A Sociological and Statistical Analysis of Fraternity Men's Attitudes

on Rape and Sexual Assault

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Abstract

Hostility, aggression, and empathy levels of 488 fraternity men were measured using portions of the Burt Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, Malamuth's Behavioral Intent to Rape Question, Hostility Toward Women Scale, and Survey Measure of Emotional Empathy. Thirteen out of the fifteen Interfraternity Council (IFC) chapters at a west coast public university campus volunteered to participate in the study. The survey consisted of thirty-five questions aimed at finding a correlation between the respondents housing location, year in school, position of office in his fraternity, and number of siblings and hostility, aggression, and empathy. Although no significant findings relating hostility, aggression, and empathy to year in school, housing location, or position of office were found, there was a substantial relationship between level of empathy and the number of sisters a respondent has.

Key Words: fraternities, men, sexual assault, aggression, hostility, empathy, rape

INTRODUCTION

Rape and various forms of sexual assault are found to be most common on college campuses with prior research suggesting that college women are at a higher risk for rape and sexual violence than women in the general population in a comparable age group (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 1998). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention nearly 1 in 2 women experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime, 37% of which were sexually assaulted between the ages of 18-24 (CDC, 2013).

Since rape and sexual assault are so prevalent on college campuses, research and education on the topic should be highly considered to combat against sexual assault. College fraternity men have received a lot of the blame when it comes to rape on college campuses with much of the literature on college sexual violence focusing on fraternity men's behaviors. In his research, O'Sullivan found that fraternity members committed 55% of the gang rapes reported on college campuses between 1980 and 1990 (O'Sullivan, 1991). Research also shows that fraternity members have more rape-supportive attitudes and are more sexually coercive than other men (Schaeffer, 1993).

In the following study, I assessed the attitudes and beliefs of fraternity men at a west coast public university on sexual assault and violence towards women in order to improve methods of prevention education on college campuses while also being supportive of Fraternity men. The following sections outline how Fraternity men's year in school, housing location (in a dorm, fraternity house or off campus), position of authority in their fraternity, and/or number of male and female siblings impact their levels of hostility, empathy, and aggression.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sexual assault and rape continue to be huge issues in American society today. College aged women are the most likely to experience rape and sexual assault out of all other ages in society. This poses as a problem because college-aged fraternity men have a higher likelihood of having rape-supportive attitudes and beliefs due to their brotherhood mentality and patriarchal origins. These mindsets can be seen in the party atmosphere on college campuses as well as in fraternity houses in which women are constantly objectified and sex is something that is highly sought after.

Concerning sexual assault and rape, it seems as though our patriarchal society has transformed men into thinking they are superior to or more entitled than women and therefore able to dominate and oppress them. Bouffard (2010) explored the concept of entitlement through various measures such as self-control, sexual partners, and use of pornography after learning that DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1993) proposed that societal patriarchy is translated into individual attitudes of male sexual proprietary and entitlement, which provide motivation and justifications for sexual violence. Her study aimed at linking entitlement with other theoretically relevant variables including: self-control, sexual partners, use of pornography, adversarial sexual beliefs, and rape myth adherence. Multivariate models provided strong support for the theoretical assertion that entitlement fosters rape-supportive attitudes and behaviors, which in turn was related to sexual aggression. Consequently, a common outcome of these attitudes and behaviors is that of sexual violence.

While many people tend to blame the United States patriarchal society for the continuation of sexual violence against women, it can be seen that these attitudes are often

reinforced and greatly expressed on college campuses as men attempt to fit in with what they believe will be seen as impressive or "cool".

Various studies have shown that college fraternity men tend to have rape-prone attitudes. Sanday (1996) studied fraternity men's beliefs in her study "Rape-Prone Versus Rape-Free Campus Cultures" in which she found that rape-prone behavior is strongly associated with environmental insecurity and female objectification. Rape-prone campuses are identified as ones in which observers report the incidence of rape to be high or one that excuses rape as an expression of masculinity. She states that insecure men who tend to bond through homophobia and the need to get sex adopt these attitudes and behaviors on college campuses, which further embeds the idea of a rape culture – a set of values and beliefs that provide an environment conducive to rape. In sum, she found that fraternities do vary with respect to rape-prone behaviors, but how these men interact with one another greatly impacts their behaviors related to sexual violence.

METHOD

Hypothesis

I tested the following hypothesis using my thirty-five-question, true-false survey and a statistical analysis of the results. Fraternity men's attitudes towards women and sexual assault can be seen as based on their levels of aggression, hostility, and empathy. These levels are influenced by their year in school, housing location (in a dorm, fraternity house or off campus), position of authority in their fraternity, and/or number of male and female siblings.

Participants

After receiving approval from the Interfraternity Council Executive Board, as well as the Coordinator of Fraternity Life, all fifteen fraternities at a west coast public university were asked if they would be willing to participate in a study. Thirteen fraternities (86%) agreed to do so. Each fraternity chapter was randomly assigned one of two surveys (Figures 5 and 6). Version One, known as the mixed version, had all the questions from the previous surveys in random order with the demographic variables at the end. Version Two, known as the divided version, had the questions divided by which previous survey they were taken from. Though there were no expectations of the version effect, two versions were used to see if there was a difference in the responses based on how the questions were ordered. Of the total respondents, 247 (50.6%) received the mixed version survey, while 241 (49.4%) received the divided version of the survey.

The vast majority of participants at the time of our data collection period were sophomores (36.8%), juniors (25.8%), and seniors (34.9%) at the west coast public university, with very few freshman respondents (1.1%) due to a deferred rush system at the university.

Procedure

College students who were members of IFC chapters were surveyed in person at their individual chapter meetings during the Fall 2012 and Winter 2013 quarters. The surveys were randomized so that each fraternity had the same probability of getting one of the two surveys given. Participants were prompted by a female, male, or both on the purpose of the study and then provided an opportunity for questions. Completion of the survey was highly encouraged, but participants were told they did not need to respond if it

triggered any unwanted emotions or made them feel uncomfortable. Respondents then completed the survey at the beginning of their chapter meeting and returned it to the researcher upon completion.

Measures

The thirty-five-question true-false survey included questions from well-known rape attitudes, hostility, and empathy scales. Each of the following surveys has been used extensively in research on men's aggression and hostility towards women. Questions from each scale were chosen based on their relatability to college-aged men and sexual assault.

The Burt Rape Myth Acceptance Scale

I used ten questions from the Burt Rape Myth Acceptance Scale to evaluate fraternity men's belief in popular rape myths. The term *rape myth* was defined by Burt as "prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, or rapists" (Burt, pg. 217). Scores at the higher end of this zero to ten scale signify stronger beliefs that associate with aggressive and sexually coercive behavior.

Behavioral Intent to Rape

To gauge how likely respondents would be to commit rape, I used Malamuth's question: "If you could be assured of not being caught or punished, how likely would you be to rape?" Participants answered this question on a likert scale with (1) being not at all likely and (5) being very likely.

Hostility Toward Women Scale

A portion of this scale was used to measure attitudes and behaviors directed towards women. This scale is frequently used in literature measuring male sexual aggression and has been found to have a high reliability.

Survey Measure of Emotional Empathy

Another ten of the questions in my survey were taken from this scale. This scale was added in to throw off our respondents from the true meaning of our survey so that they wouldn't bias their answers based on what they thought we wanted them to put, but also to see if there was any type of correlation between the dependent variables and empathy.

