A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PANHELLENIC SORORITY MEMBERSHIP ATTRITION

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ABSTRACT

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The goal of this study was to understand the authentic reasons for women joining and
discontinuing their Panhellenic sorority membership at Bowling Green State University. The
total number of women initiated into a Panhellenic sorority in the fall semester 2006 was 265. By
the end of the fall semester 2007, 88 initiated members had quit and 177 remained active
members. The meant the community had lost approximately one-third of its new members over a
one-year time frame. Through utilization of qualitative techniques to understand the motivation
to join, benefits of membership and reasons for leaving the sorority community, the needs of
potential members can be assessed and adjustments made to improve the sorority membership
experience.

Two methods of qualitative study were utilized in this study. The first was a focus group
consisting of 8 current, active sorority women, drawn from PHC sororities. The second method
utilized individual interviews held with 6 women who left the BGSU sorority community after
affiliating in fall 2006 and ending membership since becoming an initiated member. The
combination of qualitative methods was chosen to provide a more comfortable environment for
women who left to share details of their membership experience. Theoretic and networking
sampling methods were utilized to gain participants for the study.

The results showed that women who chose to continue their membership showed feelings
of attachment and engagement with their experience through connection to the organization,
relationships, and desire for self-knowledge gains from the membership experience. Women who
joined and chose to leave described overall feelings of conflict and disconnect with the sorority
experiences. These conflicts were revealed through organizational difficulties, interpersonal
relationships, membership expectations, time and requirements, and financial obligations. The experiences of former members revealed the need for a highly relational experience and to understand more fully the membership experience and expectations earlier during membership affiliation.

The information shared by study participants illuminated the need within the higher education community in general and fraternal community in particular to understand membership needs of women’s organizations and reflect those needs in practice. For example, the utilization of women’s, organizational, and general student development theories to educate practice and membership services of the future. The importance of assisting sorority organizations to ensure that the membership experience is consistent between perceived and actual membership through continual evaluation and membership development could provide valuable gains to members and improvement in the overall experience.
DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the women of Epsilon Kappa, fall 2003-spring 2006, who inspired me through their perseverance and commitment to the ideals of sorority membership. The indelible impact each of you made on me will be lifelong. These women were unafraid to challenge the sorority blueprint – I hope each of you continue to question and advance a movement of strong women committed to the highest ideals. Through each of you I learned to be a better student, friend, and sister. Walk truly, live graciously.

To Dr. Tisa Mason: Your continued mentorship and cheerleading for Greek life and interfraternalism is inspiring. Thank you for always listening to my ideas and supporting my aspirations. It is through meeting you that I have learned an indescribable amount about being a professional and utilizing research and assessment to better understand the needs of students. You showed me the true meaning of sorority.

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My gratitude also goes to the Center for the Study of the College Fraternity (CSCF) and National Panhellenic Conference (NPC). Your support of my research and working with me as an individual fairly new to the research process was greatly appreciated. As with BGSU, I hope your respective organizations find the results worthwhile for future practice and continued study.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In the United States, the term “sorority” conjures up many images, assumptions, and perspectives. However, for those presently or previously involved, sorority as an experience is attached to a spectrum of emotions and experiences. For many college women, the modern American sorority is not an area of involvement taken lightly or without considerable thought and time. Multiple works of non-fiction literature describe at length the process women go through in determining the chapter of their choice, the rigors of recruitment, and the sincere thought necessary to determine where one describes an elusive feeling of “home” (DeSantis, 2007; Robbins, 2004). However, for those women who choose to join, the act of selection is but one small part of the membership process.

Statement of the Problem

Current fraternal organization literature has described at length many issues that surround these communities including hazing, eating disorders, and alcohol use among many others. Although these issues warrant concern and certainly their relevance to fraternal populations is not disputed, there are many other important functions and operations of the college social fraternity and sorority. Although multiple studies have explored the link to academic performance, very few studies have fully explored other components of the organizational structure and the ability of today’s fraternal organizations not only to adequately meet their mission but also remain relevant to today’s undergraduate student. This study does not aim to resolve those issues, but rather bring to light specific concerns facing the social sorority community. What has been demonstrated is that membership in fraternal organizations has a
beneficial impact on student retention compared to those who do not become affiliated with a Greek organization (DeBard & Sacks, 2007).

Sororities specifically provide an opportunity for young women to engage in a community that in its ideal state provides support, leadership development, academic enhancement, and creates a tie to the university as alumnae (Winston & Saunders, 1987, p. 6). However, as sororities lose members who choose to leave the community, campus administrators need to understand why they are doing so. From there the adequate resources can be provided to sorority communities to make necessary changes to enhance membership experiences.

Knowing that a connection to the college environment impacts retention (Berger & Milem, 1999; Pascarella, et. al, 1996; Tinto, 1998), assisting sororities in providing the most positive experience possible may not only improve retention of members but also assist university administrators in helping students to feel more connected to campus. Furthermore, research from studies such as Harrison, Mitchell, and Peterson (1995) demonstrated that fraternity and sorority members not only felt a deeper connection to the university, but also were more likely to consistently give donations to their alma mater. If this proves to be true on the majority of college campuses, universities that provide resources to their fraternity and sorority communities that benefit their ability to attract and positively impact students’ lives may not only result in students’ likelihood to persist in their educational endeavors, but also provide resources to the university in the future and remain connected alumni.

In attempting to understand the problems facing today's sorority communities, the following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. What motivates women to join sororities?
2. What aspects of membership are perceived as most beneficial for those who maintain their membership?

3. For those who chose not to persist as members of a sorority, what factors were perceived to be most important in their decision to withdraw?

Because the intention in answering these research questions is to discern the authentic reason for joining a certain sorority, maintaining membership in this organization, or dropping out of the sorority, a qualitative approach will be used. This will allow for the emergence of themes based upon how the research participants construct their experiences and relate this to their motivation for joining, maintaining, or severing membership.

Limitations

This study was limited both intentionally and unintentionally. The study was clearly limited for gender as there are many differences between the male and female Greek-affiliation experiences (Hunt & Rentz, 1994; Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2006). Focusing exclusively on women’s social sororities allows for the information to illuminate the true experience of women by withholding other potential variables.

In addition, the study was limited by examining a specific subgroup of the fraternity and sorority population – those women who are members of Panhellenic sororities. This was done intentionally. There are a variety of fraternity and sorority governing councils used at institutions and a variety of Greek life experiences a student can have – such as joining a service fraternity or sorority, multicultural organization, or National Pan-Hellenic Council group. To examine all sororities, regardless of specific specializations or unique organizational characteristics, had the potential to create other compounding factors that would go beyond the purview of this study.
The experiences members have and their satisfaction between different fraternity and sorority organizations would certainly be interesting, however, the goal of this study is to understand a specific type of sorority membership experience as best possible.

Finally, there were specific limits placed on the membership affiliation period. This was to provide the most current insight on the sorority experience but still within a time frame where members have been exposed to the chapter experience and organizational culture. Members who are recent affiliates or those who have been affiliated for a long time period will potentially have limited familiarity or are highly saturated to the sorority culture, preventing thorough evaluation of the sorority experience.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW
Organizational Involvement

Fraternities and sororities offer a highly-saturated organizational environment, one where there are particular expectations for behavior, involvement, and engagement often within a homogeneous culture. Success in a given organizational climate is by no means simple – student organizations have a variety of needs that must be met to assimilate members to an organizational environment. These expectations can be implicit and explicit. Members of an organization often read the culture and then act as they believe they should, acting upon how expectations are communicated.

Two communication theorists pointed to the challenges faced by members in assimilating to a new organizational environment. Lester (1987), in a series of axioms created to understand the issues of uncertainty reduction within an organizational context, provided an understanding of the socialization of members to groups that is applicable to not only the general population but in particular to fraternal organizations. Understanding the nature of these social organizations, it is evident based on the axioms why a member may find themselves outcast if a given organization has not provided the framework for behavioral certainty and membership socialization.

