’s Greek life. Going out to drink and socialize was the cultural norm and standard of “what to do” for those in Greek life. Constant references to tailgates, weekday socials, and fun Friday nights all implied the social scene of the Greek life community—a scene of alcohol and drunken fraternization throughout the week. This social scene was predominantly controlled by the fraternities on campus since they were the ones that were actually allowed to serve alcohol at their parties and they held control over the spaces where these events took place, which in turn allowed for and perpetuated these fraternity-controlled spaces to become hot-spots for sexual activity.

With the additional factor of a heavy drinking culture within Virginia Tech’s Greek life community, their environments were sites of sexual victimization as well. Because fraternities and sororities were founded in traditional sex-

role values, they perpetuate conceptions that validate sexual victimization.<sup>14</sup> As fraternities controlled this social landscape, sorority women were often left to follow suit with how the men desired their events to play out.

Similar to how sororities were all about sisterhood, fraternities were all about brotherhood. Virginia Tech's fraternities often presented their values in the *Collegiate Times* through Rush ads (advertisements meant to convince male students to attempt to join their fraternity). As fraternity Theta Chi boasted in their 1997 Spring Rush ad:

I believe that there are many good Fraternities at Tech, but ΘΧ is the best. I believe that I have spent the best days of my life at The Ranch on Jennelle Road and that the average person doesn't know what he's missing. [...] I believe a Fraternity House should be off campus, that Jessie Dog will never die, and that our letters are not meant to be worn by girls. I believe in spending half my income at the Balcony, in late night Victim K, and week long partying that ends 10 minutes before an exam. I believe in the primacy of Alma Mater. [...] I believe that the times I can't remember are the times I'll never forget. [...] I believe in 25 years of tradition, brotherhood, and the helping hand<sup>15</sup>

This ad does an exemplary job of showcasing what fraternity life at Virginia Tech was like. Firstly, the ad portrays a distinction between someone who is a member and someone who is not a member of a fraternal organization (or more specifically, Theta Chi), stating that those who were not a part of it were missing out on an unknown "had to be there" experience. The ad further emphasized that distinction by employing insider terms that created othering; "The Ranch on Jennelle Road"<sup>16</sup> referred to Theta Chi's off-campus house where they would frequently throw parties, and still do so to this day.

Their reference to the belief in the importance of off-campus fraternity housing also implies the secret nature of Greek life at Virginia Tech. This desire for a separation from campus suggests the Greek community's sentiments toward Virginia Tech administration's attempts to control Greek life's social scenes. The use of off-campus fraternity houses meant that fraternities could throw as many parties as they wanted without needing to go through university-mandated codes and sanctions. Off-campus fraternity

houses were a huge method for Greek life to operate under the radar and away from the public eye. Students were freer to do as they pleased, so why would anyone try to ruin that?

Theta Chi's 1997 Spring Rush ad also features the heavy drinking culture associated with Virginia Tech's Greek life, glamorizing drunken blackouts, as well as references to spending loads of money at the Top of the Stairs bar, named as "The Balcony,"<sup>17</sup> all while holding the tone that *this* lifestyle was the norm. The same idea was perpetuated throughout the Classifieds' "Greek Notes" with ads for boozy concerts and parties hosted by fraternities.<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately, this culture also helped breed sexual victimization by challenging notions of sexual citizenship. In a 1990 study of 1,500 undergraduate students, data concluded that members of a fraternal organization were significantly more likely to be perpetrators of sexual aggression than their non-Greek affiliated counterparts.<sup>19</sup> Similar studies also concluded that these incidents predominantly feature alcohol use and having already been acquaintances.<sup>20</sup> Comparatively, a study from the 1992–93 Virginia Tech school year conducted by Judith Scott, Virginia Tech's former Sexual Assault Educator, "found that females and those associated with Greek organizations were more likely to experience sexual victimization and have alcohol be involved,"<sup>21</sup> falling into line with those previous findings associated with Greek life. All past collected data had been from surveys, not from police or university reports.

When attempting to collect past data for my research, I found it particularly difficult to find instances of actual reports and accounts of sexual victimization and aggression, with few exceptions. I propose that, because of the strong sense of solidarity within Virginia Tech's Greek life community, it was difficult for anything to break past that community level into the public eye. No one wanted to give Virginia Tech Greek life a bad name or sacrifice the secret world offered by those Greek organizations—a very important aspect of how individual autonomy was challenged and controlled. The reputation of one's Greek organization was more important than the individual member. Presented in *Sexual Citizens's* "The Power of the Group,"

Being high-status makes a fraternity's members sexually desirable – or at least socially desirable for sex. This can make it a far greater challenge to report or talk about sex as 'unwanted' [...This] high sta-

tus provides men with some protection against allegations of sexual assault, because it's harder for others to imagine that sex with such men could be unwanted. This leads to a disturbing conclusion: the reputation of the group may help protect its members from accountability.<sup>22</sup>

That model posed by Hirsch and Khan combined with the Greek life community supports the idea that victims and/or bystanders of sexual victimization and sexual aggression could have felt forced into silence when faced with difficult scenarios of holding their own peers or organizations accountable. People naturally want to protect and validate their own decisions, and choosing to be a part of an organization that condones sexually aggressive behavior could have been upsetting to an individual experiencing or witnessing those behaviors. Instead, it could have been easier to stay silent than bring attention to an unsavory aspect of their organization and/or affiliations.

Similarly, another layer to sexual victimization and sexual aggression within Greek life culture was (and is) its relationship to acquaintance rape. As showcased in the *Collegiate Times*' Greek Notes, Greek life's tight-knit community meant that virtually everybody knew each other, even if only by name. That notion of closeness in conjunction with the fact that sexual victimization and sexual aggression occurred at higher rates among Greek-affiliated organizations in the 1990s<sup>23</sup> suggests that many instances of sexual victimization and sexual aggression may have been by an acquaintance within the Greek life community. This makes the likelihood of reporting decrease even further, possibly for reasons of not wanting to breach loyalty and codes of confidentiality out of fear of putting their organization at risk.

One of the most jarring incidents I discovered while searching for instances of sexual victimization and sexual aggression within the circle of Virginia Tech's Greek life was written in a 1994 *Roanoke Times* article.<sup>24</sup> One of the most notable aspects of the account was the fact that the victim was not actually a member of the Greek community, but a student from Radford University, another local college. The victim had reported to Blacksburg Police that the assailant, Todd Raines, a then-newly initiated member of fraternity Tau Kappa Epsilon, had raped her in the early hours of the morning after sleeping in a friend's room at the off-campus fraternity house, the night after a fraternity party.<sup>25</sup> During the court proceedings, the assailant claimed to

have had consensual sex with the victim. He testified that he had felt guilty about the situation because he had later discovered the victim to allegedly be the girlfriend of the fraternity member in whose room the incident took place.<sup>26</sup> Raines' apology to his fraternity brother displays how deeply rooted feelings of association were within Virginia Tech's Greek life organizations.

From a Greek life perspective, many details of the incident immediately stood out to me: the reporting victim was not a member of the community, the crime had been committed in a fraternity-controlled space, and the perpetrator's reaction to the incident. Because the victim was a student at Radford University, removed from the social pressures and dynamics of Virginia Tech's Greek circle, it is possible that it could have been easier for her to claim her autonomy and voice her experience against Raines, her rapist. She did not live within the confines of Virginia Tech Greek life that so many members were subjected to—a need to abide by social scripts, showing loyalty to their communities, and a devotion to power dynamics. The victim of this assault had not previously known her attacker, therefore removing the curtain that “acquaintance rape” so often veils over campus assaults, or in this scenario, sexual victimization within Greek life. Occurring in an off-campus fraternity house, the assault happened behind closed doors, where the victim had no control over her environment—a common theme for the world of Greek life. She had immediately lost control of her space the moment she stepped into that off-campus fraternity house; it was now on their terms and rules.

An odd tune of “brotherhood” rang through Raines' account of the morning of the assault. He was not remorseful for his actions against the victim; in his eyes, he had done nothing wrong to her. However, he was remorseful because he was afraid of having hurt his relationship with one of his “big brothers.”<sup>27</sup> Raines' actions had jeopardized his position within that organization and among his fellow brothers, by reason of breach of loyalty, not sexual aggression. His status within the group was more important than the fact that he had violated the victim's own sexual autonomy. Rather than taking claim and ownership for his actions, Raines reaffirmed perceptions of Virginia Tech Greek life's drinking culture by partially blaming his actions on his drinking habits, alleging that he had a drinking problem that made him more aggressive, while still maintaining the stance that he was innocent.<sup>28</sup> Despite Raines' breach in conduct, he was still initiated into the fraternity later that

day, following the incident, further showing how others' sexual autonomy did not compare when it came to the power and bond of a fraternity.

Looking at the case of Todd Raines through the lens of someone in Virginia Tech's Greek life, his account rings true for the culture present within it. The heavy drinking culture of Greek life automatically took away individuals' sexual autonomy by placing their members into situations where they lost control of their spaces, and sometimes, even their abilities to say "yes." With excessive alcohol intake came the loss of the ability to give consent, as well as the loss of sound judgment. In this instance, the perpetrator of the crime casually entered the bed of the victim, without acknowledgement of her autonomy to her own bodily space and sexuality. With additional implications, such as the need to be a part of a group and individuals' needs for validation during such formative years, it is fair to assume that individuals in Virginia Tech Greek life could have felt silenced in the face of sexual victimization and sexual aggression for a variety of reasons. Some could have felt as though they had no other option than to engage (in a sexual act or something else of that nature) because of uneven power dynamics across organizations. For instance, a sorority sister may have felt obligated to stay mute about instances of sexual victimization or sexual aggression by a fraternity brother because she may have wanted to follow the "status-quo" imposed by their associated organizations. Others may have stayed silent out of fear of social retaliation by peer groups within their Greek organizations.

