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A Qualitative Study of Why Women Join Panhellenic Organizations

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Graduate Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Each year more and more women across the country are enrolling in higher education institutions. However, this increase in attendance is not reflected in sorority recruitment. Studies are either non-existent on why women are joining sororities, or the studies that are conducted focus on harm reduction, including alcohol and hazing. Studies also seem to focus more on men, and fraternities. This study was designed to focus on the experience that women are experiencing during recruitment and the reasoning for joining their respective chapters. Using a qualitative approach, the researcher interviewed six women who varied in race, year in school, and analyzed the data for common themes. All six of the participants were women who joined a chapter after formal recruitment in the Fall of 2019. Results varied from the participants in a social sorority at a Mid-Western university. Participants expressed that sense of belonging was the one of the major indicators for not only going through recruitment but deciding to join a chapter. Other major themes for the women deciding to join a sorority were academic performance, philanthropies, professionalism and personal growth.

Keywords: sororities, recruitment, fraternity and sorority life, women

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Chapter I

Introduction

Fraternities and sororities have a long history in colleges and universities in the United States since their founding in the early 1800s (Nelson, Halperin, Wasserman, Et. Al, 2006) and today, many question their relevance on the collegiate experience (Hevel, Martin, Weeden, & Pascarella, 2015). Sometimes called Greek-letter organizations, or social Greek-letter organizations, fraternities and sororities are male and female-only organizations respectively. Fraternal organizations have recently been questioned on the impact the organizations have on members within their first semester (Debard, Lake & Binder, 2006). The large number of members within fraternities and sororities today places importance on the future growth of these institutions. The National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) encompasses over 26-member organizations and is the world's largest umbrella organization specifically with charged with advancing the sorority experience (National Panhellenic Conference [NPC], 2018). Currently NPC reports that there are over 670 campuses with 411,242 undergraduate members in over 3,200 chapters (NPC, 2018).

In recent years fraternity and sorority life has had its share of bad publicity involving hazing, alcohol abuse, and sexual violence with over 12 national news leading incidents between March 2014 and March 2015 (Rosenberg and Mosca, 2016). These news headlines are not just centered on fraternities, though. Historically, sororities have had incidents that have made national news as well (Collison, 1990). Though the news for fraternity and sorority life may not always be positive, the number of women attending four-year institutions is positive. Currently, on a national level, women make up 56% of the population of students enrolled at a four-year

institution, with a prediction of steadily increasing over the next 10 years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

There have been several studies conducted with a focus on fraternity and sorority life, however they were typically based on harm reduction or academic performance. The research is also consistently about men and fraternities. This study helps student affairs professionals, faculty and Panhellenic organizations understand why women are joining sororities today. This information can help professionals at institutions of higher education and staff at inter/national organizations train their members better on recruitment practices and understand the needs of today's women in college.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the reasons for women joining Panhellenic Sororities. Not only can the findings from this study benefit leaders in student affairs, but also other professionals that are focused on the future of fraternity and sorority life. If higher education professionals can understand the reason why the new generation of women are deciding to join sororities, it will positively impact programming, student retention, recruitment training and methods.

Research Questions

With increasing enrollment numbers of women in higher education institutions across the United States, I seek to understand why women are deciding to join a sorority and what experiences do these women search for in a sorority. This subject was addressed by answering the following questions:

1. At what point in time does a woman make the decision to go through the Panhellenic recruitment process and why does a woman decide to go through recruitment?

2. What qualities or values does a woman look for in the chapter while going through the Panhellenic recruitment process?

3. What experience does a woman look for in a sorority?

4. How does a woman pick her top preference chapter while going through the Panhellenic recruitment process?

5. What experience should chapters be providing to new members?

Hypothesis:

1. A majority of participating women will decide to go through the Panhellenic recruitment process once at school and know a friend or roommate who is going through recruitment.

2. Women will look for chapters who demonstrate the values of community service, leadership, and sisterhood.

3. Women will look for chapters who demonstrate a family-like environment, or sisterhood based on the rapport built during initial meetings

4. Through the recruitment process, participants will be listening to the information that is explained to them regarding the values, philanthropy, and overall experience the chapter will provide, and women will follow what gives the best feeling post recruitment.

5. The majority of women in the study will want chapters to provide an experience that helps provide a transition into college and a social network.

Significance of Study

Colleges and universities across the country are seeing an increase in female enrollment numbers (NCES, 2018). In the fall of 2016, the total undergraduate enrollment at collegiate

institutions totaled 16.9 million students. This was a 28 percent increase from 2000 to 2016 with enrollment in 2000 being 13.2 million (NCES, 2018). In the fall of 2016, women made up 56% of total undergraduate enrollment, which was increased from enrollment in 2000 (NCES, 2018). These numbers are significant because, at a time when fraternity and sorority life is displayed in a negative light, female enrollment is increasing. Panhellenic and inter/national sorority organizations are going to want to take advantage of this increase in female enrollment to help boost their membership numbers while battling negative news.

This study is going to help assist the student affairs professionals who serve women at institutions and bring insight into the lives of a new generation of college women. The study will indicate whether the current negative light of fraternity and sorority life has made an impact on joining, and how women perceive organizations centered on sisterhood, leadership, and accountability.

Limitations of the Study

A number of dynamics may limit the information of this study. First, many Panhellenic sororities are historically all white organizations (Harris, Barone & Finch, 2019). This is a major limiting factor in the study in regards to diversity. National Pan-Hellenic Council, Inc. (NPHC) makes up the nine historically African American Greek-lettered organizations, also known as "Divine Nine" (National Pan-Hellenic Council, 2018) The National Pan-Hellenic Council groups have a different process for recruitment compared to Panhellenic Sororities. This could serve as a limitation because of the different processes, groups, and recruitment strategies.

Another limiting factor of the study is the transferability. The study was conducted at Eastern Illinois University (approx. 7,000). Eastern Illinois University sits in a rural setting in a town with a population of approximately 21,000 including students. Due to the size of the school

and the setting of the school, the information may not transfer well to larger institutions, or urban setting schools.

Lastly, due to the limited number of participants, the number may not fully represent why women are joining sororities. The number of women joining Panhellenic groups at Eastern Illinois University, a midsize mid-western university in 2016 was 114, however in 2017 the number dropped to 67 (Eastern Illinois, 2018). The drop in enrollment at the institution and low recruitment numbers serve as limiting factors for understanding the trends for women joining. It should be noted that the drop in enrollment numbers was due to the Illinois budget crisis (Thorp & Recker, 2018)

Definitions of Terms

Bid – A formal invitation to join a chapter of an international, national or local chapter of a fraternity or sorority (Wittenburg, 2018).

Chapter – The local group of a national organization on campus. Within each organization, chapters are usually referenced via a Greek-letter designation. For example, the founding chapter would be the "Alpha Chapter," the second is typically the "Beta Chapter," and so on (Wittenburg, 2018).

Formal Recruitment – Process where women go through a formalized recruitment program where chapters and individuals mutually decide their best fit(s). It can be held in fall or spring semester (Wittenburg, 2018).

Informal Recruitment/Continuous Opening Bidding (COB) – A casual and unstructured method for chapters to recruit new members (Wittenburg, 2018).

Initiation – A formal ceremony by which new members become initiated members (Wittenburg, 2018).

Legacy — A student who has a brother/sister, father/mother, and/or grandfather/grandmother who is a member of a particular fraternity or sorority. Legacies are often granted special consideration in the membership recruitment process but never guaranteed membership (Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2018).

National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC): Council made up of nine historically black International Greek letter Sororities and Fraternities to promote interaction through forums, meetings, and other mediums for the exchange of information and engages in cooperative programming and initiatives through various activities and functions (National Pan-Hellenic Council, 2018).