Two of Lester’s axioms are particularly relevant to fraternal organizations where members are expected to collectively behave and work together. First: “Increases in participation in organizational initiation rituals will produce increases in both behavioral certainty and performance feedback available to an individual” (p. 108). These are the initial organizational rites of passage, both formal and informal, that allow members to understand expectations, how
to act, and how to align one’s individual identity with the organizational identity. This is akin to a sense of culture, which provides direction and guide to members’ actions, also creating a common connection. Members will become more certain of their behavior in the organization and how others will react to behaviors. Thus, if a particular sorority is in its nature highly focused on rules and written expectations but the initial membership period does not communicate these expectations, there could be a misalignment of behavioral expectations and future interaction with the organization by a given member.

The next axiom is the result of the adequate or inadequate performance of an organization on the previous axiom. “Increases in organizational identity and goal clarity will increase behavioral certainty; decreases in the clarity of organizational identity and goal will cause decreases in behavioral certainty” (p. 109). Therefore, if an organization clearly defines the direction and expectations of members, the ability of members to perform the expected behaviors increases and vice versa. When a fraternal organization engages members in formal and informal organizational culture initiation and clearly communicates the identity and goals of the organization through their activities, members are enabled to meet the ideals and intended behaviors expected by the group.

When women elect to join a social fraternal organization, there is a level of expectation and predicted outcomes that accommodate this choice. As with any choice to participate in a social setting, from attending a concert to having a college roommate, there are expectations for behavior and anticipated roles that will be played. Hewitt (1976) described this anticipation as “role-taking” where individuals initially predict other’s behavior (p. 56). This is based largely on cognition as compared to actual experience (p. 77). This process is common in a setting such as a
sorority, where one likely has not experienced this organizational setting, but has constructed a picture of what anticipated interactions will look like.

Hewitt’s theorized that a person identified both as an individual and as a member of a social network. People carry with them experiences and identities from previous situations to construct their identities in the present. This speaks to how one portrays the self in a collective group and social setting. Hewitt’s described people as “a product of the moment and of a biography” (p. 76).

A person will become a role-taker when placed in a new situation and facing the anticipatory challenges of how to act and interact, taking cues from those around them and based upon their constructed identity. Hewitt explained this as each person involved “having a map of their relationship consisting of predictions of the other’s conduct” (p. 77). A person as a role-taker possesses expectations that have otherwise not been contradicted by other behaviors. Therefore the cues sent from active members to new members communicate expected behaviors and validates role-taking behavior.

This act of taking the surrounding individual’s behaviors into account when forming one’s own is not uncommon. This has particular relevance to the fraternity and sorority community. Examining role-taking with the communication axioms, a given person with the organizational context is attempting to understand not only the organizational culture but also model behavior as demonstrated by others to determine expected behaviors. This person will more likely than not, according to Hewitt’s assertions, mimic these behaviors. From this, a member will develop a sense of the structured role (e.g., formal and informal names and titles),
group attitudes, and division of labor (e.g., one is dubbed as a leader, another as lazy) as described by Hewitt.

For example, the issues of socialization can be seen within the average fraternal organization. Members quickly become accustomed to the terms by which they are referred to (e.g., pledge, new member, associate, brother, etc.). In addition, what is appropriate and inappropriate is quickly clarified through formal and informal organizational processes that are both publicly and privately displayed. For example, is outrageous behavior celebrated in formal meetings? Does the organization espouse alcohol-free activities but then host social events at local bars? Is a member’s excellent academic performance met by a congratulatory advertisement in the student newspaper? The impact of questions such as those posited, where organizational process and behavior meet, impact the ability of members to assimilate within the fraternal environment. Organizational culture and communicative behavior create the framework for membership performance and long-term behavior.

General Fraternal Involvement

Unfortunately, there is limited research on current membership trends in fraternity and sorority organizations. Not until recent years has retention and improved monitoring of membership statistics become a wide-spread topic in the Greek life professional arena. However, there is literature that can provide insight to the current experience many students in American higher education have in fraternities and sororities.

Fraternity and sorority research has been a topic of studies over the past 30 years. Studies have often focused on alcohol use, hazing, and effect of membership academic performance
(Pascarella et al., 1996). However, there remain other topics affecting these communities with limited research exploration.

Fraternity and sorority communities, at their best, provide a connection and bond to the institution unlike any other. These organizations have the ability to engage one another and help members reach advanced levels of intellectual empowerment and accountability in a way sparingly recreated through other campus involvement outlets (Pike, 2003). However, there remains a lack of research to further understand this impact. Such topic areas as the organization dynamics, students attracted to fraternal organizations, and satisfaction trends with the fraternal experience could all provide valuable information to further understand existing research.

As mentioned earlier, few studies exist on fraternal communities as they relate to development, satisfaction, or within-fraternal organization trends. Pascarella et al., (2006) examined the influence fraternity and sorority membership had on the cognitive development in its members. Women and men were examined separately through a three-year longitudinal pretest-post test quasi-experimental study. The study controlled for and assessed several potential confounding factors including precollege academic motivation, socioeconomic status, number of courses taken and in which disciplines, as well as 12 additional factors.

Pritchard and Wilson (2003) examined emotional and social factors as influences on student success, specifically anticipated attrition. Emotional health, including stress levels, perfectionist tendencies, self-esteem, coping ability, and optimism, was strongly related to a student’s decision to drop out or persist. However, social health, including involvement in a romantic relationship, introversion/extroversion, and involvement with student organizations had limited influence on student success or intent to drop out. Fraternities and sororities were not
found to negatively influence academic success; however there was not a statistically significant positive indicator. The researchers believed this was potentially due to emphasis in the organizations on academic achievement and the university environment where the study was performed, a small, private liberal arts college.

Hayek, Carini, O'Day, and Kuh (2002) noted that the difficulty with fraternity and sorority research is that the successes are often more difficult to find than the failures. Utilizing the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Hayek et al., found first-year and senior members of fraternities and sororities often fare better than non-affiliated students in the areas of student engagement. Including effort put forth in the classroom, perceptions of personal growth, and connection to the campus environment, fraternity and sorority students at a statistically significant level felt more engaged than non-affiliated students. Hayek et al., noted that the influence of this could potentially be granted to the organizations adopting additional educational programs and providing a learning-centered approach to fraternity and sorority life.

In 2000, Pike investigated the differences between Greek and non-Greek students in terms of cognitive development. Although there were no statistically significant differences in the relationship of Greek life to cognitive development compared to non-Greeks, there were significant effects of affiliation on the college experience. Pike found that membership in a fraternity or sorority was directly related to students' social involvement and ability to integrate college experiences. However, these results were limited to one research university, and results were more true to the sorority experience due to a larger percentage of female participation.
The Sorority Experience

Sororities provide an opportunity for young women to engage in a community that in its ideal state provides support, leadership development, and academic enhancement, and creates a tie to the university as alumnae (Winston & Saunders, 1987). However, continued understanding of the unique experience of women within these organizations could assist institutions and student affairs professionals in continually improving their work with this population.

Specifically among sorority members, Pascarella et al., (2006) found statistically significant relationships between membership and understanding science and gains in writing and thinking skills during the second year of college. However, several negative effects on cognitive development among fraternity and sorority students during the first year were found. However, negative effects significantly diminished during the second and third years. The researchers suggested this was due to the time commitment during the first-year affiliation process compounded by the academic adjustments to succeed in college. Pascarella et al. suggested that student organization involvement may have a negative effect during the first-year specifically among fraternity and sorority members. It was observed in the study that students who joined a fraternity or sorority after the first year had minimal negative effect on cognitive development.