Hirsch and Khan make similar observations in *Sexual Citizens*, referencing the social obligations that many students of Greek life encounter and view as "normal."<sup>29</sup> An invitation to a date party (formal-dressed parties hosted by a fraternity or sorority, where its members invite a date to accompany them) often came along with the social obligation to sleep with their date, even if no prior discussions about their sexual projects took place. Throughout the 1990s, examples of date parties are seen in the *Collegiate Times*, proudly displaying the names of dates being invited to these exclusive and high-status functions.<sup>30</sup> Still young and impressionable, students often highly valued the lifestyle offered by their respective organizations, instead of practicing their own social autonomies, publicly paying homage to their expressed priorities.<sup>31</sup> In conjunction with Virginia Tech Greek life's drinking culture, skewed and challenged notions of social autonomy stripped away its members' sex-

ual citizenships by way of upholding dangerously uneven power dynamics and group peer pressures.

Whether intentionally or unintentionally, Virginia Tech Greek life fostered a negative environment for victims of sexual victimization and sexual aggression throughout the 1990s. By branding its “exclusive togetherness,” victims may have felt fear of ostracism within Greek life when facing victimization by another member. Appearances were—and still are—a priority to maintain the “perfect” and secret world of privilege that many members of Virginia Tech’s Greek life community enjoyed and sought to protect.

Reading through the “Greek Notes” and other Greek-related content in the *Collegiate Times* made me realize that life and campus culture within Greek life at Virginia Tech has not changed all that much since the 1990s. Similar patterns are still at play that require attention within the way Greek life operates on campus. The relationship between alcohol-use and member-organization allegiance fosters an environment for sexual citizenship to be consistently challenged and/or pushed to the side and ignored.

To bring about change, it is imperative to regularly present alcohol misuse prevention and sexual assault prevention trainings to Virginia Tech’s Greek life organizations. Members of Virginia Tech’s Greek life are predisposed to becoming victims and/or perpetrators of sexual victimization and sexual aggression. These groups need repeated proper education on consent and sexual citizenship as they are constantly being reminded of their lack thereof in their respective organizations.

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# 10. Women's Agency in Virginia Tech's Emerging Sexual Geography

KATE SCHILLER

"If you assume that males and females are biologically different, this will present problems;"<sup>1</sup> stated James F. Keller, a University of Florida professor who gave a guest lecture at Virginia Tech about traits of men and women in April of 1978. It was this immediate assumption by the administration that males and females were vastly different that perpetuated the struggle for women to gain agency, both sexual and non-sexual, on Virginia Tech's campus.

Although it is often touted that Virginia Tech proudly began accepting female students in 1921, it was not until much later that the students, often dubbed "coeds", were able to integrate into the campus. Women at Virginia Tech were restricted to outside geographies, including physically at the Radford University campus and the relatively distant Hillcrest dormitory on the VPI campus, as well as academically through the Home Economics program, where women were limited in the agency they could express for quite some time. It could be argued that those struggles remain.<sup>2</sup> Even with these minimal steps, there were still clashes between the sexes. Ranging from degrading names for female students to their exclusion from campus organizations and overall life, it was evident from early on that it was going to take persistence to establish female residency and full acceptance on Virginia Tech's campus.

The time period I will analyze, roughly 1964–1979, is crucial to understanding the continuing acceptance of women on Virginia Tech's campus because of the presence of activism in the universal collegiate atmosphere. I will argue that the activist spirit present gave collegiate women a foundation to fight for their well-deserved campus agency in an emerging sexual geography. A sexual geography, as defined by writers Jennifer Hirsch and Shamus Khan, alludes to the concept that space is inevitably intertwined with sexuality.<sup>3</sup> The framework of the sexual geography allows for a correlation between

a place and one's sexuality and sexual behaviors. As such, I will argue that because women had lacked so much agency on the Virginia Tech campus prior to the sixties and seventies, their gain in agency created an extremely active sexual geography. Whether that be physically between female and male students, academically in leadership roles on campus, or through student activism, women became empowered and recognized the remaining downfalls of the time period they existed in.

Additionally, circulation of legislation, such as the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and Title IX played a crucial role in female students gaining agency on campus. These pieces of legislation not only created new spaces for women from different social circles to exercise their voices and interact with each other, but also revealed many injustices inside and outside of the Virginia Tech campus. As such, it is the introduction of this legislation, and like ideas being deemed socially acceptable, that allowed for women to exercise power—whether that be academically in leadership positions, socially through activist groups, or physically in interactions with their male cohorts.

It is important to note that upon the initial admittance of women to Virginia Tech in 1921, only a very small cohort of women arrived. Despite an initial jump of female enrollment in 1931, the cohort number wavered so much across the decade that President Burruss attempted to cut the home economics program, which almost exclusively catered to the female academic. From this time until 1940, when Hillcrest Hall was completed, women were forced to live in what Burruss called “private residences.”<sup>4</sup> However, upon its completion, the women of Virginia Tech mainly lived in Hillcrest Hall, referred to by male students as the “Skirt Barn”. In 1994, the General Assembly created a program, that on its face, preserved academic equality, but placed women on separate campuses unless they met certain criteria. That meant that unless women were either a graduate student or an undergraduate of at least twenty-one years of age, they had to reside outside of Virginia Tech on the Radford campus for at least two years.<sup>5</sup> Lacking physical space on Virginia Tech's campus was a notorious front for the oust of women's residence on campus, at least until the sixties, when new dorms for women were created.

On top of shortcomings in terms of physical space on campus, women were also discouraged in an academic sense. Women were called “curve busters” by *The Virginia Tech* in 1964, which suggested that the reason

women entered the college sphere was to find a male partner, and thus they would take academics less seriously.<sup>6</sup> Despite these discouraging comments made early on, women went on to reach a multitude of academic milestones across the next decade. By 1975, roughly 7,300 women nationwide were working toward PhDs.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, by 1978, the number of women enrolling in college in general increased drastically. The National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges called women “the enrollment story of 1977.”<sup>8</sup> By laying the foundation for the next generation of female academics, collegiate women of the mid sixties and early seventies worked hard to fight preconceived notions of unfit academic character. These stereotypical perceptions of women on campus seemed to minimally affect those who remained in terms of enrollment during the sixties, and even less so in the seventies, but certainly fueled the criticisms expressed in many of the “Papermate of the Week” articles.

While the arrival of female students on Virginia Tech’s campus was gradual at first, those who served as pioneers in the early 1960s were largely determined to establish permanency on campus, even in the more reserved social climate of that time. Barbara, one of *The Virginia Tech*’s 1964 “Papermate[s] of the week,” stated that “[s]he’d also like a few more coeds on campus so people won’t be quite as surprised when she tells them that she goes to VPI.”<sup>9</sup> Various other “Papermates”, clearly a twist on the infamous “Playmate of the Week” featured in *Playboy* magazine, had assorted criticisms pertaining to the small number of coeds on campus. One Papermate, Vesta Hartman, perhaps most revealingly told *The Virginia Tech* that “[she] feels that our school needs more female students and would unhesitatingly recommend to girls an education at VPI. It is her belief that life in a college community in which the men outnumber the women twenty to one gives a coed good preparation for the business world in which women are in the minority, as well as providing the opportunity to meet many interesting people.”<sup>10</sup> The adaptation of this mindset suggests that, despite being vastly outnumbered by their male cohorts, women were willing to work for agency in several spaces around campus. Anne, who “liked fraternities and wished for campus recognition of both fraternities and sororities...”,<sup>11</sup> expressed a similar aspiration of agency in the social sphere of Virginia Tech’s campus in the 1964–65 academic year, when fraternities and sororities were not recognized on campus. Lastly, ‘Papermate’ Mary Rives Dietrich is rather straightforward of the campus scene—“she dislikes untruthful people, boys who don’t like girls at VPI,

and ‘sometimes Yankees.’<sup>12</sup> It is clear that, in the varying ways the message is communicated, these few “coeds” at Virginia Tech began to pave the way for more women to arrive on campus the following year.

It was when women had a more prevalent presence in living quarters on campus that the sexual geography of Virginia Tech’s campus was transformed, creating an emerging sexual landscape. The campus was initially a geography that physically segregated women from men. Beginning in 1963, however, women gained the ability to dine with male students at Owens Dining Hall if they did not live at Hillcrest Hall, which had its own separate dining facility.<sup>13</sup> The women of Virginia Tech came together to have a meeting with the Dean of Women, Dean Audrey Rentz, in October of 1965 to discuss their dissatisfaction with campus life and their accommodations. In an effort to boost female morale across campus and call female students to exert their agency, Dean Audrey Rentz spoke to *The Virginia Tech* in 1965, stating the “[n]eed for [a] [s]olid [f]emale [f]ront.”<sup>14</sup> Acknowledging that many of the disparities women faced across campus were due to the gender imbalance, Dean Rentz called for female students to step into leadership roles across campus to increase communication, emphasizing roles in the developing Executive Women’s Council.<sup>15</sup> She also suggested more interaction between males and females on campus, perhaps via the dining halls, as it could foster a more amicable campus environment.<sup>16</sup> It is this outreach work, in addition to the expectation of more coeds on campus, that set the stage for women students in the coming years to be able to exercise agency more frequently and freely at Virginia Tech.