Results

After an analysis of the survey responses, the primary significant finding was the relationship between level of empathic tendencies and the number of sisters a respondent had, as seen in figure 1. This finding shows that men, who grow up with females in the household, will tend to have higher empathetic attitudes and behaviors than those who do not. Foubert and Newberry found that fraternity men that participated in educational programs that focused on violence towards women had significantly higher empathy ratings at the end of the course, when compared to those who opted out of participating (Foubert and Newberry, 2006). Though I don't know if the respondents of Foubert and Newberry's survey had sisters, this finding is similar to my study, due to men who grow up with sisters in their lives, are more likely to connect sexual violence against women to that of violence against their own sisters, which would increase their empathetic tendencies towards women who have been sexually victimized. Growing up with female siblings in the household could cause men to be more empathetic in the sense that they view all women as valuable and put their female loved ones in the shoes of those who have become victims of sexual assault. This could then cause them to reject rape and sexual assault as a positive part of society.

Upon measuring respondent's aggression levels through the Burt Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, I was able to find that the mean aggression score of all thirteen fraternities was a 2.15, as seen in figure 2. While ideally college campuses would like men (and women) to be closer to, or directly at, a zero on this scale, this finding was much less than I had originally thought fraternity men's aggression level would be at, with just a few men ranging at a score greater than four. This finding indicates that though these men were lower on the aggression scale, further education and prevention on aggression can be done to lower aggressive attitudes.

In their study, "Risk Factors for Male Sexual Aggression on College Campuses" Carr and VanDeusen note that, "The 'courtship patriarchy' creates an atmosphere of male entitlement…perpetration of rape myths…nowhere is male peer support for sexual aggression more concentrated on campus than in all-male groups such as fraternities…" (Carr & VanDeusen, 2004). Their findings further demonstrate that the fraternal identity is one that maintains a behavior that is more likely to be aggressive towards women.

When looking at the aggression score by individual fraternity (Figure 3), two of the fraternities surveyed showed much higher aggression tendencies, than did the rest of the fraternities. Upon further analysis of their results, it could not be pinpointed as to why they were found to be much more aggressive, therefore additional research should be done to assess if educational major, size of fraternity, house values, etc. may have played a part in their considerably higher aggression rating. After discussing these results with the Coordinator of Greek Life, it seems as though house values could play a large part in individual fraternity aggression ratings.

Hostility scores were measured through the Hostility Toward Women Scale in which the respondents mean score was a 2.94 (Figure 4). Though the hostility scale was much worse compared to aggression in terms of a greater number of respondents being higher in hostility than they were in aggressive behavior, college campuses would preferably like to see more men with no level of hostility and therefore less at the higher end of the spectrum. Check, Malamuth, Elias, and Barton found in their study *On Hostile Ground* that "men of higher socioeconomic status tend to score slightly lower" (pg. 60) on the hostility towards women scale. Their finding was significant to me since fraternities tend to consist of men with higher socioeconomic status, while most literature states that men that belong to fraternities tend to have more hostile attitudes and are more supportive of rape culture.

Lastly, behavioral intent to rape was measured using Malamuth's question: "If you could be assured of not being caught or punished, how likely would you be to rape?" Respondents were asked to answer this question on a scale from less likely (1) to most likely (5). According to Malamuth's findings, "men who reported a higher likelihood of raping also reported higher levels of anger, aggression, and a desire to hurt women" (Foubert, pg. 159). The vast majority of participants who took my survey answered with a 1 (89.5%). 0.03% responded with a 2, 0.02% responded with a 3, and only 0.006% with a 4. Some respondents opted out of answering this question, saying it was a "dumb" or "loaded" question; therefore I was prevented from seeing how those respondents would have answered Malamuth's question. After taking into consideration why respondents may have answered this way it seems as though confidentiality may have played a part in their low responses due to respondents feeling as though they would be judged on their response when handing their survey back to the researcher. This affected projected my

findings since Malamuth found an average of 21-35% of college men to indicate some likelihood of raping if they could be assured of not being caught, while my survey indicated only 0.006%.

Through the responses I was also able to find a negative correlation between empathy and aggression. Those with higher empathetic tendencies were also more likely to have lower aggressive beliefs and attitudes. Though there were still some fraternity men that varied from this finding, the vast majority of them correlated this way.

Hostility and empathy also had a negative correlation, though there was a larger amount of respondents that measured higher in hostility while also having a higher score in empathy, than compared with the aggression scores. I found hostility and aggression to have a positive correlation, but there were also several respondents that varied from this association also.

As for the remainder of my initial beliefs, the independent variables: position of office held, year in school, housing location and survey type, yielded no significant results relating to the respondent's levels of hostility, aggression, and empathy. My study may have been limited on the basis of anonymity, due to each fraternity preferring a hard copy survey rather than a digital one. This could have limited the degree of openness in which respondents felt they could honestly report their feelings and beliefs without being judged or looked down upon when they had to turn them back into the researcher. The results may also be limited due to the fraternities that chose to participate versus those who opted out of completing the survey. Though the vast majority of the fraternities (86%) did volunteer to take the survey, it would be interesting to see how the two that did not differed in their attitudes and beliefs towards women and sexual assault.

DISCUSSION

Sanday's findings regarding interactions among fraternity members is interesting in relation to my survey since I was able to find that some of the fraternity men I surveyed had higher level of aggression and hostility, with several entire fraternities rating much higher on the aggression scale as well. It would be interesting to create new dependent variables and assess if certain behaviors among fraternity members increase their likelihood to have behaviors related to sexual violence.

Carr and VanDeusen (2004) focused on risk factors for college male sexual aggression that were both theoretically and empirically based in their article "Risk Factors for Male Sexual Aggression on College Campuses" by using a multivariate regression analyses. Risk factors included substance abuse, pornography consumption, negative gender-based attitudes, and mild sexual abuse experiences. Analysis of these factors found that some gender attitudes, pornography use, and alcohol abuse were significant predictors of perpetration of sexual violence. They also found that sexual abuse during childhood, surprisingly, was not a significant factor in predicting sexual aggressionn as an adult. Though my survey did not cover any of these topics, further analysis of these fraternities, especially those who scored higher on the aggression scale, would be interesting to see if these types of behaviors hold true for perpetration of sexual violence.

According to Carr and VanDeusen, many of the college men surveyed held numerous rape-supportive attitudes and beliefs, however, they found that their study might have been limited due to the aspect of anonymity, since some men may not report sexual coercive behavior, as well as biased results due to the type of men who chose to participate versus those who opted

out. Lastly, their most surprising discovery was that of several men reporting that they would be likely to rape someone if they could be assured of not being caught.

These rape-supportive attitudes and beliefs can be seen as even more embedded in the college atmosphere when men that belong to fraternities are examined. Countless members of fraternities are found as having supportive attitudes towards sexually coercive behavior and the likelihood of raping according to recent survey findings.

Foubert (2000) concentrated on the rape myth acceptance, likelihood of rape, and sexually coercive behavior of 145 fraternity men that were randomly assigned to a control group or rape-prevention program. He found that although there was no evidence of change in sexually coercive behavior, significant seven-month declines in rape myth acceptance and the likelihood of committing rape were shown among the men who attended the all-male programs. This study demonstrates how important education on topics such as sexual assault and rape can be in shaping the attitudes of men who previously expressed approval and acceptance of rape-supportive attitudes. As for rape-myth acceptance, the seven-month treatment remained lower for the participant group than in the control group. Foubert mentions that his study could be limited in a few ways; first because seven months may have not been a long enough period of time to judge if sufficient changes had been made. Secondly, because the groups were of a smaller size and the control group began with a lower level of likelihood of raping, results could have been skewed. Overall, Foubert was able to demonstrate how significantly attitudes about sexual violence can change if there are rape-prevention programs available to those who are willing to participate in them.