National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) - Umbrella organization for 26 Greek-letter organizations throughout the United States and Canada charged with overseeing the sorority experience (Wittenburg, 2018).

North American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) - Umbrella organization for 70 Greek-lettered organizations throughout the United States and Canada charged with overseeing the fraternity experience (Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2018).

Philanthropy - Sororities have national partnerships with non-profits or causes, to help raise awareness and fundraise (Wittenburg, 2018).

Potential New Member – An unaffiliated registered student who is seeking membership within a fraternity or sorority (Wittenburg, 2018).

Recruitment - Process in which a potential new member goes through to find the fraternity or sorority that he or she deem fit to join (Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2018).

Recruitment Counselors – A temporary, unaffiliated member of a chapter who helps potential new members through the Panhellenic formal recruitment process (Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2018).

Social Fraternity - Local or national organization made up of only men whose primary focus is to be social, interact with fellow students and hosting institution, and conduct a secret initiation ritual (Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2018).

Social Sorority - Local or national organization made up of only women whose primary focus is to be social, interact with fellow students and hosting institution, and conduct a secret initiation ritual (Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2018).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to ultimately understand why a woman decides to join a Panhellenic sorority. Enrollment on college and university campuses, specifically female, are increasing at higher rates. Due to this increase, will Panhellenic see an increase in their numbers as well? Will the women attending institutions join to find sisterhood, or will they join for the leadership opportunities offered elsewhere? The significance of this study is important to help student affairs professionals prepare for programming and recruitment training, as well as provide insight to the Panhellenic organizations on the reasoning their new members are joining their organizations.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Previous research has shared mixed results on the benefits for the students who become members of fraternities and sororities. Some research shows that the previous studies conducted underrepresented fraternity and sorority life and hold insufficient depth (Molasso, 2005). The following literature review examines some of the differences in studies regarding the benefits of joining a fraternity/sorority, what perks have been traditionally cited by men and women for joining, and what current issues student affairs professionals are facing in helping advise chapters. The history of sororities is also important to understand how the purpose of a sorority, including the term sorority itself, came to be and the sorority's reputation by students in the modern day. It is important to have a firm understanding of fraternity and sorority life as there are a number of issues facing not only national headquarters staff and higher education institutions, but the very students who are members of these organizations.

History & Recruitment

Before discussing recruitment, it is important to understand the founding history of sororities in order to conceptualize current day sororities and their members. The first women's only secret organization, or secret society, was the Adelphean Society founded at Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia in 1851 (Alpha Delta Pi, 2019). Sororities were originally founded in order to provide a place for women to find friendship and help others in a time that was not necessarily friendly toward women on college campuses. The term "sorority" was not used until a Professor named Frank Smalley made a comment to a member of Gamma Phi Beta, who had recently started at Syracuse, that the women must be excited to be a part of a sorority. Before then, men's and women's groups were referred to as fraternities or societies (Gamma Phi Beta,

2019). The women of Gamma Phi Beta quickly adopted the term sorority which referred to as "sisterhood" (Gamma Phi Beta, 2019).

Understanding the history of sororities, why women join sororities, and the retention numbers of sororities are important. Fraternities and sororities typically lose about 25 percent of their membership annually due to graduation, quitting or other reasons (Scheibel, Gibson, and Anderson, 2002). Considering that recruitment is considered the "life-blood" for sororities, this is a concerning number (Coffey & Eberly, 2008). Not only is this concerning, but there are a number of basic questions that are not being asked. According to Fouts (2010), the question, "Why aren't students 'going Greek?'" has not been researched or published in the last twenty years. There is a lot of speculation within campus community when a chapter may or may not hit their recruitment goal for the semester. In one study the largest reason that students did not join was due to the stereotypes associated with the members and/or the chapters, with time commitment and obligations following (Fouts, 2010).

Understanding the process for Panhellenic recruitment can be difficult due to the number of variables from school to school, the types of recruitment, and bylaws for each council at the schools. To best understand, the National Panhellenic Council has created a Panhellenic guide (National Panhellenic, 2019) states that there are three types of recruitment: continuous recruitment (CR), partially structured recruitment (PSR), and fully structured recruitment (FSR). The recruitment process can look different from school to school depending on the size of the institution and the Panhellenic Council itself, however there are some common characteristics. Typically, Panhellenic will appoint recruitment counselors to serve as guides for the potential new members (PNM) participating in recruitment that will disaffiliate from their chapters in order to best help the PNM find the chapter that best fits. Typically, the schedule for Panhellenic

recruitment follows as: event 1 is an orientation meeting, women are divided into groups and attend open houses, event 2 and 3 are invitational rounds, with the event 4 being preference round (National Panhellenic, 2019). The number of invitations, and events can vary from school depending on the number of chapters on that specific campus. Lastly, depending on whether chapters made their recruitment goals or quotas, some councils at schools will allow chapters to conduct continuous recruitment (informal recruitment) so that bidding can take place after formal recruitment.

Image of Fraternity & Sorority Life

The number of incidents occurring at different institutions making national headlines for hazing and alcohol is not hard to come by. This includes an incident dating back to October 2014 when a chapter in the Southern region of the country was suspended indefinitely after a student going through recruitment broke into a zoo and stole two flamingos. The student was eventually charged with grand larceny (Rosenberg & Mosca, 2016). In another incident from November 2014, a private university in the mid-Atlantic "suspended a fraternity and banned all open parties after a 16-yer old reported being raped at one such party" (Rosenberg & Mosca, 2016).

Although national headlines reflect some of the actions taking place within fraternities and sororities, there are many founding characteristics for many fraternal organizations that provide an environment that lends individuals the opportunity for personal development. "While facilitating an understanding of independence that is critical in developing good citizens" (Jackson & Iverson, 2009). Many of the following terms are found in fraternity and sorority creeds, mission statements, and core values: social responsibility, integrity, honesty, goodness, truth, equality, and personal courage (Jackson & Iverson, 2009). Astin (1997) believed that higher education played an important role in developing and producing civically engaged

citizens. The image of fraternity and sorority life has not always been posed with this image of building better citizens; however, the founding intent was to do so.

Fraternities and sororities cannot necessarily control how popular culture portrays fraternal organizations. However, each chapter can portray themselves in a better light in their local community. In a recent study at two institutions in the Midwest, non-affiliated students made open-ended comments that involved cleaning up the fraternity members (Fouts, 2010). The respondents (non-Greek members) explained how they saw students they knew arriving to class hung-over, addressing fellow students or faculty rudely on campus, and talking freely of sexual encounters and parties that took place over the weekend. In terms of recruitment, 40 percent of students responded to the study saying that they may have participated in recruitment if the obligations of membership were clearly defined, and 36 percent said they would have considered participating if the events were better marketed or made aware of (Fouts, 2010).

Though the image of fraternity and sorority life may be subjected to negative commentary from time to time, students are still interested in the benefits that come along with membership. Fraternal organizations have historically been linked to the principles relating to change and shared decision making that involves civic and democratic principles (Matney, et. al, 2016).

Impacts Made During Membership

The impacts of membership in fraternities and sororities are often debatable, and the research varies greatly on the impacts made to the students during undergraduate membership. Although these occurrences are common in research within the higher education community, there are studies that reflect the positive impact fraternities and sororities have on their members. In other studies, it is found that fraternity and sorority members are more involved on campus,

have higher post-graduation wages (males only), and have a higher graduate school attendance than non-affiliated students (Routon & Walker, 2016).