Despite seemingly being pinned against one another, male and female students had similar complaints about life on campus. Women were placed in inadequate living quarters; men had shown resistance to the formal request that had to be approved before bringing a woman to campus. There were also drinking restrictions in place, as well as behavioral expectations, and they didn’t seem to fit the ever-evolving college student of the sixties.<sup>17</sup> This shift in behavioral norms brings an alternate perspective to the sexual geography of campus—men and women alike were eager to break the cookie-cutter frameworks they were raised with and grow into their own autonomy. Often, that meant expressing themselves through typical “collegiate activities”: watching and playing college sports; club involvement; partying; and of course, expressing their sexuality in whatever ways they could. Progress-

ing into the next decade, a student chronicled being written up for a minor misconduct incident, “[i]nstead of working on a decent library, an honest Bookstore, and improved parking, the faculty and students are hampered by minor issues such as party/jock raids, beer cans, and the control of our social sex lives.”<sup>18</sup> Students were beginning to have issues that perhaps the administration was not prepared to handle at the time of a shifting social climate—from widespread early sixties conservatism to the modern ‘college kid’ era known today.

In anticipation of the growth in number of coeds at Virginia Tech, the administration began to renovate Eggleston Hall in 1965. The entire plan stated the school wished to provide room for 2,500 new students, with Campbell and Eggleston Halls specifically being renovated for new coeds.<sup>19</sup> By creating more physical space for at least 500 new women to arrive on campus, and even more men, the sexual geography became even more emergent. With these ideals in mind, the administration laid out plans perfectly; there was a house mother, as well as a staff counselor employed specifically in the Eggleston dorm. Alongside these measures was the intent to keep male and female residences separate—Campbell and Eggleston were renovated because a new dining hall at the time was to serve as a buffer between the female and male spheres on campus.<sup>20</sup> This growth, however, proved to sprout more issues—the question of dorm security and sexual violence arose. Yet, both positive and negative consequences of the establishment further set the stage for what was to come in the budding years of Virginia Tech’s sexual landscape.

The following spring, in March of 1966, coeds on campus came together yet again in efforts to participate in Conflict, which was a yearly symposium for women across college campuses. Instead of promoting the cause of the event, which was not mentioned in the article, it read, “[t]he Conflict symposium brings to the campus an unexpected bonus for Virginia Tech’s 6700 male students; over 200 young ladies from five woman’s colleges across the state will come to Blacksburg to participate in the conference.”<sup>21</sup> This conference also had male ambassadors who were to escort the participants to every event of the day, including the parties aimed to boost social interaction at night. These male ambassadors were recruited on a volunteer basis, mentioned at the end of the article.<sup>22</sup> Even when women were given the chance to express agency, such as this conference, their actions were still some-

what limited because of the sexual geography and gender roles of this time period. It can also be seen in one of the popular columns featured in the student newspaper, *The Virginia Tech*, called “The Campus Seen.” In several instances, student author Buddy Browning is quick to use rather derogatory terms to describe women’s actions and status on campus. Whether that took the form of blaming complaints of women on campus on raging hormones<sup>23</sup> or providing Playboy comparisons<sup>24</sup> to everyday activities, one could always find a sexual notion highlighted in “The Campus Seen.”

Outside of the college campus at Virginia Tech was also an exciting atmosphere for women as activism became a social norm. By the 1970s, women had begun to gain agency through political activism lobbying for change regarding several popular issues over the period, including the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), the Voting Rights Amendment (VRA), accessibility of childcare, and abortion, to name a few. The League of Women Voters of Montgomery County was a main resource for the women of Montgomery County who wished to be politically active in their communities. By making political news and current events accessible to women, the League of Women Voters found a unique way to keep women engaged in ways they hadn’t before, and continues to do so in the modern day. Even though the interests of women involved in the League and those on Virginia Tech’s campus may be similar in nature, they are on different levels.

When referring to these two groups of women, it is important to note the types of women that typically composed them, respectively. The typical “outside” woman was married, middle aged, and resided in Montgomery County. She had an interest in getting involved in politics, and may have even had a job. There were also women who were able to transcend these particular borders, since a social norm of the early to mid sixties was to get married while in college. Though this trend faded as the seventies began, there was still a whole group of women balancing their married world with their campus world.

Using “outside” and “inside” frameworks, the different levels of activism and attitudes between women “outside” campus versus those “inside” campus can be understood. The “outside” campus demographic of women emphasized accessibility to political information and voter education as a way of building one’s political autonomy. They were eager to establish their position in male-dominated political narratives. They did so by frequently throw-

ing events such as workshops and forums, including one in 1976 pertaining to the once budding idea of identifying Blacksburg as a city,<sup>25</sup> and the state financing of local schools.<sup>26</sup> Often, these events were advertised to collegiate students in efforts to boost morale and women's engagement. Despite these efforts, however, it was rare that the interests of the two groups intersected; rather, they ran parallel. These "outside" issues typically were not of immediate interest to collegiate women, who were emphatic on their activist roles regarding Choice rallies and fighting for space on the male-filled Virginia Tech campus.

"Inside" women fully embraced activism on campus, the same way "outside" women did political issues off campus. While, indeed, there were a spectrum of personalities of the "inside" women, as some were more reserved than others, they solidified for one common goal: to be taken seriously on campus. Aside from that, however, they had further ambitions, which included but were not limited to: participation in Choice rallies, wherein they fought for more equitable visiting hours and overall safety in dormitories;<sup>27</sup> leadership positions in the Student Government Association (SGA), which influenced administrative decisions across campus;<sup>28</sup> and enforcing the promises Title IX legislation made.<sup>29</sup> Women on campus were able to have their voices heard through expressions of activism such as rallies, letters-to-the-editor, and involvement in SGA.

An issue to analyze using an outside perspective versus an inside perspective would be the Equal Rights Amendment. At the time of its prevalence, the League of Women Voters put the utmost emphasis on their support of ERA passage, while it remained low-profile on campus. Although separated by a small margin of three to four years, feelings about the Equal Rights Amendment on campus varied greatly from those off campus. A 1977 *Collegiate Times* article reporting on a local attorney's comments on the ERA alluded to the idea that even if it was passed, it would be powerless,<sup>30</sup> reflecting the notion of the previous decade that women could not have codified agency. However, contradicting this piece was an article released the next year, wherein several state delegates told their audience not to lose hope on passage yet.<sup>31</sup> The same year, there was a student editorial criticized lawmakers for blocking the ERA's passage, shaming them for not serving equality to the outside sphere.<sup>32</sup> The wavering in student feeling toward the ERA creates uncertainty that leads one to believe the students lacked the faith

in their legislators that “outside” women perhaps had. In 1979, the *Roanoke Times* put out a piece on Housewives for ERA, which was a group formed in Illinois that raised awareness about ERA’s possible passage. They took action on several levels, one of which included handing out roses to spread awareness of its importance.<sup>33</sup> The next year in 1980, a piece in the *Roanoke Times* continued to reflect the ideals of Montgomery County women, stating that their support was strong for the ERA, and they hoped its passage would solidify equality for women across the board.<sup>34</sup> This course of action contrasts the route taken by collegiate women on the Equal Rights Amendment, despite its wavering popularity. There is a swap in roles by “outside” women and “inside” women regarding Title IX legislation and its pertinence on Virginia Tech’s campus.

Passed in 1972, the Title IX section of the Civil Rights Amendment prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex in academia. Most famously known for the equality provided in collegiate athletics, coeds at Virginia Tech were eager for its full implementation across campus.<sup>35</sup> At the start, Title IX seemed to have negative implications for both men and women on campus due to the large influx of people interested in intramural sport leagues. A nationally ranked program at the time, Virginia Tech intramural sports had 349 competing teams in 1977.<sup>36</sup> Issues arose such as overcrowding, which resulted in back-to-back games and left players and referees exhausted.<sup>37</sup> Though these issues presented dissatisfaction, there was effective communication occurring. The director, Howard Shannon, had even stated “I believe the students should make their own choices,”<sup>38</sup> regarding the rules and regulations of which teams play during which season, and how each sport, was to be played. It was intramural sports that allowed women and men to interact in a more level environment, but most Title IX issues fell within the realm of collegiate athletics. Even though Title IX was passed in 1972, it was not reported to be fully implemented at Virginia Tech until June of 1978, upon which women at Tech called out the athletics department for not expanding women’s sports sooner.<sup>39</sup>

Despite having different agendas, it is clear that both outside and inside women in Blacksburg and Montgomery County were ready to enact change both on the local and federal level. By using similar strategies across the board, particularly writing to newspapers, whether that be the *Roanoke Times* or the *Collegiate Times*, women found spaces to for their voices to be

heard. The activist spirit displayed by women during the sixties and seventies is exactly what empowered women to gain agency in places they had not previously. Progressive attitudes (and more government funding for Virginia Tech) allowed for the successful voicing of opinions that had been ignored just a decade prior, particularly concerning women's equality and Title IX legislation.

As was the case before, the dormitories continued to be an issue, dealing with matters such as dorm security, which was not taken seriously by the administration until women came together to make the issue known. Because women were restricted to certain living quarters, there was often unwanted attention drawn to the buildings, including break ins, cat-calling, and other forms of harassment described by the students.<sup>40</sup> Instead of taking these complaints seriously, the Virginia Tech administration approved various changes to other aspects of campus security, including but not limited to campus parking security and fire alarm updates.<sup>41</sup> As a form of security to contain the relationship between co-eds in 1966, women had to sign in and out of Hillcrest Hall and obey certain curfews. When it was reported on in the *Virginia Tech* accordingly, the headline reads "Women Question Brandt; Dean Rentz Hears 'Gripes.'"<sup>42</sup> This is just an example of the rhetoric used surrounding women's criticisms of life on campus, wherein women's complaints are depicted as 'trivial', as quoted in this article.<sup>43</sup> Even though women begin to establish themselves as residents on campus, their voices rarely become lifted until activism begins on campus in the late sixties and early seventies.