Sorority membership has also been found to influence women's psychosocial development. Hunt and Rentz (1994) investigated the influence among sophomore, junior and senior fraternity and sorority members. In general, Greek affiliation was significantly related to establishing and clarifying purpose; establishing relationships based on trust, honesty, reciprocal caring; and developing mature interpersonal relationships. Junior sorority women membership
was significantly related to establishing and clarifying purpose, developing mature interpersonal relationships, and academic autonomy, while senior women membership was related to establishing and clarifying purpose.

Hunt and Rentz's (1994) work also noted a significant difference between in the timing of significant psychosocial development of men and women. This result suggested that although men and women will have similar experiences while in college and members of fraternal organizations, the point at which they will have these experiences will likely differ.

Atlas and Morier (1994) examined the perceptions of sororities among those who were accepted during the formal recruitment process as compared to those who were rejected. Notably, women who were accepted were on average from wealthier families, had higher frequency of alcohol consumption, and had higher ratings for physical appearance. More notable differences existed among women who chose to not affiliate with a sorority at all as compared to those who entered the recruitment process. This suggested the potential that those women who chose to persist in membership may not vary greatly in personality type or initial attraction to the sorority as compared to those who affiliated but did not persist. However, this study is limited to one college system's formal recruitment process.

Significant to satisfaction, whether in a job or organization, is the ability for our values to fit with those we affiliate. Burnett, Vaughan, and Moody (1997) researched the effects of value congruence among women affiliating with a sorority. They examined the choices made by sorority women during the formal recruitment process and the impact of information sources made available throughout the process. Specifically, the availability of information on chapters influenced the potential new members’ feelings of greater value congruence to a given individual
sorority. Burnett et al. found that personal value congruence did not change as women went through the sorority affiliation process, but rather resulted in a tendency for women to choose organizations that had values that met their own. As values congruence with a given organization increased, the utilization of resources such as printed materials and recruitment guides, also increased to assist in validating the newly discovered feelings of value congruence. This study was specific to a large, southeastern university with nine participating sorority chapters. In further examining the affiliation process and those sorority members who chose to persist, perceived values-congruence versus actual values congruence was of interest in terms of met expectations and its influence on satisfaction with the chapter.

Women’s Development

To understand the women’s social organization experience it is imperative to understand the process of women’s development in particular within the context of relationships. Gilligan’s qualitative studies of women in higher education and late adolescence highlighted their development experiences (1981, 1982, 1998). Gilligan (1982) described the legacy of psychological theories developed from a male framework to interpret the female experience, whereas, developmentally and psychologically, women and men have varying experiences and perspectives. Overall, she found the way men and women view relationships to vary greatly, from how conflict is addressed to the purpose of relationships.

Gilligan (1982) pointed to the sexual suppression and passivity employed by Freud and accepted in society as but one explanation of women’s unique struggle with moral conflict. Gilligan wrote:
The strategies of withholding and denial that women have employed in the politics of sexual relations appear similar to their evasion or withholding of judgment in the moral realm. The hesitance of college students to assert a belief even in the value of human life, the reluctance to claim one’s sexuality, bespeaks a self uncertain of its strength, unwilling to deal with choice, and avoiding confrontation. Thus women have traditionally deferred to the judgment of men, although often while imitating a sensibility of their own which is at variance with that judgment. (p. 68-69)

Gilligan’s (1982) perspectives beg the question of whether all-women’s organizations are prepared to advance women’s development through creating the necessary organizational structure to address conflict and explore issues of morality. Women’s common conflict avoidance as related to issues of “care and responsibility” (1981, p. 73) is an important component of women’s development. Conflict is an inevitable part of organizational development. However, how these conflicts have been navigated by all-women’s college organizations has not been explored but is a worthwhile issue when attempting to understand the needs of women’s fraternal organizations.

In addition, Gilligan (1981) raised the issue of how a woman may view an issue within particular context and her ability to shift from “issues of identity to those of intimacy” (p. 155). An important aspect of a sorority is the unique contact and social nature of members’ interactions. It is within Gilligan’s view that many women focus on a relationship between self and others instead of exclusively right and wrong. Furthermore, change that occurred in the face of an irreversible decision, where a student felt forced to choose between relationship needs typified the moral decision making process of college students. This included reactions to
confrontations and important decisions within the context of a social, highly relational, organization experience, common within many student organization environments, including fraternities and sororities.

Student Involvement and Retention Trends

Student involvement contributes to a student’s likelihood of persistence in higher education as explained by Tinto (1998). Tinto validated this, reflecting on years of research indicating the importance of student social integration and the impact of academic connectedness. His suggestion is that higher education administrators look at the impact of student involvement through the lens of how involvement experiences relate to the academic experience. In other words, the most impactful involvement experiences are ones correlated and purposefully connected to the academic mission, impacting overall higher education persistence.

In Berger and Milem's (1999) work, the influence of student organization involvement impacted student persistence particularly among first-year, female peer-groups. Moreover, students with a higher high school GPA were more likely to become involved their first semester. This involvement then led to other indicators in the study, such as students who became involved their first semester were more likely to continue involvement during spring semester. This indirectly influenced social and academic integration, continued commitment to the institution, and overall persistence to degree completion.

The influence of peer groups during the first semester is indicative of continued positive perceptions of the institution and social support. However, the Berger and Milem (1999) study is limited by its private, research institution sample. They suggested continued research on the relationship of student behavior and perceptions as they relate to social integration and
involvement. How sorority women adapt to social integration and peer groups may be indicative in this study in levels of satisfaction and the choice to continue or discontinue membership.

Student involvement is a key element in student satisfaction and also contributes to student persistence. Pennington, Zvonkovic, and Wilson (1989) studied various factors associated with college satisfaction. After surveying 180 undergraduate students three times during an academic semester utilizing the College Student Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSSQ), they found that overall satisfaction did not vary over an academic semester. However, the between-group effects among students who were involved and those who were not did vary. Overall, the researchers discovered that students with high grades, and who worked part-time jobs, lived in Greek houses, or were members of Greek-letter organizations were the most satisfied among the participants studied.

There are several compounding factors influencing member satisfaction with the sorority experience today. Whether attributed to Pike's suggestion of an experience that tied students more closely to the university or a potential negative influence on academic performance as attributed by Pascarella et al., (1996) there is a significant need to more fully understand whether today's sorority women are satisfied with their membership experience and receive the expected outcomes of membership. If fraternities and sororities can provide a tie to the university and promote academic achievement, involvement, retention, and significant leadership development opportunities, college administrators have a vested interest in helping these organizations achieve their intended outcomes and enhance member satisfaction.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The following research questions were asked as to further understand issues affecting sorority membership attrition:

1. What motivates women to join sororities?
2. What aspects of membership are perceived as most beneficial for those who maintain their membership?
3. For those who chose not to persist as members of a sorority, what factors were perceived to be most important in their decision to withdraw?

Research Design

Qualitative research methodology was selected for several reasons. The ability to better understand the affective and cognitive domains of human behavior is better understood through qualitative analysis. Unlike quantitative measures, in depth understanding and the opportunity to gather specific information about experiences is unique to the qualitative process. Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner and Steinmetz (1996) reflected that the qualitative research process, albeit highly personal, also is one of the few research methods that can account for the ever-shifting perceptions and experiences of research subjects. Qualitative study allows the ability to create meaning over-time versus a snapshot of one person’s feelings or experiences in a given moment.