Fraternities and sororities have typically boasted the idea that members are involved outside their respective chapters with co-curricular activities and community service. In one study, members were substantially more involved per week with community service and co-curricular activities than non-members (Martin, Hevel, Asel, Pascarella, 2015). However, the same study found that members also had an increase of excessive alcohol use. Studies have demonstrated that the most significant gains in students' leadership skills came from fraternities and sororities (Hevel, Martin, and Pascarella, 2014). Students with higher-level leadership abilities and experiences are likely to join fraternities and sororities (Hevel, Martin, and Pascarella, 2014). Fraternities and sororities tend to impact their members by providing more leadership opportunities, philanthropy and service, and social connections while in school and post-graduation.

Perks of Membership

Since starting in the early 1800s social fraternities and sororities have been both a blessing and a curse for college campuses (Nelson, Halperin, Wasserman, Et. Al, 2006; Anderson & Danis, 2007). One of the unspoken advantages that fraternal organizations can offer to its new and old members is the idea of ritual, or initiation rituals. The idea of joining or being affiliated with a fraternity or sorority means to belong to a part of a group of "brothers" or "sisters" who care about each other, and respect each other (Callais, 2005). At the foundation of all fraternities and sororities, there are two important lessons. The first is that the ceremonies hold the important secrets of an organization that all members should know. The second is typically a lesson that is taught through some form of a parable. Lessons typically involve some form of citizenship or

civic responsibility and encourage fraternities and sororities to be more involved with the community.

Secondly, the work that fraternities and sororities do for volunteering and community outreach is typically higher than non-Greek students (Hevel, Weeden, Pasquesi, Pascarella, 2015). With this amount of community service work, non-affiliated men comment that community service is a "sorority girl thing" (Foste & Susan, 2018).

Lastly, studies have broadly shown that fraternity and sorority members are more involved in drinking activities (Anderson & Danis, 2007), yet a lot of the studies typically focus just on men and fraternities. Some studies have shown that women do not drink more than the non-affiliated student (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2015; Barry, Madson, Moorer & Christman, 2016). Although fraternal organizations are typically stereotyped, data does show that there are benefits to fraternity and sorority life.

Sense of Belonging

When discussing the future of higher education, one important factor that must be discussed are the changing demographics of the students both enrolling in and leaving higher education institutions. The United States Census Bureau, through the 2013-2017 American Community Survey, has data providing that in each year in the aforementioned date range there were more people holding a four-year degree than not (United States Census Bureau, 2018). The data collected from the U.S. Census Bureau also show that women were the majority in higher education in 2017 (and going back as far as 2009—the earliest data available online through the U.S. Census Bureau online). Unfortunately, the data is not all positive regarding retention. Bradburn (2003) found that 1 out of 3 students are not returning after one year of schooling.

One of the first things to do when examining how students feel connected to their institution is by defining the idea. In this case, defining a "sense of belonging" will mean no more than "subjective sense of affiliation and identification with the university community" (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, and Salomone, 2002). This "sense of belonging" is important, as the first six weeks on campus for a student are the most crucial for a student to adjust to the culture on campus (Tinto, 1988). Institutions have to find ways to make students feel better integrated to the culture in order to help retain the students. Changes to colleges and universities have already started to take place, especially because of Astin's research (1997) with student involvement. Higher education institutions have implemented freshmen seminars and learning communities (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, and Salomone, 2002) to help confront and combat the mass numbers of students who are not returning to college campuses from year to year. Learning communities see the highest results in regard to perceived peer support, perceived faculty support, classroom comfort and empathetic faculty understanding (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, and Salomone, 2002).

In another study a closer examination of adjusting to college life was measured by examining whether friendships made with peers was connected to belonging to the university (Pittman & Richmond, 2008). In this particular study, it was determined that students can have relationships with peers, but that this is separate from the feeling of being connected to their college. In addition, another study examined whether students feel connected to their "class" and the school (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007). The most important conclusion from the study was that encouragement of student participation and interaction with peers and faculty were crucial. The findings stated that "combination of both academic and interpersonal factors in

students' college experiences might promote the sense of belonging and, ultimately, their academic motivation in that setting" (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007).

Lastly, it should be mentioned that Astin's Theory of Involvement (1997) discusses and emphasizes the role that peer groups play in terms of both student's adjustment and connection to campus. This role of groups connecting students to campus can be similar to giving students a "second home" and helping students feel more relaxed about their experience in college. The question is what role sororities will play in the future. As mentioned earlier, learning communities were found to be extremely beneficial to students on campus. Sororities can have the potential to make a positive impact on women entering higher education. Due to this, the study of women and sororities is important as the landscape for higher education institutions is changing, and student affairs professionals need to stay ahead to better serve these groups and the women who make up the membership. The relationship between sororities and higher education institutions can be a positive, and mutually beneficial one.

Generation Z

One of the most important strategies for recruitment is knowing your target audience. As time and culture evolves, new generations of college students enter the environment. Generation Z (or Gen Z) are beginning to enter colleges and are typically viewed as being born between 1995-2015 (Guidi; Lesperance, 2019). There are a couple of themes within Gen Z that are noteworthy. This specific generation has grown to know and only know technology, they already view themselves as leaders and entrepreneurs, they hold different values that millennials, and they are joining for different reasons compared to previous generations.

The first difference between Gen Z compared to previous generations is the idea of technology and safety. This generation has grown up in a world that has seen the War on Terror,

school shootings, and questions regarding climate change (Guidi). Due to this upbringing, many "Gen Z appear to have a lower tolerance for hazing and other activities that jeopardize their health and safety" (Guidi). Due to this technology influencing Gen Z, when asking Gen Z where their view of fraternity and sorority life came from, 67.2% said a movie and 55.6% said a TV show. Changes in safety and technology are not the only differences for Gen Z compared to others. Another notable change is how Gen Z view themselves.

Gen Z students are not enrolling into leadership courses, or emerging leader programs, and certainty do not buy into the idea of joining an organization for leadership lessons (Dement). "This generation also doesn't have the need to discover they are leaders, because they already know they are; they are looking for experience as leaders rather than 101 leadership trainings" (Dement). This view of themselves is partly because Gen Z believes to see themselves as being more "entrepreneurial" than previous generations (Dement; Guidi). Due to students' experiences with friends and family losing their jobs, this idea of being innovative and entrepreneurial causes students not to wait for leadership, but to step up themselves. Gen Z students may not be interested in enrolling in emerging leader programs, but will be applying for leadership positions within their first year of school (Dement).

The Gen Z population also has a different set of values and reasons for joining chapters. Gen Z are becoming more known for valuing individualism and being a realist. The students entering are not as easy to recruit (Chatten), so the methods used will have to change to reflect the differences. Some of the recommendations being made for the Gen Z include making sales pitches more specific, truly highlighting the stories that would explain why it is worth joining. Along with this specific pitch, being able to make college more memorable and setting up for professional success are highlighted as other notable changes (Chatten). For sororities

specifically, women have typically relied on ensuring that women who have a lot of fun will in return be solid, committed members. This would also include gift giving or showering new members with gifts. Rather than these activities, women should be focusing on activities that will build a relationship through deep conversations, vulnerability and authenticity (McCreary). In another study, the same results are showing that women are joining for friendships, philanthropy/community service and "home away from home" (Cogswell, Maynen, Lee). Regardless, a change in recruitment is taking place due to Gen Z and women will need to begin taking a closer look at the methods used for recruitment.

Theoretical Framework

Astin (1999) defines involvement simply by saying that "involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience." He provides a simple but clear theory that explains why student leaders may decide to join registered student organizations. Astin has five postulates in his theory, and postulates one and four are particularly connected to this study of women's involvement in sororities.