As the number of coeds on campus and enrollment in general continued to increase, there were several concerns regarding dorm security and security for women in general. Various accounts of "Peeping Toms,"<sup>44</sup> and several offenders striking in women's dorms called for severe reform on campus. Since the dorms on campus remained single sex, there had been speculation that combining genders would reduce the chance for assaults on campus. By analyzing the scene on various campuses via student reporters, James Madison University, the University of Virginia, and Radford University all "indicated that there seemed to be less problems in co-ed dorms than in dorms housing only one sex."<sup>45</sup> It made sense—since the Virginia Tech administration had a mission to separate the student body by gender, the unfamiliarity created inherent hostility of the male ego and blurred boundaries, so even when there was interaction, it may have been awkward in nature. The admin-

istration seemed to neglect this idea entirely, as coeducation dorms were not popular until more modern times. This begs the question of whether the administration at Virginia Tech truly wanted to protect their students or chose to turn a blind eye because they could not immediately profit from remedy.

Perhaps further to blame for the awareness of this behavior by male peers could lie in the rise of popularity of *Playboy*. *Playboy* circulated through Virginia Tech's male audience in the sixties and seventies and set the stage for female awareness as well. With male peers being overtly sexual in multiple columns of the *Virginia Tech* and *Collegiate Times*, particularly in "The Campus Seen", women were able to find spaces of resistance, which in turn allowed them to build their agency. What better way to let the world know campuses were sexual spaces than the headline: "Pornography Sales: A Booming Sideline"?<sup>46</sup> A local favorite at many spots around town, state store managers in the article, the popularity of *Playboy* and like publications signaled a time shift, but also kept the sexual scene to a personal sphere. It adds a layer to the sexual geography at Virginia Tech. Instead of a social practice within the geography, these magazines add a personal, private element. *Playboy* even provided camaraderie for collegiate males. Even though it was at a separate college campus, a *Playboy* club came about at Xavier University in Ohio.<sup>47</sup> *Playboy's* popularity stormed the nation, spreading notions of objectification and setting abnormal beauty standards for women across the world. In a study conducted across six college campuses regarding the social repercussions of *Playboy*, many noted that it promoted a sense of sexual openness, upon which the number of "college virgins" was vastly diminishing.<sup>48</sup> It also revealed that people were beginning to openly identify as varying sexualities and gender identities other than "straight", something that truly signaled a shift in generations.<sup>49</sup> This was another characteristic of the modern collegiate student—they were not afraid to express themselves in a fashion their conservative parents might disapprove of at home. The college atmosphere, in a seemingly conflicting dynamic at Virginia Tech, gave students a social geography to be themselves, but still remained restricted in some capacities, as the administration had the final say when it came to passing changes on campus. Sexual promiscuity seemed to be a way to separate those deemed "cool" on campus versus those "un-cool", as the sexual geography amongst many campuses, Virginia Tech included, began to bloom.

One of the biggest examples of *Playboy's* influence on women was the backlash against the Miss Virginia Tech Pageant, which was introduced as a beauty pageant on campus in 1978 sponsored by the Phi Kappa Sigma fraternity.<sup>50</sup> Dubbed “a giant step backwards”<sup>51</sup> by the *Collegiate Times*, it was unpopular among many women on campus. It was seen as a method to objectify Virginia Tech women in the name of obtaining a scholarship. Alongside a comic calling the pageant a “meat show” and depicting an older man in a suit staring at a *Playboy*-esque figure,<sup>52</sup> many people wrote to the newspaper with their own responses. If not worried about the ethics of the “meat show” itself, women expressed rather progressive views, testifying their disapproval that it furthered the gap between men and women on campus,<sup>53</sup> discrediting any academic achievement women had earned during the past decade. There was even a petition circulating around campus that received 500 signatures and called for the change of the prize of the contest. The women’s collective held out signs that read “[a]nother livestock contest here at cow college? Not if we can help it. Sign this petition against Miss Va. Tech.”<sup>54</sup> It is apparent that women felt empowered to speak out about this incident because of the time period they were living in. For years, Virginia Tech held (and still holds) the Homecoming Court, which used to consist of only Homecoming Queens in the early sixties.<sup>55</sup> Similar to the concept of Miss Virginia Tech, fraternities or campus organizations would choose a candidate based on looks, and it would run similarly to a pageant. There was no backlash against this until waves of activism crashed onto Virginia Tech’s shores.

Another point of contention in the seventies was the issue of visitation hours in the dorms. Though not all students felt this way, a large part of the student body came together to throw a slew of Choice rallies to relay the message that they did not wish to have their personal lives controlled by Virginia Tech administration. As it stood prior to the rallies, the restrictions were as follows: “Va. Tech offers two visitation programs: limited (specified hours on weekends) and lounge visitation (no members of the opposite sex allowed in rooms).”<sup>56</sup> A true sign of the times—prior to this rally the school held an event that had an abysmal turnout, but when it came to the issue of sexual autonomy, whether students realized it or not, they showed out. The Choice students proposed a change of visitation hours to be “23-hour, 7 days a week visitation.”<sup>57</sup> Choice leader, Linda Podojil, prided herself on organizing such a successful turnout, despite admittedly not drawing the entire campus. She

expressed that those who showed up were extremely happy to do so, and that was all that mattered.<sup>58</sup> This truly shows how the spirit of a united front, regardless of if it consisted of the entire student body, was able to relay a message. It also showed that students at Virginia Tech were tired of being separated on campus. A more accepting social climate among peers was on the horizon, but the administration was still stuck in a conservative head-space.

At the same time, it is also important to note those who did not care to attend the rally because it didn't pertain to them: those who lived off campus. One student stated, "I really don't care. I live off-campus. However, I think there should be more visitation."<sup>59</sup> Living off-campus was an entirely different sexual geography from that off campus—largely unrestricted, students were left to their own devices. Another student stated as such: "Part of the reason I live off-campus is because of the visitation policies."<sup>60</sup> As previously stated, the new college student wanted to express themselves in unrestricted ways, which perhaps was the appeal of going away to college in the first place.

Despite the trials and tribulations faced by women on Virginia Tech's campus from 1964–1979, it is clear that there was no lack of trying when it came to expressing their views and gaining agency. While often discouraged by male peers' demeaning attitudes through the age of *Playboy*, objectification of women, or gender norms of the time, female students at Virginia Tech were able to find feminist, activist, or just uplifting spaces between their cohort allowed for safe expression. By doing this, early collegiate women paved the way for women down the road to obtain agency in higher education as well; the number of women entering both undergraduate and graduate school skyrocketed toward the end of the seventies. Just the same, it is the time period at hand that allowed for these changes and expressions to take place. Because activism was a widespread social norm across college campuses at the time, it was only a matter of time before the students ascribed to them. Collegiate activism remains distinctive on the Virginia Tech campus as well. To analyze these instances in the sixties and seventies shows that women truly wanted to leave a mark on campus and have their voices heard, exercising their agency. Even though activism was prevalent outside of Virginia Tech's campus as well, with the League of Women Voters, collegiate activism was, and remains unique in nature due to the issues at hand.

The average Virginia Tech college student was transforming from one who was a VPI cadet male to an average collegiate male or female who wanted to either pursue an education or get away from home, or better yet, both. They enjoyed intramural sports, mingling around campus, and growing into their own autonomy, especially women when it was finally permitted. College students had a new sexual geography to explore, and they were ready to do so. Their collegiate sense of freedom was finally realized, and when students discovered administrative blockages to this, they turned to activism to find their voices. The emergent sexual geography at Virginia Tech, though a product of the social scene itself, inherently allowed women and college students in general to have access to social tools previously unavailable. Particularly for women, this was an extremely empowering route of action. Calling out the Virginia Tech administration for lacking dorm security in utmost times of need and neglecting the wants of students, particularly women, gave women spaces to practice their newfound agency on Virginia Tech's campus—as did calling out their male peers for being less than welcoming all.

## Notes

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## II. Virginia Tech Under Pressure

AIDAN YOUNG

Sexual assaults are, unfortunately, commonplace on the Virginia Tech campus. From 2020–2022, during my freshman and sophomore undergraduate years, the university sent out an email alerting the campus about yet another act of sexual violence roughly once per week. Notably, these acts took place during the COVID-19 lockdown when students were not allowed to interact. Yet sexual assaults continued to occur despite strict social distancing measures. Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that these were only reported incidents. The actual number of sexual assaults is likely much higher. Student outrage resulted in a protest outside of Burruss Hall, the main administrative building, demanding action in September 2021.<sup>1</sup> Sexual violence on Virginia Tech's Blacksburg campus has long been a problem that affects a great number of students. Historically, Virginia Tech has only addressed sexual violence on campus when external forces pressure it to do so. Even then, actions are minimal and inadequate.

Discrimination against women has been ingrained into Virginia Tech's culture since the school first became a coed institution in 1921.<sup>2</sup> Thereafter, there have been tremendous improvements to accessibility and equality for women students through Title IX and the various iterations of the Violence Against Women Act. Nonetheless, sexual violence has long been an under-addressed topic at Virginia Tech, particularly by administrators who should bear the responsibility for ensuring a safe campus environment. At many colleges in America, a culture of drinking corresponds with a culture of sexual violence, with Virginia Tech being no exception.<sup>3</sup> This intersection of a discriminatory culture combined with excessive alcohol consumption creates an environment where the latter amplifies the former, occasionally in the form of sexual violence.

There have been plenty of attempts to counteract the culture of sexual violence at Virginia Tech, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s in conjunction with the rise of the feminist movement and the passage of the Violence Against Women Act in 1994. The university's actions in the 1990s are crucial to understanding its handling of the 1994 Christy Brzonkala case, which ulti-

mately went to the Supreme Court. University responses to sexual violence in the 1990s tended to comply with the bare minimum requirements outlined by Title IX, the Violence Against Women Act, and the Clery Act. Even today, the university seems to take reactive steps outlined by such legislation, rather than proactive steps to prevent sexual violence among students.