Warren and Karner (2005) and Ely et al., (2006) both raised an important point on the basis of all qualitative research: the goal is to understand that participant’s meaning of the world as told through her story. Having questions that provide a basis for discovering experiences is important as the ability for the researcher to further understand that participant’s perspective and what this means for her “life-world [as] relevant to the interviewer’s topic” (Warren & Karner, p.
Therefore, my questions were meant to not only uncover stories and experiences but also to make connections. Carefully selected questions keep participants on task and give the researcher the most information possible to allow understanding of the participants’ experiences as they relate to the research questions.

The study focused on women affiliated with National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) groups on the Bowling Green State University (BGSU) campus. The BGSU Panhellenic Council (PHC) consists of women’s sororities most of which are affiliated with the NPC. The NPC is the governing council to 26 international and national social sororities; BGSU recognizes 14 of these sororities on its campus. The NPC granted its approval of this study and assisted with the contact of recognized chapters at BGSU when the study began.

Two methods of qualitative study were utilized in this study. The first was a focus group consisting of 8 current, active sorority women, drawn from PHC sororities. The second method utilized individual interviews held with 6 women who left the BGSU sorority community after being affiliated in fall 2006, becoming an initiated member and then ending membership. The interviews were conducted in February 2008.

A combination of individual interviews and a focus group format was chosen. Women who decided to end their sorority experience could potentially feel uncomfortable sharing details of this experience in front of other women. The individual interview with these participants provided the opportunity to have more in-depth and personal conversations about the student’s decision and experience. However, the focus group format remained a viable qualitative research method as the conversation among women still affiliated with their chapters allowed members to affirm or contrast current experiences. All focus groups and individual interviews were
introduced using a script prior to handing out the informed consent forms (Appendix A, Appendix B, and Appendix C) by the researcher.

Research Participants

All women selected for study participation were initiated members of women’s PHC chapters at BGSU. The membership time period selected for the study were women who affiliated with sorority membership during fall 2006. This provided at minimum one year of membership experience and higher likelihood of access to members who remained undergraduates. In addition, to continue to research sorority membership and retention, understanding the impact and overall experiences of the first year has the potential to provide valuable insights to inform future research and practice.

To identify participants for both focus groups and individual interviews, a list was obtained from the Office of Greek Affairs at BGSU containing the names of all women currently affiliated with Panhellenic sororities and all women who were initiated since fall 2006. The total number of women who were initiated into a Panhellenic sorority in fall 2006 was 265. By the end of fall 2007, 88 women initiated members had quit, 177 remained active members. The percentage of members retained during this time period was 66%. Retention ranged from 86% to 48% (See Appendix D). There was limited information available through the Office of Greek Affairs as to whether the 88 women who were no longer members chose to quit, were dismissed by the chapter, or left BGSU.

To identify both members who quit and remained in sororities at BGSU, a theoretic sampling and networking method was utilized (Warren & Karner, 2005). Graduate students serving as graduate house directors for Panhellenic sorority houses and undergraduate chapter
presidents were contacted to recommend potential participants who were initiated in a Panhellenic sorority at BGSU during fall 2006 and were still members or who quit but were still enrolled at BGSU (Appendix E). Member and non-member sorority women were initially contacted by publicly available phone numbers (Appendix F); however, many potential participants did not have their on-campus telephones set-up or only listed home phone numbers. This resulted in increased reliance on e-mail to contact participants.

However, a surprising result from the individual interviews was the number of women who following the interview volunteered names of other women who quit Panhellenic sorority membership to participate in the study. This was a great help in contacting additional participants and having the affirmation of a participant who had been through the interview to validate the process to a peer. More beneficial than these recommendations was the willingness of most participants to share their stories very openly and with great detail.

Of the 88 members who quit, 9 women were contacted to arrange interviews. Six agreed to an approximately 45 minute individual interview. These women were all Caucasian females, four sophomores, two juniors, and represented four different PHC sorority chapters. These interviews were conducted in meeting rooms in the campus student center or residence hall meeting rooms depending on the preferred location of the interview participant. The location was determined by discussing the participants’ schedule for the day, location near the time of interview, and verifying that the location was a place in which the participant would feel comfortable.

For active sorority members, a focus group date was pre-determined based on the schedule of fraternity and sorority events. Eligible participants were asked by phone and/or e-
mail to participate. Twelve women were recommended and 8 women participated in the focus group. Of the participants, six identified as Caucasian, one as African-American and one as Indian-American. Three women were juniors and five were sophomores at BGSU. These participants represented six different PHC sorority chapters. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. Using a recorder also allowed my focus as the researcher to be on the participants, ask questions, and follow up on responses.

Incentives

Incentives were utilized for the individual interview participants. Each of the 6 individual interview participants was given a $10.00 University Bookstore gift card. The incentives were utilized for members who left as increased motivation to participate, as unlike the current sorority members who were likely having a positive experience and would enjoy the opportunity to participate and share their stories, women who left chapters were likely to have more negative experiences to share and in return for their time in sharing those moments, an incentive, although minimal, seemed appropriate.

Anticipated Risk or Harm to Participants

Focus groups regarding the extra-curricular sorority experience have very limited potential harm to subjects. No subjects were members of protected classes, such as minors. The subject of focus group discussion is not psychologically stressful and the sample questions included in this proposal demonstrate the non-invasive nature of the research subject (Appendix G).
Data Collection

In an effort to immerse myself and better understand the sorority population at BGSU, also several measures taken to create effective qualitative research. First, each research participant provided an opportunity for me to learn about her as an individual and her story. In doing so, I had a responsibility to perceive those stories closely and contextually. I had to be in tune for when to dig deeper, being conscious of my words and language with participants, and most importantly to reflect on what was shared according to individuals and not according to my personal expectations (Ely et al., 1996).

When following an interview format in qualitative research, not all questions can be anticipated. Depending on the information shared by participants, questions that prompt further information or probe deeper into the meaning of the subject are significant and a benefit of qualitative inquiry.

The researcher must be cautious not to lead the interview subject. Therefore, it was important not to jump ahead of the research subject and attempt to complete her thoughts or guide answers through the phrasing of questions (Warren & Karner, 2005). For example, in this study, I asked what a woman’s experience was like going through the formal recruitment process. If she responded, “I had a fun time at the sorority events,” I did not jump to a question such as “Did that help you see how great the chapter women were?” That question clearly would have pushed the subject into one direction. A more appropriate follow-up question was, “Tell me more about what you thought was fun about the events.” This rephrases what the participant shared but also asks for more specific information on her meaning.
Data Analysis

Following the electronic recording of all individual interviews and the focus group, interviews were transcribed verbatim. After interview transcripts were completed, all individual interview and focus group participants were sent a copy of their transcript received via their BGSU e-mail address. Three of the 14 participants responded approving of what they read in the transcripts. The remaining eleven did not respond with any feedback.

All data collected were analyzed for common themes pertaining to the aforementioned research questions. The process I used to analyze the individual interview and focus group transcripts is called “open coding” (Warren & Karner, 2005, p. 191). Through reading and rereading the data multiple times, I looked for various themes to code throughout my information analysis. All transcripts were printed and over-arching themes were identified through reading and rereading data. As themes became evident they were highlighted. From there, all highlighted themes were cut out on paper from all transcripts and grouped on large pieces of paper to further identify sub-themes from the larger themes. The goal in utilizing open coding was to see which themes were most evident and therefore most compelling as it relates to sorority membership retention through the individual member experience.

In order to help me accomplish this analysis, three peer debriefers were drawn from my College Student Personnel (CSP) graduate program cohort. These three graduate program members read and offered their own thematic interpretation as to challenge or corroborate my initial analysis. One debriefer was a BGSU Office of Greek Affairs graduate assistant with experience as a sorority house director, advising the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) and InterFraternity Council (IFC) and was a second-year student in the CSP program, and as an
undergraduate was affiliated with a Panhellenic sorority. The second debriefer was also a second-year student, a fraternity house director, an undergraduate fraternity member, and worked in an assistantship with a first-year student transition course at BGSU. This person conveyed interest in exploring qualitative research methods. The third debriefer was a first-year CSP student with a BGSU assistantship, did not have fraternity and sorority experience as an undergraduate or graduate student, but had interest in conducting research and learning more about fraternity and sorority membership experiences. The varied experiences allowed me to see from multiple perspectives the interpretation of the individual interview and focus group transcripts.