It seems as though rape supportive attitudes and beliefs in fraternity men are embedded and then perpetuated due to the patriarchal belief that men are superior to women, as well as

insecurity within themselves. A large portion of men surveyed in these studies were found to have rape-prone behaviors and were even found to say that they would complete a rape if they could be guaranteed of not being caught. Foubert found, however, that through all-male education programs, attitudes that support sexual violence can eventually be changed. The majority of the studies above were all conducted in survey form with college-aged male students, however, Foubert's study was experiment based with staged presentations. Future research should replicate these findings with specific male-based fraternities to see if those who did not study fraternities specifically would receive the same results.

My study had several limitations based on anonymity. It is possible that the respondents underreported sexually aggressive and rape supportive behaviors even with it being anonymous due to the presence of the researcher and their desire to represent their fraternity in a positive way. There could also be a bias in terms of which fraternities chose to participate in the survey and those who chose to opt out of participating. Those who chose not to participate may reflect hidden sexual aggression tendencies. Lastly, this study was biased on selection since all participants were taken from a specific population on campus, therefore findings cannot be generalized to the entire college campus.

Future research should look further in to additional causes for sexually aggressive and rape supportive attitudes. One area of interest would be if education and prevention programs could lower the aggression and hostility levels of fraternities on college campuses, specifically this west coast public university. Another area for future research could be to look at college majors and their impact on aggressive behaviors, as well as the geographic locations that respondents grew up in.

CONCLUSION

Sexual assault is something that is excessively prevalent on college campuses, though it continues to be extremely overlooked. In order to make a significant difference in college sexual assault statistics, there needs to be a direct effort to help change the attitudes and beliefs of males on campus. The previous study suggested that though fraternity men's beliefs and attitudes are not always as extreme as prior research has deemed them as being, there is still a significant amount of work that can be done to lower the aggression and hostility rates among college aged men.

Various studies have shown that one in four women will experience rape in her lifetime (Sanday pg. 436). The next step from this research is to go beyond these initial causes of rape and sexual aggression and study possible solutions. Looking into the origins of sexually aggressive and rape supportive behaviors allows parents and peers to prevent the issue before it happens. Clearly we cannot force all children to have a female sibling in order to ensure higher rates of empathy, but with further in-depth research there are sure to be alternate solutions. Rape and sexual assault educational programs have been proven to be a great way to start in the changing of these beliefs in order to work towards creating a safer society for everyone, but without the support of the larger society, it will be extremely difficult to make the change.