This chapter explores how Virginia Tech responded to various pressures to change its approach to sexual violence in the 1980s and 1990s by probing the following questions:

- How did state and federal legislation during that period pressure Virginia Tech administrators to address sexual violence on campus?
- How did Virginia Tech respond to growing interest in further incorporating women into campus life?
- How did the student body react to the way the administration handled sexual violence on campus?

This chapter analyzes how external pressures—from state and federal legislation, internal pressures from within the institution, and the student body—prompted responses from Virginia Tech’s administration. Actions taken in the 1990s established a precedent that allowed Virginia Tech to take the bare minimum steps to prevent sexual violence, an approach that is visible in its *de minimus* gestures almost thirty years later.

The 1980s and 1990s proved to be defining decades for sexual violence reform within the United States legal system both at the federal and state levels. Virginia, as it pertains to Virginia Tech, began its legislative reform process in 1980 with the introduction of Senate Bill 258 (SB 258). Rick Boucher, while a Virginia State Senator, was a primary supporter of the Bill. SB 258 demanded that domestic cases of sexual violence become a prosecutable offense.<sup>4</sup> Boucher represented Virginia’s 9th District in Southwest Virginia, which included Virginia Tech. In his support of the bill, Boucher argued that there were two crucial components. The first was “removing the requirement of appropriate physical resistance,” therefore focusing the trial to revolve around the attacker rather than the victim. The second stipulated that “strict limits should be placed on the use of the victim’s past sexual history.”<sup>5</sup> Prior to 1980, a history of sexual activity could be used to discredit the victim as a viable strategy for the prosecution. Boucher argued that this intimidation creates a culture in which victims are far less likely to report

any type of sexual crime. Although this bill did not pass the Virginia House of Representatives in Boucher's initial attempt in 1980, it did pass both houses in 1981. The most important part of this reform established that the victim did not have to physically resist for the offense to be prosecutable.

The Clery Act, passed by the United States Congress in 1990, provided a crucial structure for the official documentation of college campus crime. The Act required every University to publicly disclose any crime that occurred on their campus that fell under the categories of sexual violence, robbery, theft, and hate crime, among others.<sup>6</sup> Prior to the Clery Act, universities across America were not required to report such crimes. As a result, many sex crimes were undocumented and handled internally. It was rare for cases to enter the court system. This allowed universities to essentially sweep many cases and reports of sexual violence under the rug as if they never happened. The Clery Act held universities accountable for crimes committed on their campuses, and they could no longer hide criminal statistics. As of 2023, Virginia Tech abides by the Clery Act through emails to the student community that simply state that a crime has occurred, along with a general description of the crime committed. A majority of the crimes reported as mandated by the Clery Act are sexual assault-related crimes. However, not every case is reported, which is often at the discretion of the victim. Under the Clery Act, the university is not required to take action unless specifically requested by the victim. Regardless of whether the victim requests legal action or not, the university is not obligated to take any action to prevent similar events from happening in the future.

The next milestone piece of sexual violence reform legislation was passed in 1994 when the federal government passed the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). Once again, Rick Boucher, at that point a representative for Virginia's 9th District in the United States House of Representatives, acted as a strong supporter of VAWA. In the Act's infancy in 1991, legislators sought to address the fact that "reported rapes rose four times faster than the overall crime rate during the last ten years."<sup>7</sup> Such statistics spotlight a harsh reality, especially when considered in tandem with demographic changes at Virginia Tech discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter. Once again, it bears repeating that the figures outlined by Boucher only represent the reported rapes, while the unreported cases are likely significantly higher.

In 1991, the VAWA originally proposed an increase in funding police resources to address sexual violence. Congressman Boucher, as the primary author of Virginia's sexual violence reform laws from 1981, pushed for more comprehensive measures to be introduced into the bill. In its final form in 1994, the VAWA provided a massive increase in funding for "battered women's shelters and rape crisis shelters and allowed the courts to apply more stringent penalties to assailants convicted of rape."<sup>8</sup> Since its initial implementation, the VAWA has been reauthorized and updated multiple times to expand its scope and effectiveness. The legislation provided much-needed federal support for addressing sexual violence.

Boucher's legislation, SB 258, was the first criminal legislation regarding sexual violence passed within the state of Virginia, forcing significant reforms to the way that Virginia Tech handled sexual crimes. The result meant the university could no longer defer all acts of sexual violence to the Montgomery County District Court. SB 258 enabled the university and external court systems to punish perpetrators of domestic instances of sexual violence, which previously could be ignored. Domestic instances refer to spousal, relationship, or family-related sexual crimes. This legislation expanded accountability to students who engage in acts of sexual violence within the context of a relationship. In addition, the 1981 legislation encouraged the university to confront perpetrators according to entirely new criteria. The new criteria established that the presumed victim did not have to prove resistance, nor could such acts be protected under the pretext of a domestic partnership. In addition, the reforms carried significantly harsher punishment and expanded prosecutable offenses in order to protect victims' rights and further safety.

Federal passage of the first iteration of the Violence Against Women Act is crucial to understanding the developing protections for women at Virginia Tech in the 1990s. Prior to its passage, the federal government allocated very little funding to the protection of individuals, both men and women, against sexual violence as well as support resources. Support centers for victims are crucial for recovery due to the deeply traumatic effects experienced following an assault. Aside from physical damages, the longest-lasting consequences are typically on a victim's mental health. The federal government's support of such crisis centers was a crucial step toward addressing the effects of rampant sexual violence.

The Women's Center at Virginia Tech (WCVT) benefited greatly from the passage of the Violence Against Women Act. In 2001, WCVT received a grant from the Violence Against Women Act amounting to \$292,632.<sup>9</sup> Until then, the Center relied on University funding, donations, and volunteers for operations, estimated to require around \$200,000 per year.<sup>10</sup> This funding grant suggests that the administration viewed the Women's Center and its mission as necessary for the functioning of Virginia Tech. In fact, the Center would go on to help fulfill diversity goals outlined in the University Plan 1991–1996.<sup>11</sup> The Violence Against Women Act enabled Virginia Tech to apply federal monetary resources in support of its Women's Center. With substantial funding from the VAWA, the Women's Center developed into Virginia Tech's primary support center for all victims of sexual violence on campus.

The explosive growth of women's enrollment at Virginia Tech in the 1980s acted as yet another factor to pressure Virginia Tech to take administrative action. For context, female students accounted for around 5 percent of undergraduates in 1960, 22 percent by 1970, 38 percent by 1980, and 41 percent by 1992.<sup>12</sup> Today, the gender distribution sits at around 43 percent as of fall 2022.<sup>13</sup> The rapid increase in female students at this historically male-dominated institution led to a need for the university to address issues including, but not limited to, sex-based discrimination in the classroom and sexual violence on campus. Virginia Tech could no longer strictly cater to its male population. It had to figure out how to incorporate and support the balance of its total student population, particularly its female students.

Because of Virginia Tech's long history of catering to the needs of male students, the university developed a culture that accepted sexism as a norm. While students, many women viewed Virginia Tech's culture of sexism as acceptable. When reminiscing about her time at Virginia Tech, Judith Leishear, class of 1994, recalled, "I look back now and see the culture of sexism, but at the time, I thought that was normal."<sup>14</sup> Regardless of such histories, discrimination—in this case, according to one's sex—should never be considered acceptable. Such a culture caused students such as Judith to become desensitized to discriminatory practices and sexism. For a coeducational institution to adopt a stance where one group accepts a subordinate position is unacceptable, especially when the institution claims to, and is legally required to, work toward equality.

In response to the radical change in campus demographics, Virginia Tech established various programs to accommodate this influx of women students. For example, the Women's Studies Program in 1988, the Women's Research Institute in 1988, the Women in the World Development Program, the administrative position of Assistant Dean for Sexual Assault, and the Coordinating Council for Women's Concerns in 1989 (CCWC), were all established in response to the growing female student population.<sup>15</sup> The CCWC was formed in order to investigate problems for women on campus and advocate for solutions.<sup>16</sup> The CCWC proposed the Women's Center in 1993 in order to centralize and expand the resources available to women. According to the 1993 "Proposal to Establish a Women's Center at Virginia Tech," the explicit goals of the center included promoting diversity and inclusion as well as providing education on topics such as sexual violence, harassment, and women's health.<sup>17</sup> The CWCC's advocacy for the Women's Center serves as a prime example of how internal organizations pressured Virginia Tech's administration to accommodate the needs and provide protections for an increasing presence of female students.

The Women's Center is a lasting example of a step taken by the university to address sexual violence. However, the university's administration did not directly seek to create the Women's Center. Rather, it instructed the Coordinating Council for Women's Concerns to achieve the diversity goals for women outlined in the University Plan 1991–1996.<sup>18</sup> The university's administration provided funding to establish the Women's Center. However, the idea of the Women's Center and its operations were carried out by the Coordinating Council for Women's Concerns. VAWA's funding combined with advocacy from the Coordinating Council for Women's Concerns provided sufficient pressure and justification for the university to establish the Women's Center.

The entire student body in the 1990s, now with a considerable number of women, generally supported the creation of the Women's Center. Its opening was even celebrated in the student-run newspaper, the *Collegiate Times*. The article emphasized its connection with the SAVES (Sexual Assault Victim Education and Support) program as an essential component.<sup>19</sup> Vocalized student support for university action to address sexual violence, in particular assault, proved that the greater student body sought adequate protection from sexual violence.