Astin's first postulate is the postulate that defines involvement as the "energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (1999, p. 519). The involvement can be as small as studying for a test in a class or involved with an organization. This then leads into the second postulate. The second postulate basically states that involvement is along a continuum. In other words, student's involvement may differ at different times and within different activities (Astin, 1999, p. 519).

Astin's Student Development then moves into the third postulate, which discusses qualitative and quantitative measurement. Astin uses an academic example, where a student's involvement can be measured quantitatively by how many hours a student spends studying. This

compares to qualitatively where student involvement measured qualitative is measured by how much is retained by the student reading (Astin, 1999). The fourth postulate, Astin discusses how much a student can take out of a program or involvement. How much a student puts into involvement regarding an organization or class is directly proportional to what a student will take out. Lastly, the fifth postulate in Astin's Theory of Student Development states that educational policy effectiveness is related directly to increased student involvement (Astin, 1999, p. 519).

There are two postulates that connect this theory to fraternity and sorority life. The first postulate is that the involvement from students will be continuous and be involved in different ways. If a "freshman A" joins a sorority her first semester of college, it is assumed she will stay in all four years for membership until graduation. If "freshmen A" sticks with the sorority all four years, her college experience will most likely be more enjoyable and beneficial since she was involved for her four years in school. This is one point where sororities can make a difference in a young woman's life. Greek letter organizations typically try to instill alumni involvement even after graduation which can continue an individual's development.

The second postulate relating to sororities (the fourth postulate in Astin's theory) is the amount that students put into learning and personal development will be proportional to the quality and quantity. This question of whether fraternities and sororities truly benefit its members has been researched several times and has gone to show either positive or neutral results in multiple studies (Molasso, 2005). This void of studies creates an opportunity to better look at the benefits of women joining sororities on campuses. According to Astin (1999), the more women are putting into their sorority experience means that the benefits to women in the sororities should be higher due to the high-level involvement sororities offer its member. If the quality of the sorority experience is strong, women can potentially develop more during their experience.

Research Question

This study expanded on the work mentioned in the Review of Literature. This study examined reasons women join Panhellenic sororities. Specifically, the process that the participant went through when deciding on the chapter she wanted to join and what experience she was searching for.

Summary

The literature identifies some of the negative light that fraternities and sororities are held within, as well as the harm reduction and risk related to fraternity and sorority life. The literature also identifies that there are some perks relating to civic involvement, graduation rates, and leadership opportunities awarded by chapters that complement lessons taught in the classroom. The information from the research and this study will help student affairs professionals, sorority leaders, and staff of inter/national sororities understand the reason for women joining sororities on college campuses today.

Chapter III

Methodology

This study used a qualitative method for data collection and analysis. The "purpose of qualitative research is to gain an in-depth understanding of purposively selected participants from their perspective" (Patten, 2014). Based on the women being interviewed in this study, the responses ranged greatly from participant to participant, and qualitative research offers the ability to focus on the words in the responses. Qualitative research allows the proposed study to be focused on the trends in the words rather than statistics (Patten, 2014). Lastly, since there is little research on Panhellenic women, and the reasoning why members joined their respective organizations, qualitative is typically suggested in new areas of research (Patten, 2000).

Design of Study

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach, consisting of six separate one-on-one interviews between the researcher, and each interviewee. Each interviewee was a new member to a recognized Panhellenic chapter that joined in the fall semester of 2019. The interviews allowed the women to discuss their experience as a new sorority member, the process which helped women decide they were going to join a sorority, and what traits they were looking for in a chapter that the woman did or did not find.

Participants

Six Panhellenic new members were selected to be in the proposed study. All participants selected agreed to participate in the individual interviews, and were consequently offered a form of consent, and informed that participation was voluntary. Withdrawal was permitted at any point. The participants ultimately consisted of six female undergraduate students between the

ages of 18 and 22 years old. Each of the six participants were women who participated in Fall 2019 Formal Panhellenic recruitment.

Beginning with Participant 1, she identified as a white, female, freshman who is not a legacy, and currently majoring in Pre-Nursing & Biological Sciences. Participant 2 identified as Asian (Indian), female, freshmen who is not a legacy majoring in Criminology & Pre-Law. Participant 3 identified as a white, female, sophomore and who is not a legacy majoring in Special Education. Participant 4 identified as a white, female, junior who is not a legacy majoring in Psychology. It should be noted that Participant 4 is one of two transfer students in the study who completed at least 1 year of schooling before transferring to Eastern Illinois University. Participant 5 identified as a Hispanic, female, freshmen who is not a legacy majoring in Early Childhood Education. Lastly, Participant 6 identified as a white, female, sophomore who is a legacy of two sororities, and majors in Special Education. It should be noted that Participant 6 is the second transfer student in the study who completed at least one year of schooling before transferring to Eastern Illinois University.

Research Site

This study took place at Eastern Illinois University. The university sits in a Midwestern rural community of about 21,000 residents. The university is 2-3 hours away from major cities including Chicago, Indianapolis, and St. Louis.

Eastern Illinois University, along with many other Illinois intuitions, reported a drop in enrollment numbers due to the Illinois budget crisis (Thorp & Recker, 2018). Eastern Illinois University reported in the spring 2019 that total full-time undergraduate students was 3,647, with 2,178 being female. Despite the drop in enrollment, the Office of Fraternity & Sorority Programs reported 12.2% of the institution's community was in a fraternity or sorority and reported the

average Panhellenic chapter size was 30 members, including new and active members for the Spring 2019 semester.

Instrument

This research consisted of six individual interviews conducted between the researcher, and the interviewee. The researcher had the interviewees complete a questionnaire to collect information about age, race, major, year in school, and chapter joined. Each interview lasted approximately half an hour to an hour, and consisted of open-ended questions that were pre-determined; prompts associated with responses from the interviewee answers were also included. The individual interviews were placed in meeting room of the university union to provide a convenient location for participants. Interviewees were allowed to add any additional comments about their experience with the questions asked immediately following the last interview question.

Data Collection

After the formal Panhellenic recruitment in fall of 2019 the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life sent all women who went through formal recruitment a post-recruitment survey. This survey included a question on whether women would be interested in being interviewed on their experience with recruitment. The interviews were then conducted, and audio recorded in the fall 2019 semester. The interview audio was then transcribed, and later coded into themed responses for analysis.

Before deciding on qualitative research, the different methods of conducting the research were heavily discussed. The researcher decided that quantitative research would not provide the emotional attention that a qualitative approach would. Deciding to join a sorority that is offering

a lifetime of sisterhood is a very large decision, and one that can impact their life significantly. The researcher wanted to ensure that emotion is captured during the interviews.

The second reason for conducting a qualitative research for this study is that quantitative could be limiting the answers for how women would answer on their reasoning for joining. The answer for individuals joining could be connected to stories in their life, or personal feelings or experience that would be best captured through qualitative practices.

Data Analysis

Upon completion of the six in-person campus interviews, each of the interviews were transcribed from an audio file to a Microsoft Word document on a personal computer that is password protected. Only the researcher had full access to all audio recordings. Participants were offered the chance to give a pseudonym name to help protect the identity of the participants.

Once the interviews were transcribed, a process of searching for themes then began. Each research question had a different color marker, and answers from participants were highlighted to recognize each response. Once all major themes were identified, any secondary themes were then searched through each participant interview to recognize any other secondary themes. Following IRB protocol, the audio recording will be destroyed after three years.