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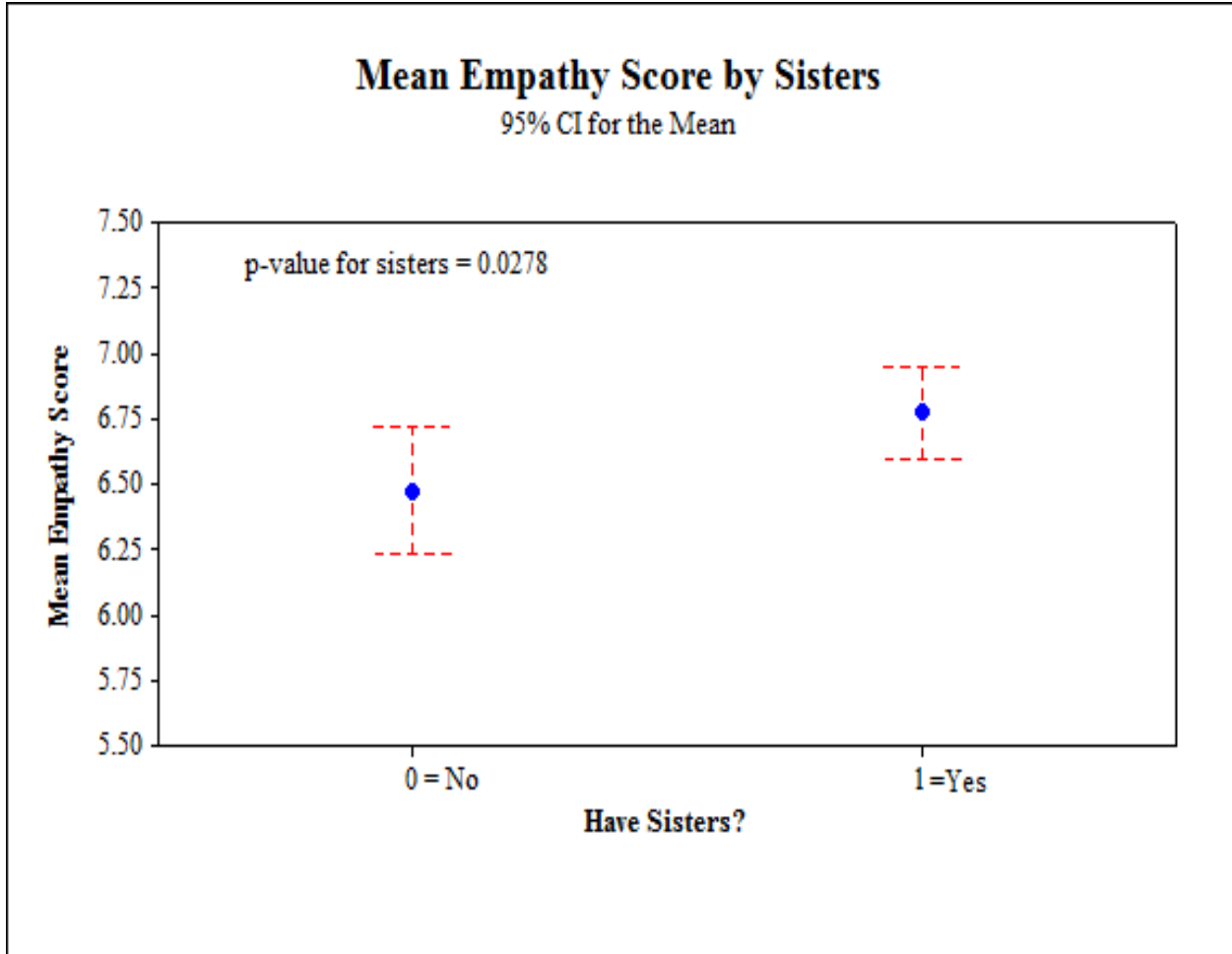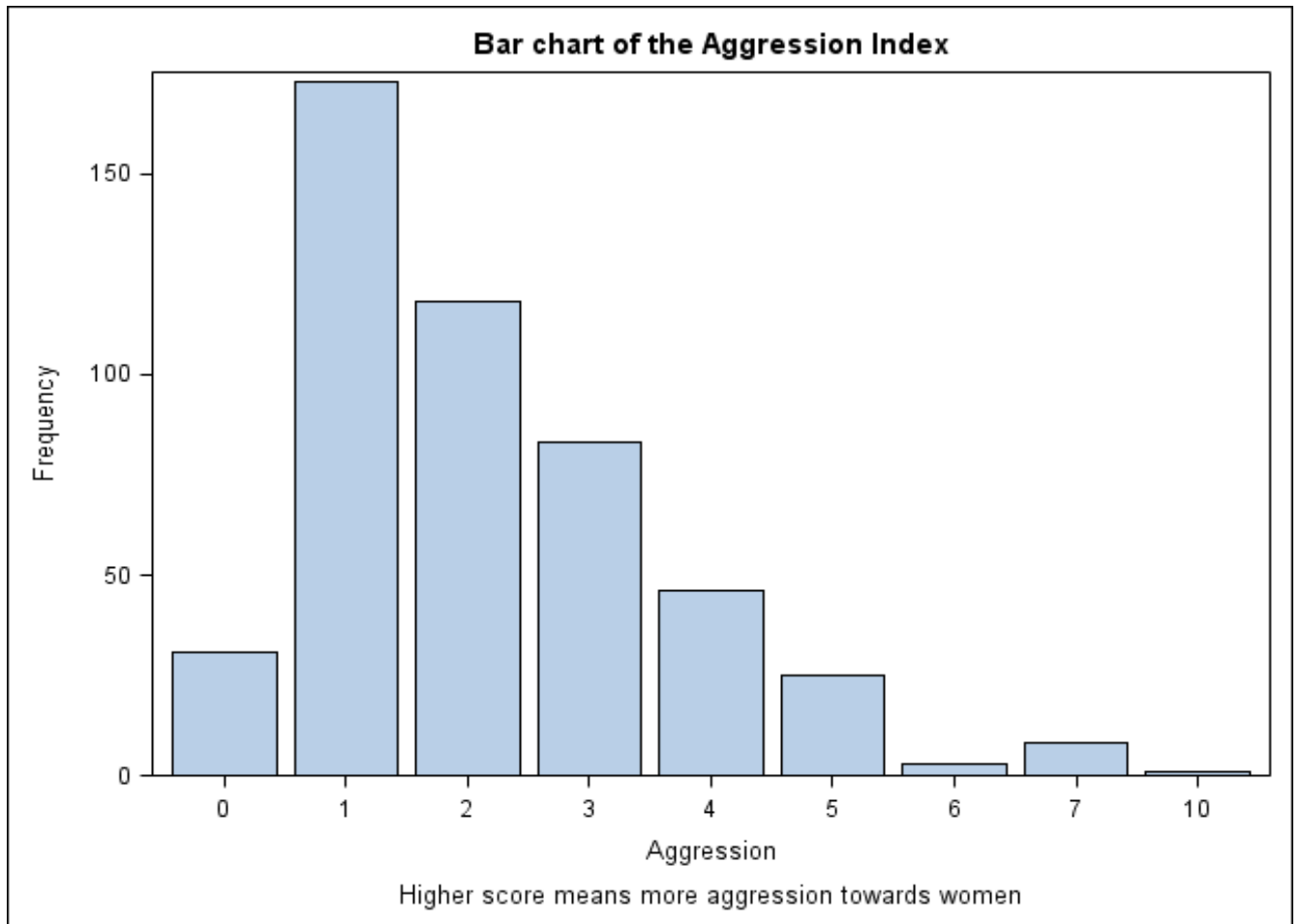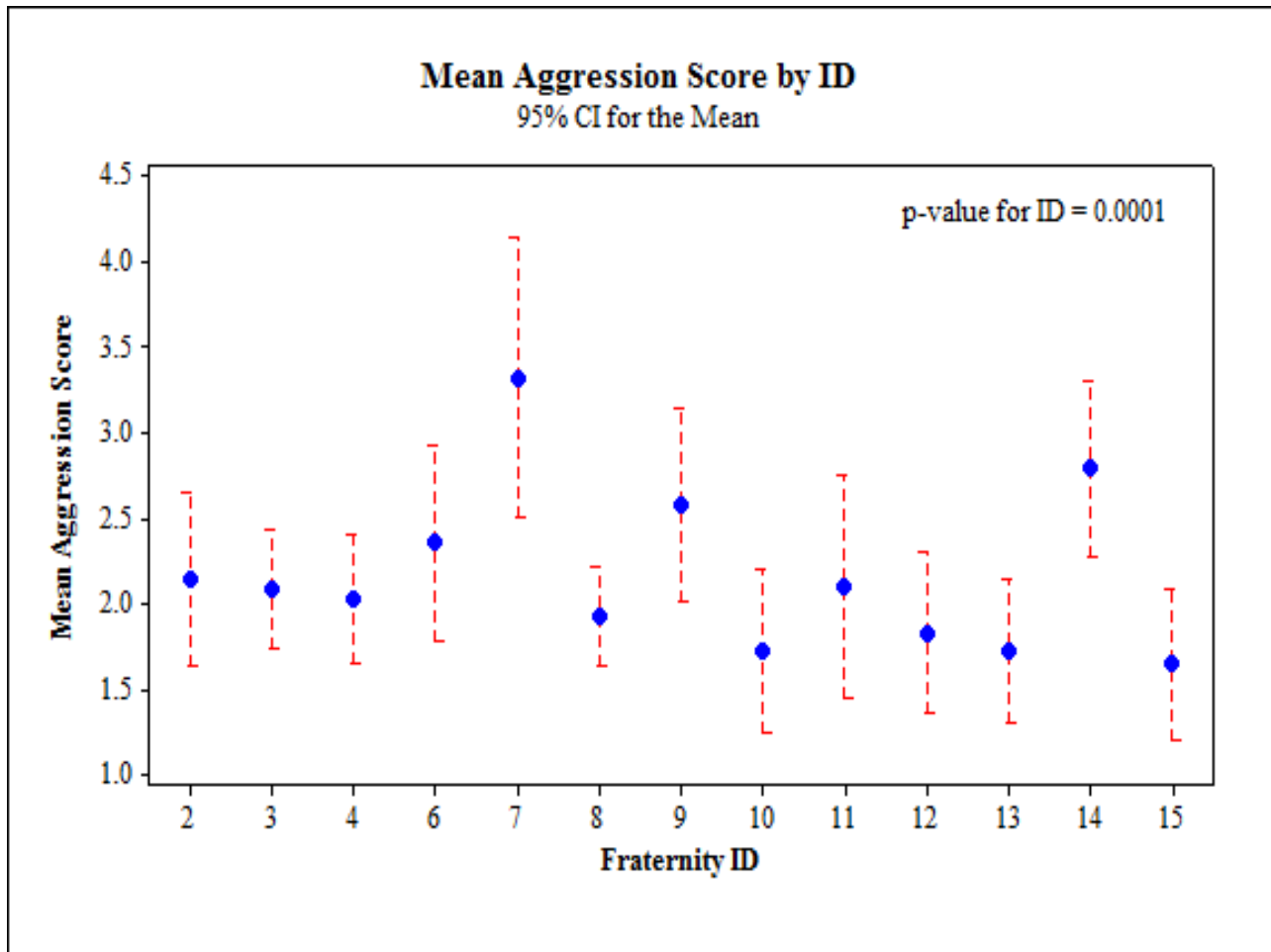
Appendix

Figure 1:

Mean Empathy Score by Sisters
95% CI for the Mean

p-value for sisters = 0.0278

Figure 2:

Bar chart of the Aggression Index

Figure 3:

Mean Aggression Score by ID
95% CI for the Mean
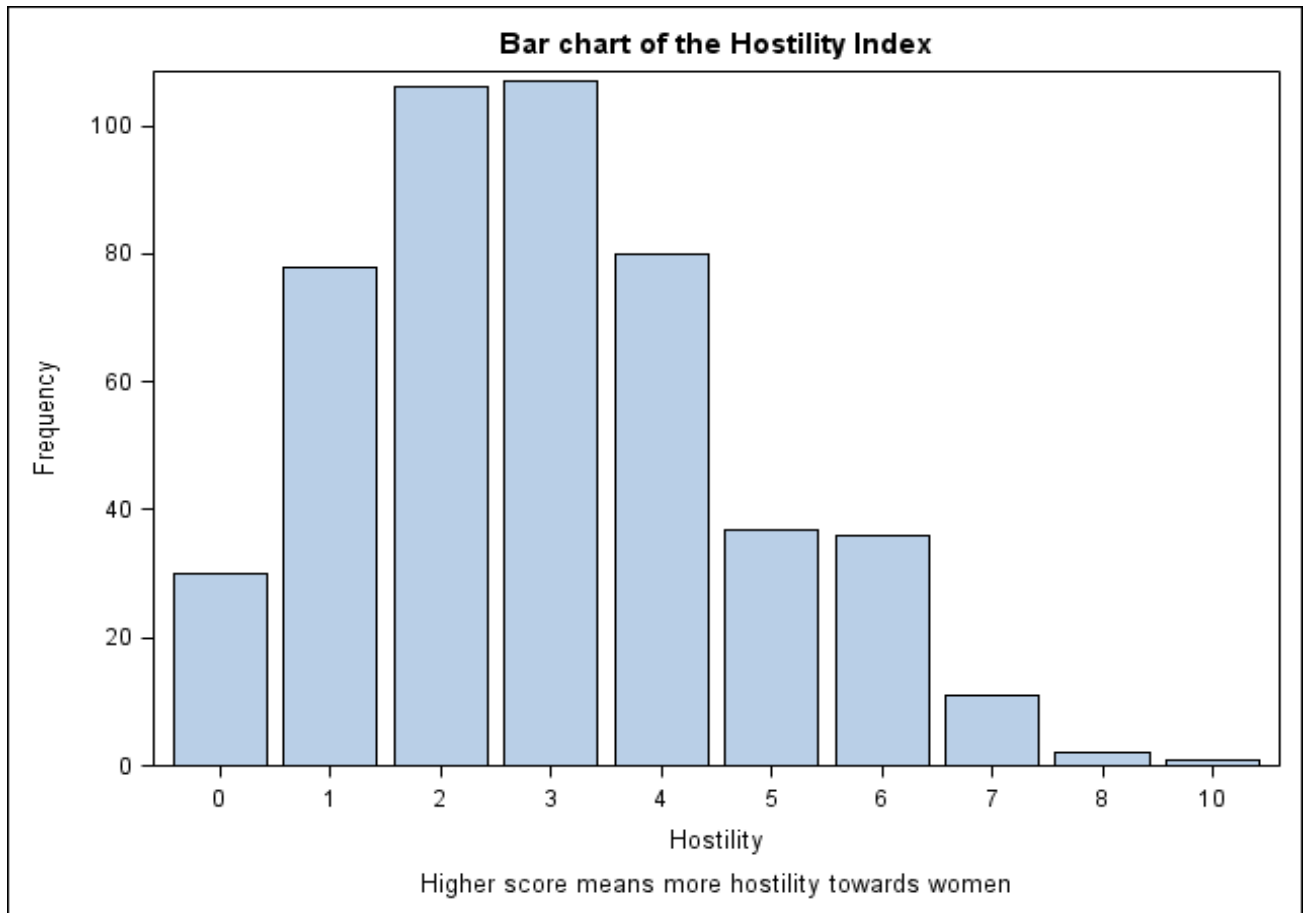
Figure 4:

Figure 5:

Divided Survey

Student Questionnaire

Please answer the following True/False questions based on your own thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. By Filling out this survey, you are agreeing to the use of this information in our senior project. All responses will remain anonymous.

1. I often find public displays of affection annoying **T F**
   Please explain your answer below:

2. I get very angry when I see someone being ill-treated **T F**
3. Lonely people are probably unfriendly **T F**
4. I cannot continue to feel okay if people around me are depressed **T F**
5. It is hard for me to see how some things upset people so much **T F**
6. I am unable to make decisions without being influenced by people's feelings **T F**
7. When a friend starts to talk about his/her problems, I try to steer the conversation to something else **T F**
8. I like to watch people open presents **T F**
9. The people around me have a great influence on my moods **T F**
10. Sometimes the words of a love song can move me deeply **T F**
11. I do very few things to women that make me feel remorseful afterward **T F**
12. It doesn't affect me when women tease me about my faults **T F**
13. There are a number of women who seem to dislike me very much **T F**
14. I often feel that women probably think I have not lived the right kind of life **T F**
15. When I look back at what's happened to me, I don't feel at all resentful toward the women in my life **T F**
16. I never have the feeling that women laugh about me **T F**
17. Many times a woman appears to care but just wants to use you **T F**
18. I do not think that most women would lie to get ahead **T F**
19. If I let women see the way I feel, they would probably consider me a hard person to get along with **T F**
20. I don't typically get really angry when a woman makes fun of me. **T F**
21. A woman who goes to the home or apartment of a man on their first date implies that she is willing to have sex **T F**
    Please explain your answer below:

22. A woman who is stuck-up and thinks she is too good to talk to guys on the street deserves to be taught a lesson **T F**
23. One reason that women falsely report a rape is that they frequently have a need to call attention to themselves **T F**

24. In the majority of rapes, the victim is promiscuous or has a bad reputation   **T   F**
25. If a woman gets drunk at a party and has intercourse with a man she's
    just met there, she should be considered "fair game" to other males at
    the party who want to have sex with her too, whether she wants to or not   **T   F**
26. Regardless of appearance or behavior, any female can be raped   **T   F**
27. If a girl engages in necking or petting and she lets things get out
    of hand, she is responsible if her partner forces sex on her   **T   F**
28. Any healthy woman can successfully resist a rapist if she really wants to   **T   F**
29. When women go around braless or wearing short skirts and tight tops,
    they are just asking for trouble   **T   F**
    Please explain your answer below:

30. Women who get raped while hitchhiking get what they deserve   **T   F**
31. If you could be assured of not being caught, how likely are you to commit rape?
    Less Likely   1   2   3   4   5   Most Likely
32. What year are you at Cal Poly?
    a. Freshman
    b. Sophomore
    c. Junior
    d. Senior
33. Do you hold a position in office in your Fraternity? If so, which one?
    a. Executive Officer   b. General Officer
    c. None   d. Prefer not to answer
34. Where do you currently live?
    a. In a fraternity house   b. In the dorms/on campus
    c. With parents   d. Apartment/house off campus
    e. other
35. Do you have siblings? If so, how many brothers and how many sisters?
    a. _____ Sisters
    b. _____ Brothers   c. None

Figure 6:

Mixed Survey

Student Questionnaire

Please answer the following True/False questions based on your own thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. By Filling out this survey, you are agreeing to the use of this information in our senior project. All responses will remain anonymous.

1. It doesn't really bother me when women tease me about my faults **T F**
2. There are a number of women who seem to dislike me very much **T F**
3. A woman who goes to the home or apartment of a man on their first
   date implies that she is willing to have sex **T F**
   Please explain your answer below:

4. I don't typically get really angry when a woman makes fun of me. **T F**
5. If I let women see the way I feel, they would probably consider me a
   hard person to get along with **T F**
6. A woman who is stuck-up and thinks she is too good to talk to guys
   on the street deserves to be taught a lesson **T F**
7. I do not think that most women would lie to get ahead **T F**
8. I often feel that women probably think I have not lived the right kind of life **T F**
9. One reason that women falsely report a rape is that they frequently have
   a need to call attention to themselves **T F**
10. Many times a woman appears to care but just wants to use you **T F**
11. In the majority of rapes, the victim is promiscuous or has a bad reputation **T F**
12. I never have the feeling that women laugh about me **T F**
13. If a woman gets drunk at a party and has intercourse with a man she's
    just met there, she should be considered "fair game" to other males at
    the party who want to have sex with her too, whether she wants to or not **T F**
14. When I look back at what's happened to me, I don't feel at all resentful
    toward the women in my life **T F**
15. I often find public displays of affection annoying **T F**
    Please explain your answer below:

16. Regardless of appearance or behavior, any female can be raped **T F**
17. Sometimes the words of a love song can move me deeply **T F**
18. The people around me have a great influence on my moods **T F**
19. I like to watch people open presents **T F**
20. If a girl engages in necking or petting and she lets things get out
    of hand, she is responsible if her partner forces sex on her **T F**
21. Lonely people are probably unfriendly **T F**

22. I get very angry when I see someone being ill-treated **T F**
23. When a friend starts to talk about his/her problems, I try to steer the conversation to something else **T F**
24. It is hard for me to see how some things upset people so much **T F**
25. I cannot continue to feel okay if people around me are depressed **T F**
26. I am unable to make decisions without being influenced by people's feelings **T F**
27. Any healthy woman can successfully resist a rapist if she really wants to **T F**
28. When women go around braless or wearing short skirts and tight tops, they are just asking for trouble **T F**
    Please explain your answer below:

29. Women who get raped while hitchhiking get what they deserve **T F**
30. If you could be assured of not being caught, how likely are you to commit rape?
       Less Likely   1   2   3   4   5   Most Likely
31. I do very few things to women that make me feel remorseful afterward **T F**
32. What year are you at Cal Poly?
    a. Freshman
    b. Sophomore
    c. Junior
    d. Senior
33. Do you hold a position in office in your Fraternity? If so, which one?
    a. Executive Officer
    b. General Officer
    c. None
    d. Prefer to not answer
34. Where do you currently live?
    a. In a fraternity house   b. In the dorms/on campus
    d. With parents   d. Apartment/house off campus
    f. other
35. Do you have siblings? If so, how many brothers and how many sisters?
    a. _____ Sisters
    b. _____ Brothers   c. None