Despite a plethora of new programs to support women, the university did not take sufficient steps to address sexual violence specifically. The administration failed to take a proactive role in addressing sexual violence. For example, the university failed to aggressively advertise the new resources made available to female students. The university did not take any observable actions to increase women's protection within their own living spaces. According to Judith Leishear, (Virginia Tech Class of 1994), "Dorms were never locked, and we did have problems with peeping toms in bathrooms. Also, it was common knowledge not to get too drunk at parties because you might fall victim to unwanted sex (now termed rape)."<sup>20</sup> Not until after the shooting at Virginia Tech in 2007 did the university implement security in dorm buildings. The fact that students would refer to sexual assault as unwanted sex suggests that the university had failed to educate its students on consent and proper sexual conduct. All the women's support programs from the late 1980s and early 1990s appear to have had very little effect on their stated goals to educate the student body in order to identify and protect oneself from sexual violence. Judith Leishear states this very bluntly: "There were no hotlines or education on abusive behaviors . . . there was no education about sexual violence."<sup>21</sup> Clearly, the university failed in its goals to spread awareness of sexual violence resources, also outlined in its 1991–1996 University Plan. How can resources be effective if the people who need them are unaware that they exist?

The infamous Brzonkala case, which would later be heard in the United States Supreme Court as *United States v. Morrison*, called into question Virginia Tech's handling of sexual violence in accordance with the Violence Against Women Act. In 1994, Brzonkala claimed that Virginia Tech football players Tony Morrison and James Crawford sexually assaulted her. Virginia Tech dropped the case against Crawford despite his alleged involvement. Morrison's case was heard by Virginia Tech's internal Judicial Review Board in 1995. The nature of the case revolved around sexual violence; however, due to lack of evidence, the university sought only to punish Morrison according to the University's Abusive Conduct Policy. Morrison was found guilty and sentenced to two semesters of suspension. Thereafter, Provost Peggy Meszaros overruled the decision according to her personal discretion and reduced the sentence to deferred suspension.<sup>22</sup> A deferred suspension means that the student is allowed to continue to attend the institution as long as they complete a specified course of action. In Morrison's case, he was

required to attend an hour-long meeting to review student conduct policies.<sup>23</sup> In addition, Virginia Tech allowed Morrison to continue to play for the football team. Virginia Tech demonstrated incredible leniency toward Morrison to the point where he faced negligible punishment.

Morrison played football for Virginia Tech in the early 1990s. There was speculation among the student body that his status as a player on the football team meant that Meszaros let him off with a significantly less severe punishment than he deserved. The decision spurred mass outrage among students at Virginia Tech who voiced their frustration through articles in Virginia Tech's *Collegiate Times*. The editorial team published an article stating that "Meszaros should be severely disciplined for her heartless aiding and abetting of this malicious cover-up."<sup>24</sup> Student sentiment regarding the handling of the Brzonkala case is overwhelmingly critical of the university. Students were particularly outraged that the only punishment Morrison faced after being found guilty was a singular hour-long counseling session. Chad Willis in his *Collegiate Times* article entitled "The Provost Blew It," equates Morrison's punishment to having to "report to detention hall."<sup>25</sup> The blatant lack of punishment for a sexual violence offense exposed the administration's lack of willingness to enforce its own policies.

The administration defended its decision, further cementing its inability to protect female students in the public's eyes. The incident proved to be overwhelmingly negative for relations between students and the administration. Then President Paul Torgersen responded to the wave of criticism by denouncing student opinions in his own *Collegiate Times* article. Torgersen lambasted students for their criticism claiming that evidence employed "misleading, inaccurate . . . wrong conclusions."<sup>26</sup> The President's response displayed only token sympathy and was defined by an aggressive tone aimed to discredit student critics. An administrator, much less the president, should not abuse their position of power and retaliate against students. The power differential in this situation is rather clear. Ideally, Torgersen would have taken remedial measures, such as instituting reforms, and accepted accountability for the university.

Following Torgersen's article, students became increasingly outraged and distrusting of the Virginia Tech administration. The subsequent edition of the *Collegiate Times* contained numerous articles directly attacking his response. In her article "Torgersen was Wrong in his CT Bashing," Christine

Harrison stated that Torgersen's response avoids acknowledging Brzonkala as a victim of a sex crime. In addition, Harrison argued that the university protected itself from accountability by implementing a student code of conduct.<sup>27</sup> A code of conduct cannot protect a student from a violent act, and it cannot be expected to do so. Despite measures intended to combat sexual violence, the handling of the Brzonkala case exposed the Virginia Tech administration as unwilling to enforce its own rules to protect students.

Another aspect of Brzonkala's case has been entirely overlooked by both the university as well as the student body. From the beginning of the case, James Crawford never faced scrutiny from Virginia Tech despite claims by Brzonkala that he, as well as Morrison, raped her. This was because Brzonkala did not have enough evidence against Crawford to pursue charges directly for sexual violence. Amid student outrage at Morrison's punishment, Crawford was involved in an entirely unrelated criminal case. He was charged with "defrauding an innkeeper and a felony hit and run with injury" in November of 1995.<sup>28</sup> However, the *Collegiate Times* did not mention that Crawford was originally involved in the Brzonkala case. Most significantly, Crawford would later plead "no contest to attempted aggravated sexual battery" in a case where he allegedly raped yet another Virginia Tech student. This occurred during a period when he continued to play for Tech's football team.<sup>29</sup> Crawford clearly demonstrates a behavioral pattern of sexual violence and crime through his multiple convictions. By not taking any proactive action, Virginia Tech essentially allowed Crawford to rape two female students and participate in a hit-and-run all while continuing to play football for the school. Complicity on the part of the university, with particular regard to sexual assault punishments, demonstrates an unwillingness and inability to properly protect its own students.

Virginia Tech's reluctance to take action against sexual violence reflects a systemic failure. Complying with legal minimums allows the university to protect itself and its money from expensive legal battles. By leaving many cases unpunished, Virginia Tech relieves itself from legal liability associated with taking a stronger and more proactive stance against sexual violence. However, a strong zero-tolerance approach is necessary in order to create an environment where students feel protected. By not taking this approach, Virginia Tech demonstrates that it disregards the well-being of its students in exchange for safeguarding its wealth.

Virginia Tech has made considerable changes in its approach to sexual violence due to legislative and grassroots pressures in the 1990s. Rick Boucher pioneered revolutionary legislative changes through his work on Virginia's SB 258 in the 1980s. As a staunch advocate for sexual violence reform, Boucher pushed for the passage of the Violence Against Women Act in 1994, which revolutionized the handling of sexual violence and discrimination on a national scale. Combined with grassroots feminist movements within Virginia Tech, the Act spurred the creation and growth of the Women's Center throughout the 1990s and 2000s. The administration's support of the Women's Center provided crucial resources and support for Virginia Tech's growing female demographic. The university's newfound commitment to women's issues came under scrutiny in its handling of the Brzonkala case. Despite the numerous institutional changes in the early 1990s, the student body reacted with outrage at the administration's conscious failure to adequately punish Brzonkala's assaulters.

Virginia Tech's handling of sexual assault as recently as the Spring 2023 semester remains questionable, at best. Typically, the extent of university action consists of an email simply stating that an assault occurred, its location, and its time. Most of the email contains resources to be utilized by assault survivors. The email contains no information regarding punishments for the offenders. Also, these emails contain little substantive information in terms of preventing assaults. It appears that the university is doing the bare minimum to address sexual violence by distributing informational and educational emails. However, these emails are nothing more than compliance with the Clery Act and not an attempt at addressing sexual violence. By doing nothing to stop the assaults, the university enables them.

The precedent established by the Brzonkala case suggests an unspoken policy of complacency, which is often exploited by offenders. Because the university is largely unwilling to sufficiently punish offenders, students view assault as a crime that will go unpunished. A friend of mine in my freshman year was sexually assaulted on campus, which ended with the victim's arm being broken. The case went to the court system and resulted in the offender going unpunished. The offender continues to be enrolled at Virginia Tech, while my friend transferred to a different institution out of fear for their safety. This handling of sexual assault is completely unacceptable on the part of the university. There is no attempt to establish a campus where women

feel that they are safe from assault or that they will get justice from the university. Another one of my friends was sexually assaulted while traveling through a Virginia Tech program. That individual reported the assault and consulted the Women's Center. However, they were told nothing could be done except to seek therapy. In both cases, the victims felt that the university had failed to protect them as students. This is once again unacceptable for a prominent institution such as Virginia Tech. There is no justice for victims of sexual violence at a complacent university. The university needs to denounce incidents of sexual violence and proactively create a healthy culture that respects individual autonomy and well-being.

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# 12. Conclusion

## *Next Steps*

KIERA SCHNEIDERMAN

“One of the greatest challenges facing administrators, faculty, staff, and the student body at Virginia Tech is how to make real the commitment to diversity that was outlined in the University Plan 1991–1996 and other University documents. It is simply not enough to integrate women and minorities into institutional structures designed for and by white males then assume that their needs will be met. When this occurs on campus or in society, the needs of all groups tend to be viewed in terms of white male norms, which are often inappropriate. The resulting programs and policies poorly serve, if at all, those who are different.”<sup>1</sup>

The above text is from 1993 and introduces the proposal for the establishment of the Women’s Center. The Women’s Center has now been up and running for over twenty-five years, and while this installation was certainly a step in the right direction, the issues that brought about its founding are still prevalent today and have been since women’s first arrival at VPI. Even with the Women’s Center and other resources, Virginia Tech does not foster a sexual geography that promotes healthy sexual citizenship, which is why we explored and researched our history to write this book.

Sexual violence is universal. It occurs in every age group, every culture, every country, and every campus. If Virginia Tech were to single handedly solve sexual violence among its 30,000 undergraduate students, 6,000 graduate students, and faculty and staff, it would be the most remarkable achievement of any institution. It is not possible to monitor the individual actions and previous sex education of over 36,000 undergraduate and graduate students, but it is the responsibility of Virginia Tech to set rules and regulations, assist in the education of its students, and adequately respond to campus events. In determining how to effectively combat sexual violence, it’s important to differentiate between which behaviors and practices on campus are a product of Virginia Tech, which are trends among the general public, federal laws,

and which are a combination of sorts. While there are no definitive answers to solve the massive issue that is sexual violence, below are some potential solutions created based on Virginia Tech's history and the research from the previous chapters.