Treatment of Data

Before starting the interview and questionnaire, participants were required to read and agree to an informed consent in order to continue. All contact information has been deleted from the data collection process, and maintained in a separate file to ensure no contact information can be paired with participants' survey information. Additionally, all information has been kept on one flash drive to maintain confidentiality of the participants. Data will be kept for three years after completion of the research, then which the flash drive will be destroyed.

Role of Researcher

The interest of recruitment in the fraternity and sorority world comes from my undergraduate experience. As an undergraduate, I was a member of a fraternity that belongs to the North American Interfraternity Conference. I had an amazing fraternal experience, which led to my post-graduation job to serve at my fraternity's International Headquarters. The role of an Educational Leadership Consultant (ELC) is plentiful and can be challenging due to the number of chapters visited in a single semester. The various chapters sizes, and schools can also be challenging as no chapters are the same. During this time as an ELC, I led an expansion project starting a colony. This experience led to my interest in discussing the future of fraternity and sorority life, and the ways that recruitment works with individuals. My experiences from traveling various parts of the country have taught me a lot, however I will make a strong effort to not make assumptions on the participants and their experiences. I identify as a white, male, college graduate.

Chapter IV

Results

The overall purpose of this study was to answer why women are interested in joining Panhellenic sororities. After conducting interviews, the researcher identified five major themes: a sense of belonging and friendship, philanthropy and academic success. Two additional noteworthy themes were career and resume building, and personal growth. These two specific themes were not discussed by all participants, but were identified as a major contributor to the participant's experience.

Sense of Belonging & Friendship

The most frequent theme discussed by participants was friendship and sisterhood. The discussion around friendship started in a multitude of ways: The first was that the participant knew someone who was going to go through recruitment, and this friend influenced them to go through recruitment together. Participant 4, a junior transfer student, explained that her friend who was currently not an affiliated member of a chapter before recruitment thought it would be a good way to make new friends. The two were not placed in the same recruitment group, however Participant 4 and her friend would talk about their experiences afterwards. This discussion made her feel more comfortable about the experience, and that she was not alone. Women who had this same experience really credit the friend or peer that encouraged them to go together. The women felt more comfortable knowing that someone else was going to have the same experience, and was also interested in the idea of going through recruitment. Participant 4 stated:

> Well, she [her friend] just convinced me that it was a great way to meet people. She
>
> knows a lot of different people who are in sororities and fraternities and she says
>
> they have a lot of fun doing all of that. We weren't in the same group. So, we didn't

get to spend much time together, but it was nice afterwards that we could talk about each other's experiences. So, yeah, it felt a little more comfy having someone there that I knew.

The second was that some participants, including Participant 1 and Participant 5, thought by joining a chapter, it would be a great way to make a group of friends who were similar to them and had the same interests. The participants who decided to go through recruitment individually mentioned having friends at other schools who had gone through the process. Others knew that recruitment may be challenging on their own, however knew that sororities provided an opportunity for making a group of friends. The participants thought that once they were a part of a chapter it would be worth it for the sisterhood and friendships. Participant 1, a white freshman, discussed that she had friends at other universities that had joined a sorority and heard the positive benefits. Participant 1 stated:

> I wanted to find my group of girlfriends with all similar interests and stuff. And I wanted to be able to be kept on track. Sororities do a really good job, actually, of keeping you academically on track. I wake up every morning and calculate my grades to make sure that I'm good, because you can be put on academic probation. So, I'm grateful that I have that kind of boost of morale to keep doing well in school. And I have this whole group now of girls who are all my best friends. It's so cool. I love it.

Participant 1 believed that sorority involvement would offer the opportunities that her friends at other universities had been given through joining. She believed in the idea of sisterhood, making new friends and academic assistance.

Whether participants joined because of a peer going through recruitment together, or knew others at other schools who had joined, the sense of creating friendships and sisterhood appealed to all of the participants. The women wanted to find a group who shared the same interest, and bonded well together.

Academic Performance

While academic performance was a main driving factor for Participant 1, it was thoroughly discussed by all of the participants. The women discussed that having the extra accountability, such as having friends that cared about their performance in school, helped them keep on track. The participants discussed that there were several sisters who would offer to tutor or study with them. Generally, chapters have a GPA requirement in order to stay in good standing, and a number of the participants discussed wanting to stay above the minimum and felt responsible to do so. One participant during the interviews discussed that she liked the idea of joining the chapter for the grades because of how determined the women in a sorority remain. Participant 3, a sophomore majoring in special education, stated:

> We are all very determined, I think. We all have goals, and we are all here for a
>
> reason—to get a job and further our career and our lives and better our lives. Being
>
> in a sorority, it can be stressful. So, you have to be determined to get the things done
>
> that need to be done. For your philanthropy, your volunteer hours, your grades.

Participant 1 discussed that the perks of being a member, including the sisterhoods and philanthropy events, are what encouraged her to stay in good standing academically so she could enjoy the perks of membership without stress.

The importance placed on strong academic support and accountability by the participants is important to note in a university setting. Whether academic success was due to social pressure

from fellow members or increased perks for sisters with academic status, it is apparent that it was a priority as a part of the sorority experience. Setting a precedent of personal encouragement to do well academically inevitably causes the chapter to do well as a whole. The women who join the chapters and have this personal encouragement to do well academically can only drive the chapter to continue to do so.

Philanthropies

The last major theme that a majority of the women all discussed during the interviews was philanthropy. It should be noted that this particular theme did not impact all of the women in the same way during recruitment. For some during the recruitment process, some women felt very connected to specific chapter's philanthropies and their purpose. Participant 3 stated when asked about what she looked for in a chapter, "I was definitely looking for a chapter that had a good sisterhood and was passionate about their philanthropy, not just it being there to make them look good." This was extremely important because to some women, when learning about the chapter's philanthropy really built a connection to the participants, and the chapters themselves. For some, the philanthropies were important during recruitment, however the connection to those causes or non-profits did not come until after joining.

Participant 5, freshmen majoring in early childhood education, was interested in the chapter's philanthropy that she joined, however when the researcher asked if the chapter would have had a different philanthropy or non-profit, she stated:

I feel like it would depend on what they did for it, I guess. I love all of the girls

there and I don't think I'd change. I feel like if they did have another philanthropy,

I don't know. I feel like I'd still go to them because they were all so passionate

about this one, so they would still be as passionate about the other one, which would

make me want to go back. I think I would.

Participant 1, a freshman majoring in pre-nursing, who made an interesting statement when

the researcher asked what the participant was searching for during recruitment. Participant 1 stated:

I was looking for… one of my main focuses is what their philanthropy was. Because after

I realized there were philanthropies, I was basing most of my decisions, not based on what

girls were in it, but what the cause was. Because at the end of the day, you can make friends

anywhere. It's—what is the greater cause you are supporting?

Philanthropy overall was an important part of recruitment, and clearly made a difference

in the thought process for some who decided to join. Only one of the participants stated that the

decision to join a specific chapter was based on the chapter's philanthropy. However, the

philanthropies did make some impact on feelings towards a chapter or building a connection

between the active members and the participants. These connections would only then lead to better

discussions, and bonding.

Professionalism

While professionalism was not discussed by the majority of the participants, it did bring

up a concept that was interesting to discuss. Participants 3 & 5 discussed that their chapter

experiences so far had helped with their resume, and leadership skills. Specifically, participant 3

stated "… having that on your resume – you're a part of an organization, all of the volunteering,

and the home away from home. Just having that family even though your mom, dad, siblings are

far away." The researcher asked a follow up question in regard to thinking long term considering

participant 5 was 18 and a freshman, and participant 5 did go back to mentioning that the sorority

would bring up the philanthropy and community service experience. Breaking it down more, she

mentioned that the event planning and community involvement it requires would interest a future employer.