In electing to perform a qualitative study, as a researcher I understood the commitment that must be made to create a trustworthy research environment. This is not only for the benefit of sound research protocol but also for the experience of the research subject. Guba (1981) and Patton (1990) both have perspectives on qualitative research pertaining to trustworthiness that have guided my methodology decisions and have prepared me for the qualitative research environment. Guba emphasized the importance of providing transparency of the researcher’s background to the subject as this provides both validation and an improved understanding of the researcher as a person to trust with information. In addition, utilizing peer evaluation through thematic corroboration and working with academic superiors to scrutinize methodology as through my thesis committee are important and a relevant part of creating a trustworthy research project. Finally, Patton suggested the importance of the researcher being honest throughout the process regarding personal bias, in particular while evaluating the data for themes, commonalities, and overall trends.
The choice to utilize a qualitative method allowed for a topic with limited published research to be explored more thoroughly for common themes that are relevant to the community and for future, generalizeable research. For the time being, it will be beneficial to the institution’s Greek community to discover how chapters at various stages of success and organizational development have managed their membership, the perception of both current and previous members, and for what reasons members are satisfied with their experiences.

To protect confidentiality, the final thesis report does not reveal the names of individual chapters, its leaders, or other identifying information. BGSU Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) approval was gained in order to ensure compliance with confidentiality and other research protocol. In addition, all focus group and interview participants had access to their respective transcripts to provide any revisions to their comments as to ensure that what was verbally discussed is indeed what was documented in written form.

Anticipated Implications

Due to limited research in this area of fraternity and sorority affiliation, literature was examined regarding the effects of student organization involvement and current trends in student satisfaction. As explained, the qualitative nature of the study was selected to provide a focused analysis of the BGSU sorority community as to better serve the students choosing to be a part of it and the staff who support its functions. After identifying common themes, research can be used to gain a better understanding of why college women today choose to affiliate with sororities and feel either satisfied or dissatisfied with those experiences. However, basic identification of common themes and issues through research are needed first to better understand sorority women today and their levels of satisfaction with their chapter experience.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The intention of this study was to illuminate the experiences and perceptions of undergraduate women sorority experiences to uncover the motivations of affiliation, benefits of membership, and factors affecting membership attrition. As described in the methodology, six women who left their sorority chapters were individually interviewed for approximately 45 minutes. To compare the experiences of both women who ended sorority membership and those who persisted, a one-hour focus group was held with eight active sorority women. Statements from the participants are provided as to draw upon the stories and individual experiences that have marked their membership and further educate understanding of sorority membership.

Overall, two primary themes were identified through the thematic analysis. Each primary theme also has subthemes. Overarching themes included conflict and disconnect among women who left their sorority chapters and attachment and engagement among members who remained active. Organization, interpersonal, role-taking, finances, and time and requirements were subthemes of conflict and disconnect. Attachment and engagement subthemes included agreement with sorority ideals, relationships, and self-knowledge.

Participants

The 14 total participants met all necessary criteria. They affiliated with a PHC sorority in the fall academic semester 2006, had been or continued to be an initiated member, and were currently enrolled students at BGSU. In total, these women represented eight different sororities on campus.

The experiences of the six individual interview participants, women who affiliated with a sorority but then chose to end their membership, are dubbed Beth, Jessica, Carly, Marie, Anna,
and Kelly. The overview of their membership experiences shared through interviews is described below. Following this, the focus group overview is provided. The participants, women who have continued to be members of sororities, are labeled by number if specific experiences or quotes are referred to.

_Beth_

A current Junior and on her fifth major, Beth elected to join a sorority in hopes of finding a strong network of fellow women and additional campus involvement opportunities. Beth conveyed her desire for this network as not only for the college years but “to get some sisters who I would be best friends with for the next 50 years of my life.” Throughout the duration of my interview with her, she repeatedly conveyed a hope that the organization provided by a sorority would provide her with a strong group of female friends as she otherwise had challenges in making friends of the same sex.

Overall, Beth described her new member education experience as very positive. “We all got to know each other really well and became really good friends.” Even as Beth began to have problems in the chapter, it was the women she affiliated with during new member education that commiserated with her and related to how she was feeling. However, shortly after affiliating and being initiated, her relationships with fellow chapter members became strained. She noticed that when she came to the sorority house after being initiated, other older, initiated members did not pay as much attention to her as they had previously. When Beth discussed this with other women who went through new member education with her, “A lot of them saw a huge change between, like new member just when we got the bid and when we were fully initiated.”
This was not as bothersome to Beth until she approached an older sister with an issue pertaining to a recent social activity. The older sister hosted an activity that had very little membership attendance and in response, in Beth’s perception she, “sent out this really nasty e-mail” that detailed a feeling of the older sister that the other women were “not being good sisters” by not attending. However, Beth felt that more information should have been gathered from the members to find out which socials should be hosted since the social in question had been hosted at a local bar where many of the members could not attend. Beth sent an e-mail that she felt was “very diplomatic” stating what she felt happened and how things could change for the future. This was met by further conflict with the older member who then, according to Beth, furthered the conflict by gossiping about the incident to other members. When Beth shared her frustration with this issue with fellow members, including the chapter president, it was met with passivity, validating the older member’s behavior.

For Beth this was but one incident that brought to light the issues in her chapter that she did not expect nor feel were worthy of her time and energy. Other issues emerged, including a recruitment workshop that went far over the time allotted, the restraints in being involved with other campus organizations and taking academic internships due to chapter time expectations and requirements, and lack of communication from fellow chapter members when Beth became unsure of continuing to be a member.

In the end, Beth told the chapter the reason for her leaving was financial, but that was only one reason. In actuality, the issue of finances was used to deflect further gossip and questioning by members. Beth conveyed her disappointment as follows:
I wanted to take more time to take internships or get involved in the organizations that would help me build the skills I need for my career and I couldn’t do that while still in the sorority. And just the people, like, it felt a lot like I wasn’t making progress with the friendships there so why am I paying x-amount of dollars per month to have people talk about me behind my back and not talk to me when I go to the house? Y’know, it’s, it wasn’t worth it. I was putting more into it than I was getting out. The difference wasn’t small enough to just brush it off.

Ultimately, her issues with chapter membership appeared to boil down to an issue of cost-benefit: at what point do the costs, financial and otherwise, outweigh the desired benefits? Beth provided an interesting case where conflicts interpersonally, with time, and then ultimately with financial expectation were the dominant issues that made her membership no longer worth it. However, in the eyes of her sisters, the reason she left was financial, leaving many of these issues without full introspection on behalf of the chapter.

Jessica

After a friend wanted her to attend a sorority open house event, Jessica, a sophomore, decided to go to accompany her friend. She ended up joining in particular after seeing her younger brother’s summer orientation leader was a member. Originally, Jessica had no intention of joining. She attempted a music sorority the previous fall semester freshmen year but did not find friendships that met her expectations. However, when attending the recruitment event for a social sorority, the women she met all seemed, “really down to earth, really friendly. I didn’t feel like they were being fake toward me at all. They seemed like a genuine group of people.”
Jessica thought this type of positive social interaction would continue. She felt well liked by the women she met and discussed how the active women would even buy lunch for her and spent a lot of time getting to know her. Jessica reflected, “I just felt really special because they were really interested in what I had to do and I just felt like, why? I’m not that special! So that was cool.” However, it was shortly after this that one of the first organizational dilemmas arose. She ran into an issue with the new member educator (an active, initiated member who teaches the new members about the organization) where there was an expectation to make a large purchase financially for her big sister (a formally arranged undergraduate sorority mentor). Jessica felt frustrated by the impromptu financial expectation and conveyed her frustration. The new member educator offered to front the required expense, but Jessica felt that was beside the point – in her perspective, there was already an expectation to pay to be a member so to require additional finances was unexpected and frustrating.