Extra Graphs

Hostility Vs Empathy

Responses to Likelihood of Committing Sexual Assault
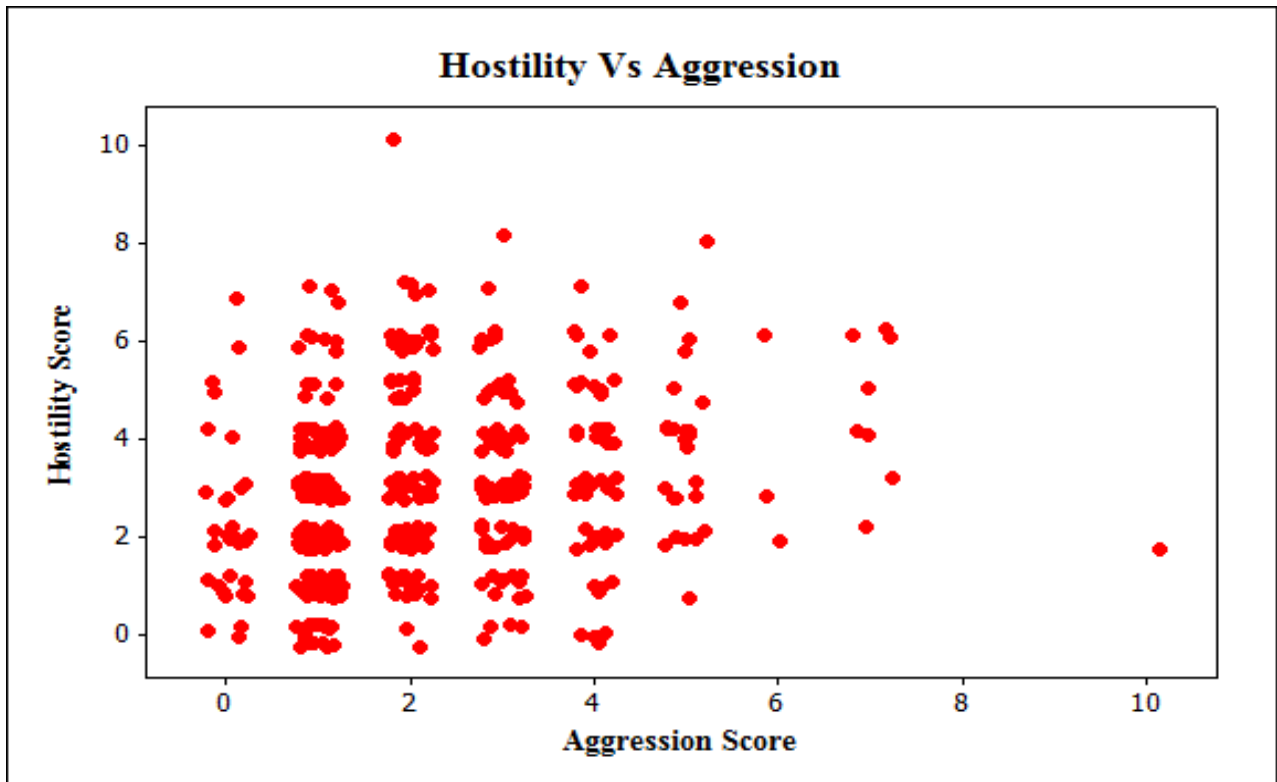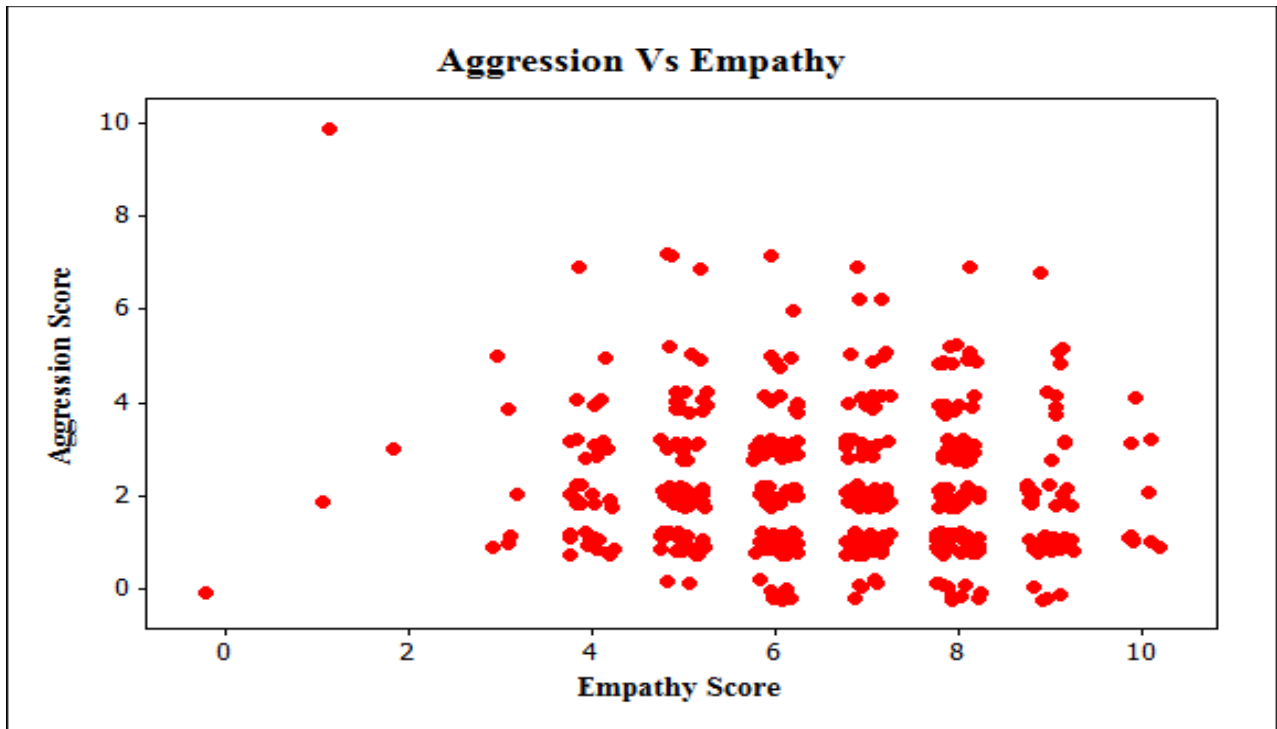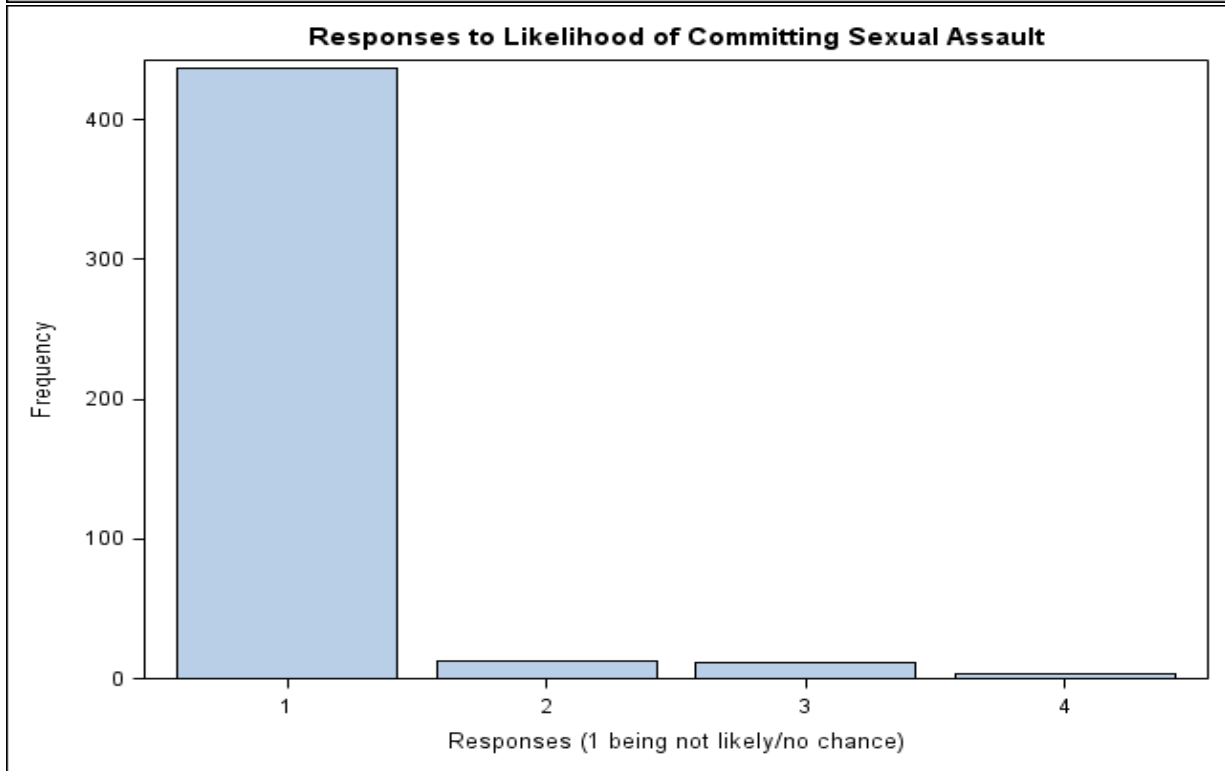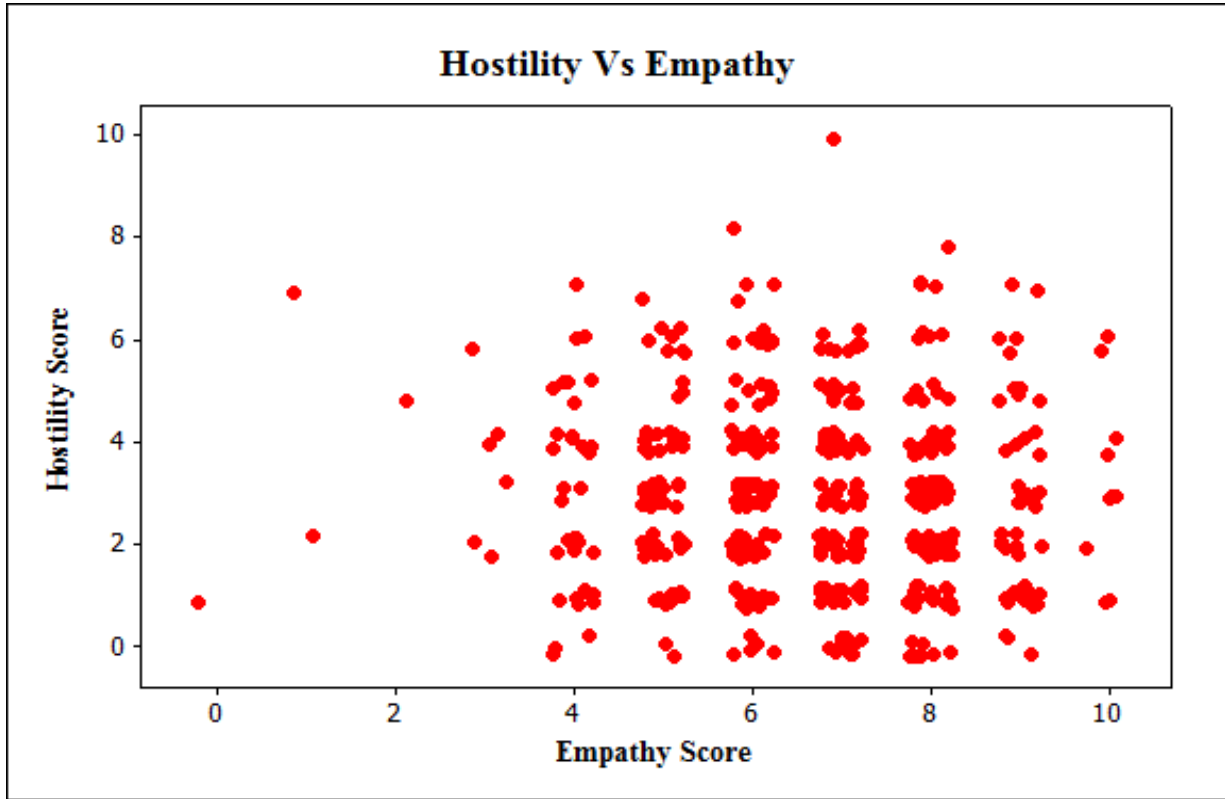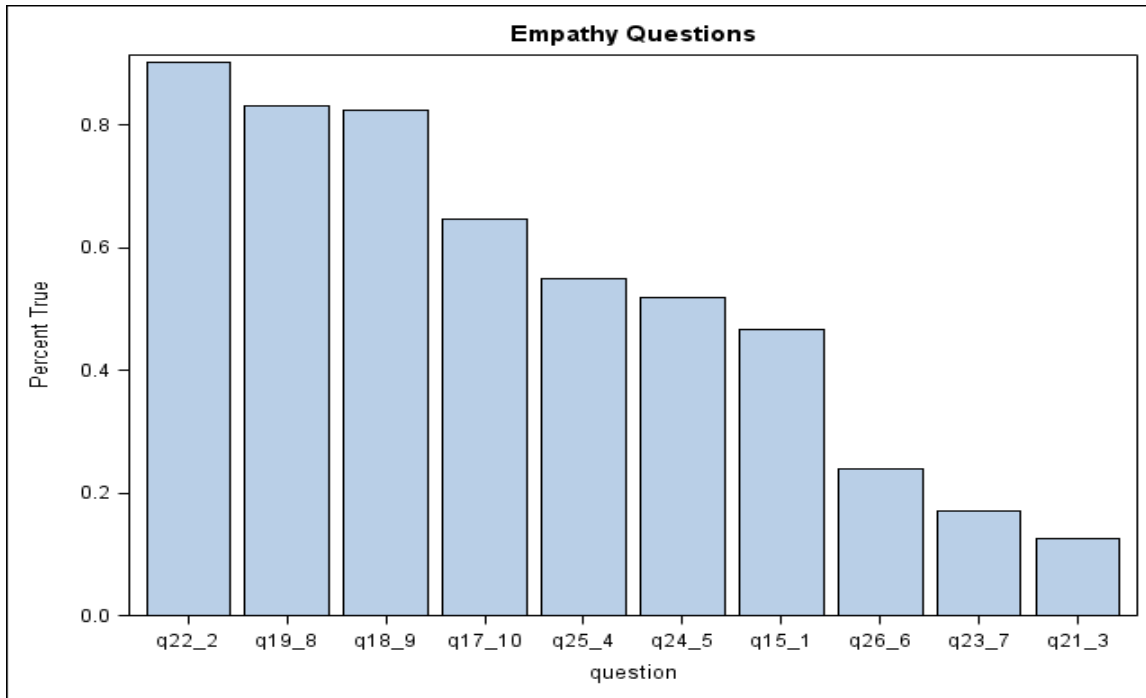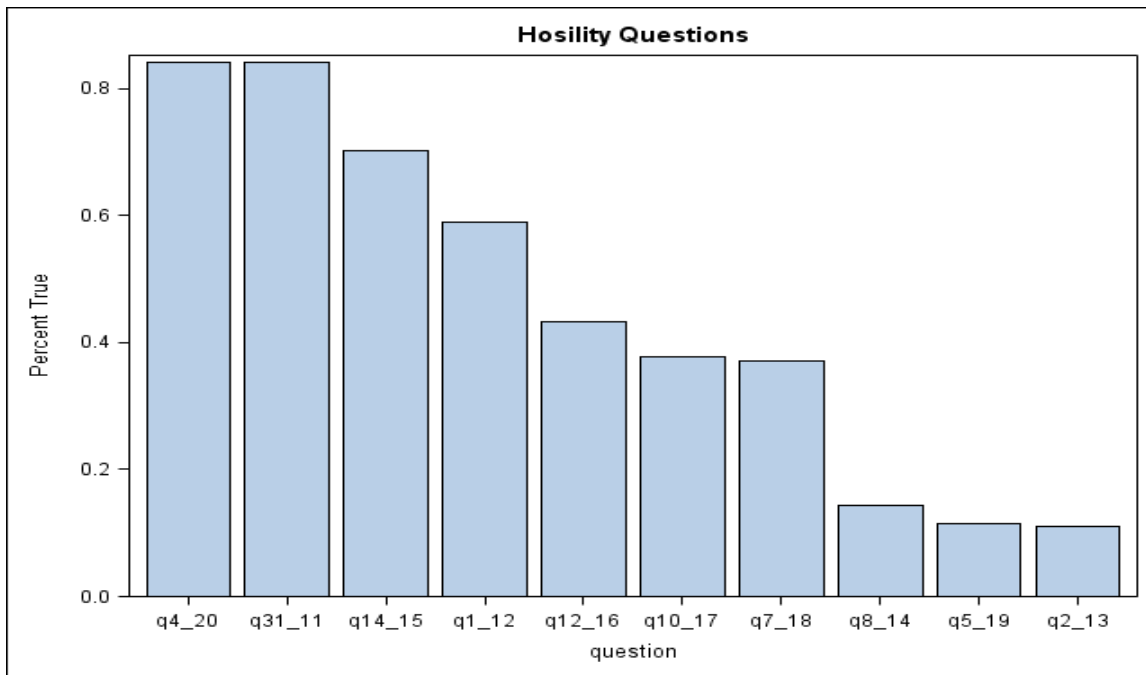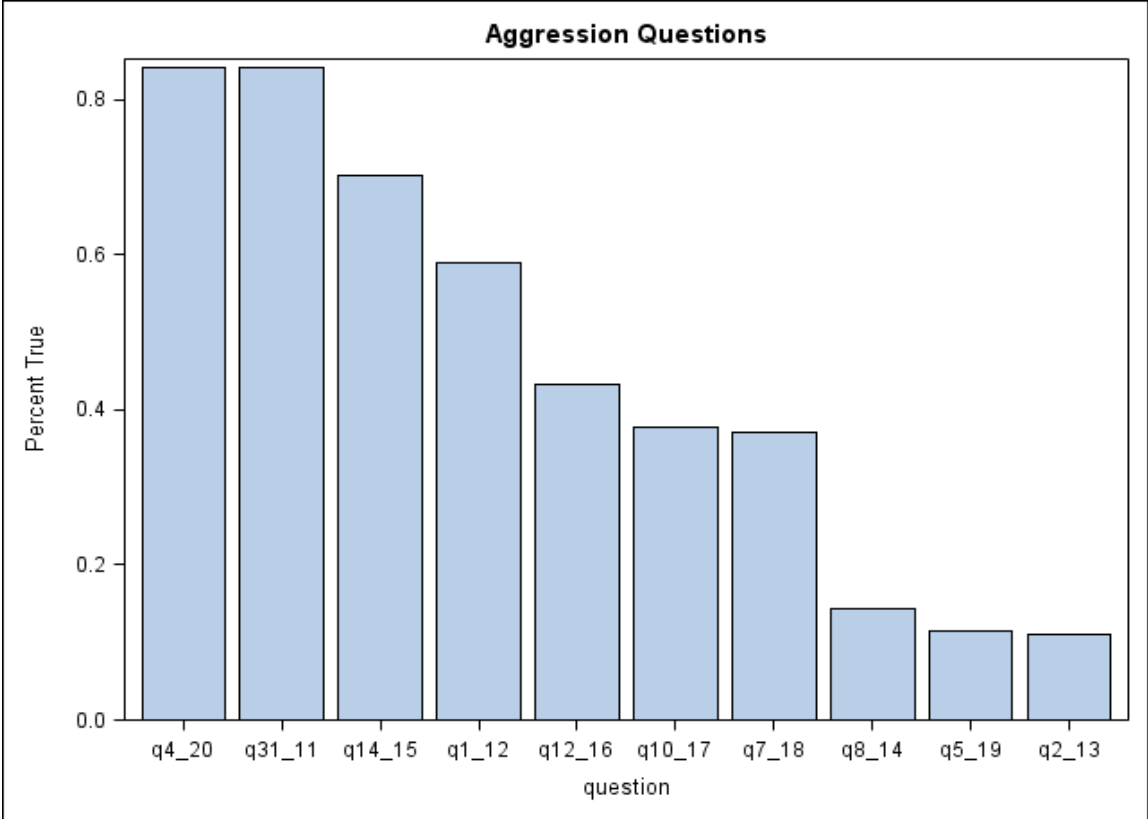
Empathy Questions

This is a chart of all the empathy questions from the survey, showing the percent that was answered true to that question.

Ex. q22_2 would be 22 on the mixed and 2 on the divided.

Hosility Questions

Same as above, but for the hostility questions

Same as above, but for the aggression questions