This sense of professionalism extended not only in involvement, and resume building, but did impact some participants through recruitment. Participant 6, a sophomore transfer student, stated:

> I was searching professionalism and classiness. From my chapter, I felt that since day one. They were the most outstanding to me. All of the other chapters, to me personally, I couldn't see myself there. You really think a lot during recruitment, so when I would talk to someone I would notice if they were laidback, all casual or if they have their legs crossed, sitting up straight talking to me, and using formal language.

Though this was not necessarily shared between all participants, each participant did discuss areas of comfort or discomfort during the sessions that impacted their preferences. The idea of professionalism varied from each of the participants but still is noteworthy for women during recruitment.

Personal Growth

The last theme identified was personal growth or personal development. This specific theme is valuable due to the importance that it meant for the participants who identified with personal growth, and believed personal growth truly made the sorority experience that much better. Participant 2 stated that, "I feel like my [chapter] focuses on personal growth. I feel like I've grown as a person, and I'm more outgoing." When the researcher asked to explain the personal growth experienced, several participants pointed to the recruitment activities, new member education and the experiences that lead to be an officer, executive committee member or attending conferences.

One of the perks for new members joining chapters is that the chapters have a new member process that involves a specific education program. New member education is incredibly important as it helps educate the new members on the chapter's history, campus resources, and how to take full advantage of opportunities within the chapter. This can include conferences, leadership opportunities within the chapter, serving as an officer or involvement in other campus organizations. Based off the participant interviews, a lot of chapters require involvement outside the chapter which would allow for more growth.

The second area that some participants discussed was that some of the women, whether it was themselves or others that joined at the same time, became more confident. This could be as small as starting conversations with strangers to taking leadership roles, when the drive to do so may not have existed before joining. The participants begin to build personal confidence because of the extra support, and encouragement that their chapters gave them. It is important to note the change in confidence regardless of how small or large.

Theme Summary

The overall themes discussed throughout the interviews are a small part of the larger conversation on why the participants decided to participate in recruitment and then go on to join their chapter. The participants were all interested in a sense of belonging to a group of women at the university and fulfilling that sense of belonging to a group of women with high character quality. The women at one point or another noted the importance of philanthropy, whether it was during recruitment or post joining their chapter. The participants were interested in helping the community and supporting a cause that they felt connected to, whether before or after joining the chapter. Academic success was important to the women, and the women felt that the chapters were going to help keep them on track or even perform better. The difference between women may have been

wanting to stay in good standing in order to participate in events or fulfil the personal need to perform well academically but the takeaway is that women wanted to do well academically. The last two themes were not mentioned by all of the participants, however that does not discredit the importance of the two. The career and resume building, and personal growth factors are both themes that carry a lot of weight and may prove important to more and more college women as women begin to compare the benefits of joining a sorority to a non-social fraternity or sorority registered student organization.

Research Questions

The number of women enrolling into higher education institutions is important for not only institutions, but for the sororities at those institutions. The researcher was seeking to understand why women are deciding to join sororities and what experiences women look for in the sororities. The questions were addressed during the interviews the researcher conducted.

1. At what point in time does a woman make the decision to go through the Panhellenic recruitment process and why does a woman decide to go through recruitment?

2. What qualities or values does a woman look for in the chapter while going through the Panhellenic recruitment process?

3. What experience does a woman look for in a sorority?

4. How does a woman pick her top preference chapter while going through the Panhellenic recruitment process?

5. What experience should chapters be providing to new members?

Question 1 addresses the timeline for participants deciding to go through Panhellenic recruitment. The researcher found that this ranged widely. The participants signed up months before recruitment, or only a few days before the deadline. During the interviews, the researcher

found that the women signing up days before the deadline were more likely to have been encouraged by friends also participating in recruitment, or already in a chapter. Participant 3 stated that she had a negative view her freshmen year, however decided that she wanted to join and signed up during the early months of registration.

Question 2 addresses the qualities or values that the participants looks for in a chapter during recruitment. The researcher found that the majority of woman looked for sisterhood, and that idea of being comfortable with chapter's members was one of the most important values. Participant 2 decided to go through recruitment because she was wanting to be more involved and make new friends as she transitioned into college.

Question 3 addresses the experience that the participants wanted from a sorority during their collegiate experience. This was much more challenging to the researcher to gather from the participants, however having a sorority that offered sisterhood, academic support and personal growth were all experiences the participants noted wanting from a sorority to offer. Participant 1 believed that by joining a sorority, she would not only enjoy the benefits of sisterhood and personal growth but be held accountable for her grades.

Question 4 is based on asking participants how they ranked their top preference chapters during Panhellenic recruitment. The researcher found that the participants based off this decision off feeling more than anything. Participant 6 felt that a chapter should have a level of professionalism in order to join and based her decision off her interactions and how the members conducted themselves.

Question 5 addresses the question on what experience should a chapter be providing to new members. The researcher through interviews found that sororities should be offering experiences that help members develop themselves professionally, and personally. All of the

participants were wanting experiences that offered sisterhood and bonding. Development programming and sisterhood are the two key areas that chapters should be offering to all of its new members, and what potential new members are looking for in sororities.

Hypothesis:

The researcher believed that the participants who decided to go through recruitment most likely knew another person going through recruitment, and many of the participants confirmed this through the interviews. The participants were interested in looking for chapters that demonstrated values of community service, leadership and sisterhood, and that women would want chapters to make them feel comfortable during the recruitment process. Finally, the women going through recruitment would be interested in joining the chapter that best relates to themselves the most regarding values, philanthropy and overall experience while helping to transition into college and a social network. To better help understand this over all-purpose, the researcher hypothesized five different hypotheses:

1. A majority of participating women will decide to go through the Panhellenic recruitment process once at school and know a friend or roommate who is going through recruitment.

2. Women will look for chapters who demonstrate the values of community service, leadership, and sisterhood.

3. Women will look for chapters who demonstrate a family-like environment, or sisterhood based on the rapport built during initial meetings

4. Through the recruitment process, participants will be listening to the information that is explained to them regarding the values, philanthropy, and overall experience the

chapter will provide, and women will follow what gives the best feeling post

recruitment.

5. The majority of women in the study will want chapters to provide an experience that

helps provide a transition into college and a social network.

Hypothesis 1, women participating due to friends or peers going through recruitment, was found accurate. Over half of the participants credited a close friend or roommate for supporting and encouraging going through recruitment together which resulted in the participant joining a chapter. The participants also noted that they did not always join the chapter that their friend or roommate joined, and that was acceptable to the participants. The best recruiter for recruitment is other women. None of the participants mentioned any form of social media, or advertising but noted that having others to go through the experience made it that much better.

Hypothesis 2 did not result in being accurate to in the study. Though many of the women mentioned that philanthropy was important to them personally and thought it should be a part of the process during recruitment, philanthropy did not directly result in the women joining a chapter over one or another. The researcher believes that some women did connect to some philanthropies, which could have made the participants feel closer to the chapter, however this was not the sole reason for joining the chapter. Participants mentioned that sisterhood and philanthropy were fun, and valuable but would be okay if their chapters would have had different philanthropies.

Hypothesis 3 centered around the idea of women looking for chapters that would provide the best rapport building during recruitment. The researcher found that this specific hypothesis proved to be one of the easiest to identify when interviewing participants. The researcher identified that the participants described their own chapter during recruitment as the "right fit"

and felt comfortable around the members. This hypothesis proved to be correct as the participants were naturally attracted to joining their chapters because they did feel at home and similar. This sense of comfort comes from the ability to build rapport with the women participating in recruitment. Participants who did not identify with the chapter or have rapport with the chapters were the first to eliminate those chapters during preferencing.