This issue became common in Jessica’s experience. Following this incident, Jessica attended what she thought was a summer retreat. The chapter was told that the retreat would involve sisterhood activities and overall group bonding. However, when Jessica arrived it wound up being more about recruitment than sisterhood. Jessica reflected, “So we sat in a room for multiple hours out of the day having recruitment shoved down our throats basically. And I was just like, what is this? This is not what I signed on for.” In addition to this, Jessica became informed of other policies, such as a mandatory housing requirement and other mandatory recruitment workshops after being initiated. Jessica felt a sense of betrayal and a desire to have known about these policies prior to joining. Overall, she felt she could not trust the women in her sorority due to the rules and policies that appeared hidden at first, “I was just kind of like, okay,
so I was lied to when they said there was no housing requirement and now there is and I got really upset. What else are they lying about that I don’t know that they are just putting a positive twist on?"

Jessica had several issues with recruitment. At one point, she described herself as “a dirty car salesman” when endorsing the organization. This was during a time when she felt that what members were told to “sell” during recruitment was not what they would actually experience. Jessica felt that new members did not know what they would be getting themselves into; in her perspective the organization was very different from what was promoted during recruitment activities. Jessica thought the formal recruitment experience, both the preparation and actual events, took away from her schoolwork. She shared that at one point, “We were actually told during meeting that y’know, this weekend [formal recruitment] is so important it should come before your schoolwork. I was like I’m not here for sorority; I’m here to get my education.”

In addition, Jessica observed quite a bit of dissonance between the organization’s ritual, an area she deeply enjoyed about the sorority, and other member’s behavior, such as drinking and “partying.” Considering the catalyst to leaving the organization, she reflected, A lot of girls I just wasn’t getting a long with and I didn’t like calling them my sisters cause I didn’t like what they were doing and they were basically giving the group a bad image and because I am part of the group they were giving me a bad image as well and I didn’t like that.

The on-going challenges between Jessica’s expectations and the actual sorority experience inevitably led Jessica to decide, despite paying her dues in advance for the entire year, to leave the sorority. Moreover, Jessica could not get all of her dues money reimbursed for the semester she paid for but was not an active member. Initially, the chapter leaders wanted her
to pay a fee for quitting the organization to process her paperwork. She strongly disagreed with this having already paid a full semester’s dues prior to the semester starting. Following this disagreement, the chapter leaders then agreed not to charge her.

As Jessica reflected back, she felt that sororities in theory are a great idea. However, it was instances such as the financial constraints and lack of information that led to ultimately deciding to leave. Like Beth, Jessica felt a large difference between being a new member and active, initiated member and felt the active members did not have to work as hard to keep and retain initiated members so they didn’t worry about the new members as much anymore. Looking back, she wished she had spent more time going to different sorority houses and felt that if she had joined a different chapter, maybe things would have been different.

Carly

Carly, a current junior, was a transfer student from another in-state, four-year institution, and sought to join a sorority after seeing her friends have a positive experience. She wanted to feel more connected. In fact, Carly was so sure she wanted to join a sorority she signed up in advance for formal recruitment during the summer while at orientation. Primarily, Carly was looking for a group of women she could spend time with but not feel pressured to go out to parties as she stated, “I was looking for girls I could go hang out at the house with and not have to be like going out, going out to parties and stuff like that, that I could just hang out with.” At first, she saw the group of women in the sorority she affiliated with as a group of genuine, sincere women and felt the needs she was seeking were being met.

However, like Beth and Jessica, Carly felt a difference between new member education and active membership, “They were all really nice like during new member period and everyone
invites you places and you’re like, yeah, let’s go hang out all together. But then you get initiated and it’s not like that anymore.” Prior to being initiated the events were optional; however, Carly felt overwhelmed by the number of commitments expected once becoming an active member. She noticed how her schedule seemed to instantly fill up. In addition to this, she no longer felt like a priority to other chapter members. Once Carly had her big sister, it seemed that women primarily spent time with their respective sorority families (groups of women who share the same big and little sisters).

Carly desired to push herself into additional leadership roles and become more involved on campus. This was an area she had not done as much with as she would have liked in high school and hoped that being at a new institution and joining a sorority would help with that. However, feeling overwhelmed in general with the expectations and multiple events, Carly found herself withdrawing instead and questioning why she should spend the money on the chapter. Especially when her sorority big sister dropped out, this became especially clear – not only was she missing a close friend and companion but she was also not achieving what she hoped through being a member. She described this thought process in relation to her decision to quit:

At first I thought, if I quit I won’t see a lot of these girls. My big sister transferred out so I knew I wasn’t going to see her anyway and she left the sorority also but she doesn’t even go here anymore. So I knew she was leaving so that factored into me leaving cause she was one of the people I really hung out with so if she wasn’t going to be at everything then I kind of felt like well then why should I be at everything too if my friends aren’t going to be there?
Reflecting back on why she left and the decision-making process, Carly admitted that she could have taken ownership over her own attitude and behavior more often than she did, “Like thinking this is not gonna be fun and then I get there and I make it not fun kind of thing.” She did not experience any specific interpersonal conflicts, but overall felt that the close sisterhood with an entire group that she expected was not there. Carly believed the chapter members also had a responsibility to create a more welcoming environment, “You’re still a new member even when you’re initiated so there should still be a willingness to hang out with you.” However, Carly also felt attached to the idea of the history of the organization and the fact that she knew other close friends of her family that joined sororities and loved their experiences. She hoped to replicate the feelings they had through the sorority.

Carly’s decision became clear after spending a year in the organization. She shared her frustrations with her parents, who were assisting in paying for her membership. Carly’s mother raised the issue of the money she could save and use toward other activities, In addition, in Carly’s perspective if she was not happy for the majority of her membership than there was probably little point since according to Carly’s mother, “You can still see these girls around campus.” The combination of the potential savings when weighing out her current experience resulted in deciding to quit. “There were more times that I was upset about being in a sorority than I was happy about it. So, that was the overall decision. But I still think they’re a great idea.”

Marie

Interested in joining a sorority when first arriving at BGSU as a first-year student, Marie was looking for a strong group of friends who were “motivated in doing what was right.” However, shortly after becoming a member, Marie had the following realization:
There were a lot of meetings and read this and fill out this and here’s our book and do this and I felt like I didn’t sign up to take another class! I signed up to have a group of friends and do different things with it and just get experiences and plus something for on my resume and I wasn’t ready for all of this. I honestly didn’t know 100% what was entailed in a sorority. I just knew that it was a sorority and that’s what it was.

Quickly, Marie became social chair for her chapter, planning various outings with fraternities and date parties. She enjoyed this role and found it fulfilling, in particular helping to plan an annual formal event that was applauded by her peers. “Everyone had a blast at that [formal]. So that was like a confidence booster.” However, overall Marie felt the chapter put recruitment activities and academic performance ahead of socials. She openly agreed that she valued socials more than other women did and that was part of the issue of organizational fit. Like many of the other women interviewed, Marie felt her experience would have been different had she joined another chapter.

Marie realized that she “was not having fun anymore. I wasn’t enjoying it.” She felt a sense of pride in the beginning and enjoyed going to formal meetings. However, after some time she no longer agreed with some of the women who the group represented. She observed that the group was overly focused on recruitment numbers and thought the organization should be more selective. In light of this, she left the chapter along with several other women she affiliated with because they felt so strongly about the direction the chapter was going in.