## Institutional Memory

My first semester of my freshman year, I was up late in my dorm room inside Hillcrest Hall researching the politics of a South American country. I could not tell you which country it was or the topic at hand, but it just so happened to cite the Supreme Court case *U.S. v. Morrison*, Christy Brzonkala's case from chapter 1. I was shocked to learn that Virginia Tech went to the Supreme Court in 1994 for the same reasons I was receiving dozens of Clery Act sexual assault emails in the Fall of 2021. I asked everyone around me if they had heard of the case to find that no one knew what I was talking about, not even my professors. A case only goes to the Supreme Court when it has some sort of national significance, meaning the case must impact much more than just the plaintiff and the defendant. *U.S. v. Morrison* diminished the value of the Violence Against Women Act, no longer allowing victims of gender-motivated violence the right to sue their assailants in a federal court, and almost no one on the Virginia Tech campus knows this case even exists.

Ironically, at the time I first discovered the Brzonkala Supreme Court case, I was living in Hillcrest Hall, where many of women's first struggles at VPI began. My freshman year, I frequently encountered students unaware of the existence of Hillcrest, to which I responded, "Oh, it's really far from everything," having no idea that Hillcrest was intentionally placed at a distance from the men and the academic buildings back in 1940. I had no idea that the first women to live in Hillcrest didn't have lounges, kitchens, fire exits, laundry machines, or locks.<sup>2</sup> No one told me that women had to sign in and out when they left Hillcrest, that women had to receive special permission to wear pants, or that Hillcrest women had to guard their own living spaces from Peeping Toms and panty stealers, and I lived there.<sup>3</sup> Most students still barely know where Hillcrest is.

Universities and Greek life organizations operate very similarly in that they rely on a culture of secrecy and reputation. Fraternities are afraid of getting kicked off campus, and universities are afraid of losing money, both of which would lead to a demotion of power and influence. Just as sexual assault is universal, so is the desire to have a good reputation. No company, organization, city, or institution wishes for a bad image in the eye of the public. This is why we spent hours in the basement of Newman Library sifting through primary documents in order to write this book. Sometimes the influence of reputation helps maintain accountability for good, like when a fraternity punishes a brother for committing sexual assault, which hopefully discourages other brothers from doing the same. However, some fraternities poorly monitor sexual assault and instead keep these incidents a secret. But what about students who aren't in Greek life? Who is holding them accountable besides a potential victim? While Greek life is not perfect, perhaps this accountability model can be modified to disincentivize students from committing sexual assault. Furthermore, we must hold our university accountable when the scope of sexual assault travels beyond universal truths. After all, Virginia Tech cannot be kicked off campus. If Virginia Tech is truly dedicated to *Ut Prosim*, we must set ourselves apart by committing to consistent transparency. If other schools are choosing to cover up their past and present experiences of sexual violence, the incidents don't magically disappear. Imagine if we researched the history of sexual violence at every school in the country; would there really be a lot of differences? If universities are collectively transparent about sexual violence, to the extent that FERPA allows, their universal dependency on secrecy and unawareness will be diminished. Students should know what they're getting into before they set foot on campus, and Virginia Tech must lead the charge in creating a culture of transparency to formulate the institutional memory needed to hold each other accountable. If our own history of sexual violence is a secret, how can we expect history to not repeat itself?

The motivation to prevent sexual assault should come from a place of care rather than a place of self image, however, sometimes that additional push of accountability regarding one's reputation can make a difference. Hopefully, this book will bring us one step closer to the possession of knowledge needed for a culture of accountability and transparency. Who knows what other information about our history lies in Special Collections in Newman Library? It would be nearly impossible to investigate it all, at least while being

a full-time student. In the next section, I will offer methods to spread the information we've gathered thus far.

## Education

I distinctly remember once during a Sexual Violence Culture and Climate (SVCC) workgroup meeting, a faculty member expressed frustration because students did not know about the website created by SVCC. He was acting as if it were the students who were at fault. Students come to college to learn, and they cannot learn if they are not taught. Virginia Tech offers a myriad of resources for sexual violence and other issues, but many students are lacking in awareness, need, or motivation to attend.

After years of utilizing the same methods, it's time to evaluate Virginia Tech's means of communication to the student body in regards to providing resources. Perhaps a tiny link at the very bottom of a Virginia Tech News email isn't the best way to spread information to students. Campus-wide emails that don't require multiple links are beneficial, but many students' inboxes are already flooded from classes and clubs. In my opinion, the best way to spread information is through in-person presentations, so long as the speaker is engaging. Opportunities for such presentations could be during orientation, weeks of welcome, first year experience classes, syllabus days, chapter meetings, club meetings, hall meetings, and more. These talks are especially effective when given during mandatory events like classes, so that all students are receiving the information, and not just those on social media. The revival of an official Women's Week from chapter 2 is another good opportunity to spread awareness. Students cannot learn if they are not safe, and in order to keep them safe, Virginia Tech must meet students where they are in their knowledge of campus resources and sexual citizenship.

Much of our current sexual violence education content is focused on broad topics like empathy, relationship building, wellbeing, and consent, all of which are important, but there is a noticeable lack of education for the aftermath of an assault. Explaining Title IX reporting procedures to brand new freshmen can be anxiety-inducing, but first-semester freshmen are the most vulnerable to assault. It is especially vital that freshmen are provided context

before they receive their first Clery Act email. Most, if not all, of the events from the previous chapters took place before the creation of the Clery Act, another reason why it is difficult to research the history of sexual violence of an institution. Because Virginia Tech does not incorporate things like Clery Act emails or Physical Evidence Recovery Kits (PERKs) into its introductory curriculum, countless students receive their first Clery Act email, and believe that reporting an assault automatically results in the same email and the start of an investigation, which is not true. In fact, a great deal of incidents do not meet the criteria necessary to send a campus-wide email. This common misconception prevents students from reporting and ultimately getting the help they need. Virginia Tech has systems in place to help students, but too many students are misinformed about the reporting process and notification network.

Even with our longstanding history of sexual violence, there is still an overwhelming lack of availability and education surrounding Physical Evidence Recovery Kits (PERKs) at Virginia Tech. The only individuals with the power to administer a PERK are Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE). At the time of writing this, there are only four of these nurses in the entire New River Valley, all of which are in Radford, designated for a population of 36,000 undergraduate and graduate students. This means that a victim must travel forty minutes to receive this time-sensitive exam, while they are likely struggling to get out of bed and go about their daily life. The only cost involved with PERKs is the nurse itself, as the cost of PERKs are covered by the state. Once again, most students don't even know this exam exists or how to get it. For example, students don't know they can wait years before utilizing evidence from their exam, or ultimately choose not to use the evidence at all; the exam is not a commitment. Virginia Tech has made great strides since 1940, but we still don't offer a means of receiving physical evidence after an assault—in contrast, the University of Virginia does.

Students come from all walks of life, and at the end of the day, they are enrolled in college to receive an education. If students are consistently lacking in institutional memory, knowledge of resources, and sexual citizenship, that is not a reflection on the students, but a reflection on the university. Education programs must welcome students with open arms, meeting them where they are, in order to adequately educate the student body—which is

what a university is paid to do. It is my hope that Virginia Tech offers more efficient methods of communication and education to keep students safe.

## Sexual Geography

To recap, the sexual geography of a space refers to who has access and/or control of a physical space, and how this impacts sex and sexual assault.<sup>4</sup> The current sexual geography of Virginia Tech is certainly not what it was in the 1940s, where women had little access to space and virtually no control, but there is still progress to be made. With thousands of largely unsupervised young people living in close proximity to one another, it's not easy to maintain a healthy sexual geography, especially for on-campus residents. While women have comparably more access to space and control than the days when they were confined to Hillcrest Hall, the balance of power for space and control is still not equal.

You are safer when you are in your own space. On a campus like Virginia Tech where nearly all freshmen live on campus and the upperclassmen live off campus, a dynamic is created that often removes on-campus residents from their own space. For example, if underage freshmen students wish to drink alcohol, but they are afraid of getting written up by a resident advisor, they will likely migrate to a secondary location, like a bar or a fraternity basement, where they no longer have the home advantage. Whereas if the same underage students drink in their own room, at least they have more control over who is in that space and have easier access to help if needed. We can't stop students from drinking, so they're either going to do it in their own space where they are comparably safer, or they're going to move elsewhere where they are more vulnerable.

Now imagine a freshman woman travels downtown to drink, and she encounters an attractive man. The two of them start hitting it off, but the man lives off campus. The two of them go to his place. Even if the man is observant and respectful of the woman's sexual citizenship and an assault was never going to occur, the man ultimately has more control as he is in his own space. Because freshmen are limited to small dorm rooms with twin-size beds and roommates, it makes sense why one might prefer to go to the

apartment of an upperclassmen rather than their own room to engage in sexual activities. This is not to say that freshmen never experience sexual assault in their own rooms, but being in their own space makes it easier to leave a situation they're not comfortable in and ask for help, as opposed to being in a crowded room or in an apartment far from home.

Sexual geographies are difficult to improve. While allowing alcohol in the residence halls may potentially keep students safer, changing the legal drinking age is far beyond the scope of Virginia Tech. Allowing sororities to have alcohol like their male counterparts would also decrease the reliance on men for access and space, but unfortunately this is also not Virginia Tech's charge. Freshmen would surely benefit from bigger rooms, bigger beds, and no roommates, but this requires land and money. So what should Virginia Tech do? It might seem silly, but we could potentially create spaces for sexual activities, where neither party initially has the home advantage, which could also prevent freshmen from having sex in public places like bathrooms. We could also create spaces for roommates to go temporarily, and work to educate students on how to have that conversation with roommates and set boundaries. Additionally, we can increase our education around bystander intervention. This book is a beginning. There are plenty more ideas and methods waiting to be created in order to prevent sexual assault in our community and revamp our campus sexual geography to be the best it can be.