Hypothesis 4 focused on the recruitment process, where the participants would be listening to information regarding the chapter's values, philanthropy, and overall experience the chapter can provide. During the interviews, the participants discussed some of the values that they were looking for, which alternated from sisterhood, professionalism, to just over all involvement. Only one participant mentioned a value of her specific chapter, personal growth, which was a shared theme between majority of the participants. Philanthropy as discussed before was a very important part of the recruitment process. All the participants valued the time learning about each chapter's philanthropy; however, this was not something that was taken into consideration when choosing between two chapters. Though, it did help build a relationship between the participants and the chapter while going through recruitment, this was not the single cause for any of the women to pick a specific chapter. Lastly, the overall experience that a chapter can provide was surprisingly not mentioned a single time during the participants interviews. The participants went into great detail about why they decided to go through the process, and select their chapters, however there was not a mention about what specific chapters offered to potential new members. The hypothesis was mostly proved wrong due to the women picking the chapters based off relationships with the members more than the experience the chapter may be able to provide, including their philanthropies and chapter specific values.

Finally, hypothesis five centered around the idea that the chapter would help transition its new members into social networks and into college. There are two elements to this hypothesis, the first centers around the social network. This was heavily discussed by all participants by the women wanting to grow their friendship circle or wanting to get involved on campus. Some participants voiced that by joining a chapter, they believed that the chapter would lead to meeting more friends with other fraternity and sorority life members, or in other groups. Chapters typically have a requirement, or at least encourage new members, to become part of the campus and become involved in other registered student organizations. Due to this, new members who may not have a full social network yet can take this as an opportunity to really put themselves out there and make more new friends. There is also something to be said that the participants were excited to learn about leadership roles not just within their chapter, but Panhellenic and other registered student organizations. The second part of hypothesis 5 is the transition into college. There were a few comments made during participant interviews about learning campus resources, however there was not enough to justify supporting this claim. Overall, hypothesis five was not completely proven.

The participants over all gave a wide presentation of what women are looking for when deciding to register for recruitment, and second the decision process during recruitment. The researcher learned that having a friend, roommate or fellow peer participate in recruitment is a significant factor in deciding to participate. This also led to discussions that the participants overwhelmingly wanted to join a chapter because of the friendship and sisterhood that sororities bring. The researcher was able to provide substance that philanthropies and community service provide aid to chapters building relationships with potential new members, however the chapter's philanthropy is not a reason for the potential new member to pick one over another. The

participants shared that they were looking for similar values, and ways to give back through community service or philanthropy, however experiences that chapters offered to give members were never cited as a reason for joining a chapter. Lastly, the participants wanted to join the chapter because it would provide some transition into social networks, however chapters were not necessarily helping with the transition into college as much as thought. Overall, women were heavily impacted by peers to go through recruitment, want to grow personally and their social network, and be a part of something that is larger than themselves.

Chapter V

Conclusion & Discussion

The research study exploring why women join Panhellenic sororities was conducted to understand why today's college women are making the decision to join sororities. This study was conducted to help campus professionals, student affairs professionals, inter-national headquarters, and sorority chapter leaders learn more about what the women who participate in today's recruitment value most. This is incredibly important in order to best ensure that chapters are true to their values, while also ensuring that programming and recruitment are in line with what women need on college campuses, and in today's society. By researching participants who decided to join a Panhellenic sorority in the fall of 2019, the community can better itself in helping find creative ways to adjust to today's college women by ensuring that their sorority and collegiate experience is that much better.

How Does This Impact Us?

This study is incredibly important not to just the sororities, and the hundreds of thousands of members currently in a chapter, but to the future that sororities have on our college campuses across North America. Women are increasingly enrolling into higher education, and sororities offer an amazing array of opportunities. Women joining chapters are able to transition into a new social group easier, become involved in more campus organizations, and become stronger leaders. Women who join chapters are more likely to graduate within four years and perform better academically (Ahren et al., 2014). Higher education institutions should be concerned about the well-being of their fraternity and sorority life on the campus because of these amazing values that the chapters bring.

Fraternities and sororities do bring a new set of challenges, however the advantages and benefits to a school for having fraternity and sorority life cannot be ignored. Based off of Astin's Theory of Involvement, fraternity and sorority life offer benefits for its members that other student organizations cannot offer. Based off the researcher's personal experiences combined with the results of this study, sororities provide women a safe place to foster sisterhood, encourage leadership development and involvement within the chapter, and on campus along with the professionalism gained through events. Fraternities and sororities typically have the most alumni members engaged due to the deep connection to the campus and chapter the members have (The University of New Mexico, n.d.). This tends to result in alumni willing to volunteer for alumni events and donate to the host institution.

The researcher believes ultimately that the study being conducted will help our communities become better at accepting societal changes regarding recruitment practices. Changes to recruitment practices should be a priority, and the community should be receptive of changes in priorities and values to the potential new members as priorities and values change with every generation. Recruitment is extremely important to all sororities, as it is the lifeline that keeps the organizations continuing for many years to come. The research in this study is aimed to help chapters awaken to what potential new members are interested in learning about the chapters, and the potential benefits that chapters can offer new members.

Schools that afford their students to have the opportunity to join a fraternity or sorority allow for unapparelled involvement with the campus, professional development, event planning,

Astin's Theory of Student Development

The researcher decided to approach the study with Astin's Theory of Student Development (1999) because of the connections built between the students who are involved on

campus, and the organizations on our institution's campuses. Sororities from the research show an important role in women's development during college, and offers the opportunities to grow social network, take leadership roles and grow out of their comfort zone.

Astin's theory had two postulates that related to fraternity and sorority life. The first postulate is that the involvement from students will be continuous and the student will be involved in multiple ways. This is important not only for the freshmen, but for all students, because the more the student connects to other students, campus resources and enjoys their experiences, the more likely the student will stay for all four years. The student then is more likely to graduate within four years and perform well academically in their chapter to be able to continue being a member. The perks of having a sorority woman involved for potentially up to four straight years are very rewarding, as the sorority woman will have numerous ways to be involved in her campus, community, national organization, and building a second home.

The second postulate related to Astin's theory of involvement relates to the idea that the more that students put into their education and personal development will be proportional to the quality and quantity. As the participants have been experiencing their first semester being a member of their chapter, the participants have been putting their time and energy into being successful member of their chapter. The members of the chapters are learning about campus resources, opportunities for community service and philanthropy, and conferences. The women of these chapters will have many amazing opportunities to take advantage of due to their membership benefits and will only lead to a more successful quality education.

The researcher used Astin's Theory of Involvement for a number of reasons including ranging from the theories approach to involvement on campus to its wide understanding. However, the main reason for the researcher to use Astin's Theory is that he provides a simple

but clear theory that explains why student leaders may decide to join registered student organizations, and in this case, women joining sororities.

Limitations

1. Number of Women. There are a number of limitations to this study, most notably the number of women who participated in the interviews and the number of interviews the researcher could schedule. The institution has nine Panhellenic chapters, and the researcher was able to interview six individuals, each from different Panhellenic chapters. The researcher was able to interview approximately 11.2% of the women who participated in fall 2019 recruitment and joined a chapter. New member experiences varied from chapter to chapter, and the type of women the chapter may try to recruit could have impacted the study.

2. Panhellenic Chapters. The second limitation was only researching Panhellenic chapters. During the time of the study, there were three National Pan-Hellenic Council sororities on campus. Due to the member intake process of National Pan-Hellenic Council chapters, the study would have been drastically impacted. National Pan-Hellenic Council and Panhellenic organizations recruit in very different methods and it would not have been beneficial for the groups to be combined.