I think we should get our name out there and get people known and then when we do our philanthropies and stuff people will come because they know us and like us and want to hang out with us. I guess I just lean that way and some other girls learn that way.
In addition, although Marie enjoyed attending sorority activities, she did not agree with the chapter’s requirements for many activities. For example, when Marie voiced her frustrations with members not attending social activities to the chapter president, the president suggested that she make the social activities mandatory to force women to attend. However, making events required was something Marie did not support. More important to Marie, events that are meant to be fun should not be required; women in the organization should want to go regardless.

Overall, Marie’s decision was not related to finances. Like some other women, Marie’s parents supported her sorority activity but upon seeing her dissatisfaction felt she should do something. They suggested that she quit the sorority and get a job related to her academic major in education. She currently interacts frequently with the other women who left the chapter around the same time she did. She misses the lost connection from the sorority and wondered if it was something that was ever really a good fit for her or not, regardless of which chapter she affiliated with. Marie saw the benefits of membership, but as mentioned earlier with other women in the study, thought a different chapter experience would have better suited her personality.

Anna

Anna came in to the interview in cheerleading sweats and a definitive view of who she is, “I’m a very unique personality to say the least. I’m extremely outgoing and like way too outspoken, extraverted beyond, y’know. I tend to cross boundaries a lot.” With that, Anna was not at all interested in joining a sorority but after feeling pressured by friends to go with them to an open house during, Anna thought it may be worthwhile. She found the members to be genuine and nice and felt that what they sold in terms of helping with academic performance was
worthwhile. However, Anna found the new member education period to be “annoying” but enjoyed the social aspect of that period of time.

Anna’s membership was very short. She affiliated during the fall but quit only a few weeks after being initiated. She felt she did not experience much; however, there appeared to be couple events that conflicted with Anna’s values and expectations that stood out. First was that Anna came from a very small, rural, religiously-affiliated high school. She is a person committed to, then and now, not partying and drinking. However, one social event in the chapter went from a regular date party to “this date party that we were surprised with and it wound up being this huge drinking party in this frat basement.” Anna felt frustrated by the amount of partying that occurred, reflecting the following,

> It was just something I was not ready for. Drinking, partying, boys, smoking; I was not, and still am not interested and don’t ever plan on being interested. It’s not to say all those girls do that but just surrounding myself with people who it is was not for me. I never wanted to.

Another event occurred at a party where Anna had to go to the hospital due to alcohol poisoning; however that aspect of the social was the least of Anna’s worries when sharing her story. Through a dating triangle, another sorority sister took Anna’s current love interest to the date party. Anna felt okay with this set-up as they planned to go as friends. However, it was when two of her sisters wound up kissing the man she was interested in that felt particularly hurtful as it was also captured on another sister’s digital camera. She felt equal blame for both her sisters and the guy she was currently involved with, but felt mainly frustrated by the lack of
true friendship. “There was a lot of back-talking and back-stabbing…It was like there was like this façade being put on.”

On top of these things, Anna felt like there were many requirements, from living in the house to attending particular events that she did not agree with. As this all stacked up – the social aspect that was less-than what was expected, required activities, and overall a lack of interest from the beginning beyond finding friendship, Anna determined the costs were not worth it. Anna shared that joining a sorority wasn’t a good choice for her personally but she supports others’ decisions to do so, “I still like them as people it’s just, it’s a personal choice. You either like it or you don’t. I don’t have any negative feelings about it.”

*Kelly*

As a first-year student, Kelly thought joining a sorority was a good idea since a friend joined. She admitted not planning on joining but reconsidered believing, “You can’t just not try it.” She enjoyed the friendliness of chapter members and how eager they were to get to know other members. There were plenty of activities to get to know people however, after new member education was over, Kelly described everyone as “kind of blah.”

Overall, Kelly was looking for friendship outside of the individuals she met through her academic major. Therefore, requirements such as participating in intramurals and weekly meetings did not appeal to her. “I just wanted to be in it, but didn’t want to be forced to do something.” In addition, Kelly began to see that other sorority members’ interests did not align with her own. About a month in she began to think about quitting but reconsidered it believing she had not given it enough time. After continuing to feel disconnected and not enjoying the requirements, Kelly went to the chapter president and shared her concerns. The president was
understanding while other members tried to get her not to quit. However, it was something she
had been thinking about for awhile and felt she needed to do for herself. She reflected,

Some people were trying to be like ‘Sometimes I just feel like I want to drop but I
thought about it and I’m glad I didn’t.’ And I’m like no, I’ve been thinking about this for
awhile and this is what I really want to do. It was okay.

Kelly noticed how social women in the sorority were and that did not match what she was
looking for. In addition, second semester she began to struggle with classes and began avoiding
the sorority house where she was currently living. She would often visit friends at another nearby
institution. Realizing her disconnection, Kelly determined, “I needed to do something about it
and that I needed to start including myself or I needed to just stop.”

Overall, Kelly liked the idea of a sorority but would have enjoyed one more focused on
her academic major. She did not have any serious conflicts, other than not desiring to socialize as
much as what she felt was expected. In addition, Kelly frequently mentioned issues with time
commitment – working a part-time job and being an art major demanded quite a bit of her time.
Her choice to leave was based completely on what she needed personally.

Focus Group

With 8 participants, focus group participants are referred to by the names Ashley, Bonnie,
Christy, Donna, Elizabeth, Francine, Gloria, and Heather. The women all affiliated at the same
time. Three are currently juniors and five are sophomores. Overall, women in this group were
seeking friendship and a sense of familiarity. These women desired a good fit and a place where
they could develop a sense of identity and develop as a person. However, reaching that point was
different for each woman. Several were against joining a sorority or had not fully considered it
for various reasons including stereotypes, influence of family and friends, or simply being unsure about joining. Others realized they wanted deeper friendships while at BGSU and yet another knew as soon as she got to campus she wanted to join a sorority.

Two women, Donna and Elizabeth, talked about the leadership issues that were going on while they were new members. The current president was being removed from office, but the new members knew very little about this process. However, they could still feel the effect of many other women quitting the chapter and other interpersonal tensions. They both described the process as not enjoyable, but they emerged through it to get to a stronger chapter in the end. Donna said, “It was really stressful, in a way it made us stronger. If we could make it through that we could make it through anything in the chapter. But it wasn’t good. It wasn’t a fun time.”

However, even these women agreed the strongest bond they held was with their pledge class. Heather, Ashley, and Francine agreed with this, saying that they continued to have a close bond with the women with whom they affiliated. However, none of them described feeling any differently after new member education. Francine described how she did not like “feeling babied during new member education” and enjoyed the added responsibilities of active membership. In fact, each woman involved with the focus group described at one point her involvement in a leadership role in the chapter.

Throughout the focus group, women discussed a variety of organizational conflicts and interpersonal challenges they faced. Ashley discussed the issues faced by the organization as it was growing and believed rules needed to be further developed to match the current membership needs. However, as this happened, older members felt dissatisfied and it resulted in several of them quitting. During this, Ashley was more focused on the women who stayed:
That’s the fine line when you know that they really are your sisters. They pull through it and their commitment to [the sorority] show[s] when situations like that occur. It [chapter conflict with seniors] turned out to be, y’know, one of the best things for our chapter.

Bonnie, Francine, and Elizabeth echoed these sentiments. They wished that when older members disliked changes they would not allow their negative attitudes to rub off on others. Francine rationalized the older members’ behavior, observing they were scared to leave an organization they love so much. Donna shared, “If you don’t want to follow the rules we’re not holding you hostage.” Francine nodded and vocally agreed. If a woman felt the organization no longer aligned with her values or what she hoped to gain, it was better to leave “with class” than to continue to spread negativity around to others.