When many people think of sexual assault, they imagine a scary man in the bushes, but more often than not, the perpetrator is someone you know. The sexual violence we hear about through social media, rumors, and Clery Act emails is again and again perpetrated by fellow Hokies on our campus, through our shared sexual geography. Maintaining a healthy sexual geography with equal access and power to physical space is vital to keep our community safe.

In our fight in the pursuit of reducing sexual violence, both students and administrators must be held accountable. Virginia Tech is not at fault for every single sexual assault case that occurs on campus, and no statement in the aftermath of an assault is ever going to make students happy. Virginia Tech must abide by due process of law in every case before punishing an offender, and these cases take time; the statements are vague for a reason. Students must attend sexual education programs *and* take them seriously, so that those programs continue to run. And overall, we need to support and

uplift one another. Virginia Tech administration, faculty, and staff must lead by example. Virginia Tech is not the only school struggling with sexual violence, and we need to be transparent about that. We can learn from other schools, exchange resources, but growth can't happen if we're all hiding our history. We need to offer a systematic and streamlined approach to communication and education for students. Virginia Tech has almost everything students need to stay safe and receive help, but still so many students are left in the dark. We have to change that.

Reflecting on our history shows us how far we've come, but the story isn't over yet. We must continuously work toward progress until all students are safe. Perhaps one day, a new book about Virginia Tech's history of sexual violence will be written, where life on campus is significantly safer than it is today. Until then, we work.

## Notes

1. Coordinating Council for Women's Concerns (CCWC), "Original proposal for the establishment of the Women's Center from 1993," *History of Women at Virginia Tech*, April 4, 1993.
2. Lancaster, Lucy Lee, 1905-1989, "History of Co-eds at VPI," *History of Women at Virginia Tech*
3. "Peeping Toms Cause Question Of Safety," *The Collegiate Times*, November 8, 1977, 3.
4. Jennifer S. Hirsch and Shamus Khan, *Sexual Citizens: A Landmark Study of Sex, Power, and Assault on Campus* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2020), xvi.



# Parting Words

To my Grammy and Granddaddy, who fostered my love of books. To my friends, who are my rock and without them I would not be the person I am today. And to Dr. Mollin, who has positively impacted me more than she will ever know.

Madelyn Nogiec

To my mother, for showing me what it means to be an empowered woman and inspiring me every step of the way.

Amanda Talbott

To my Mom and Dad, who have taught me that there is light in every instance of darkness.

Kate Schiller

To all victims of sexual violence at Virginia Tech, in particular three friends, who will remain anonymous. Be strong, we will fight sexual violence together.

Aidan Young

To my family, I wouldn't be here without them. To my wife for being the best support system one could ask for. Lastly, to all the victims who have been effected by sexual violence. We are in this fight together and we will make a change.

Aaron Lowther

To my mom, who alone, left her world behind in Bolivia to give my brother and me a better life in the United States. Thanks for teaching me anything is possible, even when the world is against you.

Jorge Gomez-Pedraza

To my mom, dad, and step-mom, thank you for pushing me to do the things I love even if they're hard. Also to my partner who has nonstop supported me through the past four years. Lastly I would like to thank Dr. Mollin for giving me guidance throughout my undergraduate years.

Kaylie Duty

To my sister, who gives me purpose. To all young women who deserve to live in a better world. To all future daughters who will.

Caitlyn Simson

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Rosa Mata

To my parents, without whose support I would not have been able to attend college in the first place. To all the professors, Dr. Mollin included, who have acted as my mentors and shaped me into the scholar I am today. Finally, to Christy Brzonkala, who endured years of grueling legal battles in pursuit of justice.

William Cardullo

# About the Editor

**Marian Mollin** is Associate Professor of History at Virginia Tech. A historian of women, gender, and twentieth-century American social movements, she is the author of *Radical Pacifism in Modern America: Egalitarianism and Protest* (Penn Press, 2006), co-editor with Leilah Danielson and Doug Rossinow of *The Religious Left in Modern America: Doorkeepers of a Radical Faith* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2018), and author of numerous articles, book chapters, and reviews. She has edited several student-led class publications, including *Politics, Power, and Playboy: The American Mindset of the 1960s* (VT Publishing, 2019) and *Nasty Women: Transgressive Womanhood in American History* (VT Publishing, 2021).

# Contributors

**William Cardullo** is a History major and Classical Studies minor in Virginia Tech's class of 2023. He served as president of the Academic Competition Organization, co-president of the Classical Studies Club, and was an active member of the YDSA chapter at Virginia Tech. His main field of historical interest is in the social history of late medieval and early modern Europe as well as labor history. His work in this book developed from an interest in the interactions between ordinary people and systems of authority. Upon graduation, William pursued an MA in History with a concentration in Medieval History at the University of Exeter.

**Kaylie Duty** is a History major in Virginia Tech's class of 2023. Her areas of interest are women's history and human rights history. The idea for her project stemmed from her interest in diving deep into historical gender obstructions. Upon graduation she will be working for a masters degree in Legal Studies in order to pursue a career in the legal field.

**Jorge Gomez-Pedraza** is a History major and Sociology minor, class of 2023. He is most interested in American Civil Rights history. This project grew out of his interest in the intersectionality of History and Sociology. After graduating, he plans to attend law school.

**Aaron Lowther** is a member of the class of 2023 and graduated with a degree in History. While at Tech, he was a student equipment manager for the Virginia Tech football team. His primary interest in the field of history is World War II. The inspiration for his chapter stemmed from the on-going fight for women's equality in today's world within a college atmosphere. Upon graduation, he hopes to get a job within the government trying to make the world just a little bit better than how he found it.

**Rosa Mata** is a History major, class of 2023. She has worked with the Center of Rural Education at Virginia Tech, and has a strong interest in fighting the opportunity gap for rural, Latinx students. The inspiration for her chapter stemmed from her experience of being an ethnic minority at a PWI, and she wanted to shed light on another minority group in the same community. Upon finishing her bachelor's degree, she remained at Virginia Tech to obtain

a MA in Education, Curriculum and Instruction with a concentration in History and Social Science Education.

**Madelyn Nogiec** is a double major in History and European and Transatlantic Studies with a minor in French, graduating in 2025. Her chapter topic grew out of her interest in women's history after taking another one of Dr. Mollin's classes as well as her close ties to Greek life. She is an officer in her sorority Alpha Delta Pi, a member of model NATO, and a Peer Mentor for the class IS/PSCI 1034. During the remainder of her time at Virginia Tech, she hopes to learn how to spell so her classmates stop making fun of her rough drafts and expand upon her research and write a senior thesis on the history of Greek life. After graduating, Madelyn is unsure of what career she wants to pursue, but she is confident she will take over the world and travel as much as possible in the process.

**Kate Schiller** is a graduating member of the Virginia Tech class of 2023 majoring in Political Science with a minor in History. During her time at Virginia Tech, she has served as the President of the Political Science club, conducted multiple undergraduate research projects, reflecting a multitude of academic interests—ranging from the injustices of fossil fuels to her work in this piece. Her work stemmed from an interest of the legal aspects and consequences of sexual violence on campus, and the lack thereof. Upon graduation, Kate will be attending law school, where she hopes to become a disability rights attorney.

**Kiera Schneiderman** is the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 student body president of Virginia Tech. She is a double major in criminology and political science in the class of 2025. She has first hand experiences helping victims of sexual violence in her time as a resident advisor/student leader, and she is a member of the Sexual Violence Culture and Climate (SVCC) work group and the Title IX Advisory Board. She hopes this book can promote a higher standard of institutional memory and an overall safer campus.

**Caitlyn Simson** is a professional technical writing and creative writing double major with a minor in German. She serves on the community engagement subcommittee for the Sexual Violence Culture and Climate (SVCC) work group. She was afforded the opportunity to participate in this study by the SVCC, and hopes to continue serving her community beyond the classroom. Caitlyn plans to pursue a Master of Arts in Creative Writing, which she will

use to draw attention to sexual violence and garner support for those in need.

**Amanda Talbott** is a dual degree student with History and Biochemistry at Virginia Tech. She has served on the executive board of her sorority, Chi Omega, and on the director cabinet for event planning. She also serves on the Panhellenic Council at Virginia Tech as the Director of Women's Advocacy. She has been on the executive board of many other clubs at Virginia Tech as well. Her interest in the project grew out of other classes which touched on how sexual violence affected health in different sectors of the world, Dr. Mollin's *Interpreting the Sixties* class, and her position on Panhellenic Council.

**Aidan Young** is a History and Political Science double major, with a minor in Japanese Studies, at Virginia Tech class of 2024. He has served as Commodore (President) of the Sailing Club at Virginia Tech, and has been on the executive board since his Freshman year. His inspiration for this project stems his love for multiple close friends who have been victims of sexual violence and whom the university has failed to protect.

**Hannah Ziari** is a History and Consumer Studies dual-degree student from Virginia Tech's 2023 graduating class. Hannah has served as the Co-Chair for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion of her sorority, Tri Delta (aka Delta Delta Delta). Her chapter takes inspiration from her own learned experiences and insights which have developed over her four years while in her sorority and as a VT student. Hannah is passionate about social history and bringing unheard voices to light in a world that is very much male-centric. She hopes that her chapter allows for its readers to understand the subliminal narratives which often exist within not only Virginia Tech's greek life societies, but also greek life as a whole.