3. Timing. The third limitation was the timing of the interviews taking place. The researcher conducted all interviews from October – November, with sorority recruitment ending late September. Though this may not seem too much later, opinions and experiences with their sorority may have started to impact the participants perceptions of recruitment and their impressions from when they had first joined the chapter. This is important because the members may have already started learning more about recruitment strategies, and ways to help expand their chapter in upcoming semesters.

4. Illinois Institutions. The last limitation to the study was the university itself. The university may have had a severe impact on participants and recruitment itself due to the campus climate during the study. At the time of the study, many Illinois institutions of higher education had been harshly impacted by the Illinois budget crisis. During this time, enrollment was heavily impacted across the board at wide range of Illinois higher education institutions. The campus was celebrating enrollment increases during the time of this study; however, the enrollment numbers are not predicted to return to traditional figures for at least a few more years. This campus's fraternity and sorority life chapters are adjusting to declining membership as a result of the drop-in campus enrollment at the institution.

Recommendations for Future Research

The researcher believes that the information learned through the study is important for both campus professionals and chapters officers. The host institution's chapters are continuing to see a decline in membership, and the more information that can assist chapter officers, alumni, and campus professionals, the better the chapters will be equipped in handling changes to recruitment. The researcher acknowledges that there could be alterations to the study that could produce more comprehensive results.

1. Replicating Study. A recommendation for future research would be replicating the study at other institutions. As mentioned before, the research could vastly change if duplicated at a larger public university. The number of chapters, university climate, enrollment, and student type could begin to change the results of the study. The study might also produce different results if conducted at a private institution. The type of institution, the culture, and the support for fraternity and sorority life could alter the results of the study.

2. Timeline. The second recommendation the researcher has for the study, if conducted on the same campus, would be identifying chapters that are willing to have new members interviewed for the study. The chapters would essentially select members to participate in the study directly after the recruitment period ends. If this approach was taken, it could result in the researcher being able to interview the participants directly after recruitment concluded because the new members chapter encouraged the member to participant. This could also potentially help the participants' perceptions being altered after recruitment due to the delay for the researcher to find new members willing to participate in the study.

3. Interview Timeline. The third recommendation from the researcher is to identify participants before the potential new members started recruitment. The researcher would interview the women before going through the process, and then directly after recruitment concluded. This method would potentially identify changes in reasoning for joining because the interviews would take place before and after. The researcher could also potentially interview potential new members who left the recruitment process or did not join a chapter the potential new member enjoyed.

Conclusion

The research study exploring why women join Panhellenic sororities was conducted to study why today's college women are making the decision to join sororities. The study found that women are joining sororities because of the sisterhood and friendships that can be formed by joining a chapter. The study found that women valued community service and philanthropy, and through this found connections to chapters. Some of the women grew connections to philanthropy during recruitment, and others would grow to appreciate it after joining. The study also found that women were very concerned about their academic success and believed that

being in a sorority helped with academics. Some women believed that the extra accountability was helpful, and others used the programming as an incentive to ensure their grades met the standard. This level of seriousness also ranged into professionalism, in regard to career and resume building. Some women believed that the sorority experience helped their undergraduate resume to better help them find jobs post-graduation. Lastly, some of the women in the study were found to have appreciated the personal growth that sororities offer. Whether it was becoming a better leader, or growing their strengths, personal growth is a part of the sorority experience and makes them only better for joining. Understanding why women today are joining sororities will only benefit the community, in the long run, to ensure that chapters, higher education institutions, inter-national headquarters and collegiate members are giving the best experience for future members.

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Appendix A

Email to Participants

Hello Student's Name,

My name is Alex Martens, and I am a Graduate student in Eastern Illinois' Student Affairs

program.

I am completing my research over Panhellenic recruitment. You completed the Fraternity

Sorority Life Programs survey and answered that you would be willing to participate in the

study. I was hoping you still would be interested in discussing your experience with recruitment.

If you would be interested, please let me know and I can send a Doodle with dates and times.

Meetings will take place within the MLK Jr. Union.

Hope to hear from you!

Best,

Alex T Martens

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Introductory Questions:

1. Do I have permission to take an audio recording or video recording of this interview?

Demographic Questions

2. How would you like to be called in the study (pseudonym name)?

3. What year are you in college?

   a. Did you transfer?

4. What is your age?

5. What best describes your ethnicity?

6. What is your major?

7. Which chapter do you belong to?

8. Are you a legacy to any chapter?

   a. If so, which chapter?

Interview Questions

9. What made you consider going through the Panhellenic recruitment process?

10. When did you sign up for Panhellenic recruitment?

11. What was your vision of sorority life before deciding to go through recruitment?

12. Did sororities have a more favorable view, and if so, why?

13. Did sororities have a less favorable view, and if so, why?

14. What did you search for or look for during recruitment?

15. What three words would you describe your experience or feeling towards fraternity and sorority life?

16. What positive benefits do you see in being a member of a sorority?

17. What was your decision process for ranking your preference chapters?

18. Have those benefits impacted your life in any way from the day you joined to today?

19. What experience in your chapter is your most favorable thus far?

20. What experience in your chapter has been your least favorable?

21. Where do you see yourself in the future in regard to your sorority?

22. How has participation in Panhellenic recruitment impacted your experience at this institution?

Appendix C

Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

A Qualitative Study of Why Women Join Panhellenic Organizations

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Alex Martens and Dr. Heather Webb from the Department of Counseling and Student Development at Eastern Illinois University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you have been identified as a person who has participated in your campus's formal sorority recruitment during the 2019-2020 academic year.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the proposed study is to investigate the reasons for women joining Panhellenic Organizations.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

1. Answer several open-ended questions about your experience during your recruitment process during the 2019-2020 academic year.
2. Agree to the recording of the interview using a digital video recorder.
   Your answers will be collected in an individual, private meeting set up between the

yourself and Alex Martens. The interview will be conducted within the MLK Jr. Union on campus.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by the principle researcher who will have complete ownership of all information shared by the participants. Only pertinent findings of the research will be

shared with the thesis committee members. Questions will be asked within an individual meeting. Confidentiality will be asked of all members who participate as well as the researcher.

The researcher will be the only person who will have access to the video files of the interview. All interviews will be transcribed, and the original tapes will be destroyed after the approval of the master's thesis by the committee members.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAW

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring this research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits of services to which you are otherwise entitled.

You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORMTS

As a volunteer, you agree to any potential discomfort when discussing personal views within the interview. The researcher will provide an open and safe forum, to the best of his ability. By agreeing to participate in this study, you are aware of the potential for discomfort with sharing ideas and feelings about your personal experience with recruitment. Additionally, there will be no personal repercussion if you share information with the researcher about potential recruitment infractions or other punishable information.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR SOCIETY

As a participant in this study, you will not directly benefit from participating in this study. However, the results of this study will provide many benefits to the fraternal and sorority organizations world-wide. Since there is very little quantitative and qualitative research about the benefits and limitations of formal recruitment, and membership, this research will be valuable to Universities and Colleges who are looking to make an educated decision involving fraternal and sorority organizations. The intent of this study to help bring to light some focus area's for future researchers to investigate in relation to membership benefits. The potential to put benefits and membership perks within the campus and Greek life community could bring about a more concentrated effort to focus on the needs of women who make the decision to join a Panhellenic sorority.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

If you have any questions or concern about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Eastern Illinois University

600 Lincoln Ave.

Charleston, IL 61920

Phone: (217)-581-8576

Email: eiuirb@eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject within a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____ Printed Name of Participant

_____ Signature of Participant

_____/ 2019 Date Signed