It was interesting to hear these women’s intentions for future sorority involvement. Several aspired to work for their national headquarters, serve as a chapter advisor, or continue to come back to BGSU for homecoming and see their sorority sisters. Christy shared the importance her membership had made on her:

For me, my sorority has changed my life. So much even in this past year because I found out that my grandmother who passed away when I was in sixth grade was actually in my sorority; that was insane. Ooh, I’m getting teary-eyed. So, I just want to do as much as I can for my sorority.

Overall, the women who conveyed strong affection and feelings for their involvement wanted others to understand their experiences. A number of these women were confronted with challenges from peers and family due to their involvement. However, what they experienced on a regular basis that brought them connection, support, growth, and challenge was an opportunity
they wished more could relate to and take advantage of. Christy summarized it well, “I wish everyone could see how much it means to me and to all of us. I just wish everyone could know how I feel about it.”

Conflict and a sense of disconnect, or relative lack of continuity between expectations or intentions and reality occurred within the following areas: unmet expectations, personal and organizational mismatch, and requirements. Overall, the women who left sororities conveyed more frequent instances of conflict than women who remained members. There is the potential that in a group setting women who did experience conflict would not feel comfortable sharing that. However, it was clear that women who quit did not do so because they were happy and content but because there were a variety of conflicts that built upon one another and resulted in an ultimate cost-benefit analysis. The perceived benefits of maintaining membership conflicted with the costs, financial and otherwise.

Analysis of Themes

Two over-arching themes are apparent throughout the individual interviews and focus group: conflict and disconnect and attachment and engagement. Each is described here.

Conflict and Disconnect

At least three of the women who left sorority chapters candidly explained that they were not fully aware of what they became involved with upon joining. Unlike the remaining sorority members, women who left felt hesitant and found further validation to hold back. For example, Jessica and Anna joined after not thinking that they would. Each had positive experiences at various times during membership and felt that there was a perceived benefit in joining. Jessica desired to become more involved on campus and improve her leadership skills while Anna
believed a sorority would help her academic performance. Conflicts occurred that invalidated these perceptions and resulted in loss of attachment to an idea.

*Unmet Expectations*

Throughout the interviews and focus group, women conveyed a desire for particular outcomes. One in particular was making friends and achieving a social outlet. For example, Beth felt very satisfied with her sorority experience during new member education. She became close to her new member class and thought she built a substantial social network, however, she later felt disappointed when her interactions with active members changed after initiation.

It was very different. It felt, for me, that a lot of the girls in the sorority stopped going out of their way to be nice to you once you were actually pledged and initiated. That’s how it came across to me. There were a lot who you know, where before when you came to the house they would make time to come over and have a conversation with you. When I went over in January as compared to October they would just ignore me. It was that way for about half my pledge class actually. A lot of us saw a huge change between, like, new member [education and] just when we got the bid and when we were fully initiated.

For example, Marie was a woman who felt ready to join a sorority and desired specific outcomes. There was only a limited, tolerable amount of time that Marie was willing to wait for improvements or attempt to change the organizational culture. Marie conveyed a strong desire for a social organization, but not one that was focused on alcohol and partying. However, her experience involved members that engaged more in the latter. The result was that Marie was dissatisfied and chose to leave. She reflected on her time in the sorority and the change from being an active to a new member as follows,
Yeah. I think when I was a new member it was exactly what I was thinking it was going to be. Like I remember the new member sleepover was just so much fun or whenever we had sisterhoods, those were fun. Everybody genuinely wanted to be around each other. And I thought that was going to be like that all the time but it wasn’t. But girls are like that I should’ve thought about it a little more ‘cause no one wants to be around each other all the time and everyone has their bad days. So like during new member period it was a lot of what I expected and then that sisterhood stuff was just y’know, once a month – not even, maybe.

*Personal and Organizational Mismatch*

For the women who left, inner conflicts arose when their personal values or the espoused values of the organization were not upheld or affirmed during their experiences. Carly described this as she reflected on the importance of ritual. She enjoyed the ideals of the ritual but felt frustrated by the members who would “go out all the time and brought a bad name to the chapter.” Anna described a similar situation where she felt exposed to a group of women who spent more time socializing than she was comfortable. In contrast, Marie was involved with a chapter that was not social enough for her. For example, when she asked the chapter president how to encourage more members to attend socials and the response was to make the events mandatory. Marie’s real problem was that she was not finding the social outlet she hoped would create the friendships she desired. It was her intention to make the chapter president aware and she hoped for a reaction similar to her own emotions. However, she was met with a response that echoed her current frustrations with the chapter – there continued to be a lack of emphasis on a social experience for members.
Kelly found that eventually her original membership intentions did not align with her experiences and the required membership activities. She described her initial hopes in membership but then her realization that the activities and participation expected were not what she planned.

I guess my whole life I’ve been looking for a group of girls that I feel like are my best friends but I don’t know, I’m just kind of the type of person who is friends with random people and I just, I don’t really have a group of girlfriends… I expected to just have friends but I felt like if you didn’t do things with those people that they got offended or that they kind of want you to do a lot of outside activities like going to activities at the [campus recreation center] and everything with everybody. I wasn’t really into that. I just wanted to, y’know, hang out with them sometimes but not necessarily do all that extra stuff.

Requirements

The conflict that stood out the greatest for women who left arose from continual requirements or demands with limited explanation of their relations to their membership. For example, Jessica was frustrated when she was told that recruitment was more important than school, Kelly and Beth were attempting to balance work with sorority commitments, and Carly was surprised by the expectations as an active member after having no requirements as a new member. For example, Carly commented,

I had heard, like, from my roommate-friend who is still in it who – she joined her freshman year – and she just said, like, there’s gonna' be a lot more stuff. But I didn’t
realize how much more of a time commitment it was. And they tell you that it’s a time commitment, but I don’t think I was expecting as much stuff.

Beth shared her perspective on the demands of her sorority chapter,

I knew there was going to be a big time commitment I did not expect this to be the kind of organization. I know there are some organizations when you join they believe it is the only [organization] you are ever in. At the time, I forgot to mention, I also wrote for the [student newspaper] … Our [newspaper] meetings were every Sunday and coincided a lot with a lot of the [sorority chapter] stuff and often they were not very understanding. I couldn’t go to a sisterhood because I had a budget due for the paper due tomorrow or something like that and I got the impression that was one of the organizations that believed they were the only one that you were involved in. I really didn’t care much for that kind of attitude.

In addition, Marie reflected on the requirements as a new member that not only affected her ability to manage her time, but the purpose behind the amount of time she was putting in did not always seem clear. She shared her frustration with the amount of time required:

The one thing I didn’t like was that we were required to do a ton of stuff. I transferred here so my GPA didn’t transfer. I knew I was struggling at the time with certain classes. I was wondering why did I have to go through all of this? What’s the point? I don’t understand… As a new member there was more pressure, like, ‘You don’t really want to do this do you?’ But I felt like don’t make me do something when I don’t really know what all this [the sorority] is yet.
Time and Activities

Participants often took on roles to adjust to the new social situation of a sorority. When women felt they could no engage in the sorority member role and act in a manner that was expected, it often resulted in feelings of dissonance. For example, Carly felt she could no longer maintain the time expectations set and although she enjoyed the idea of a sorority, she could no longer fulfill the expectations and remain a satisfied member. She described what her experience was like in the beginning, “Everything we did as new members was pretty much optional. You wanted to go to Big/Little and you wanted to go to all this stuff but it was like if you can’t make it, not a big deal.” Carly knew the expectations could change, and although this also relates to issues of sorority expectations for time and required activities, Carly also began to take on a particular role as a member. Therefore, when that role changed, she shared the following,

You were kind of forced to hangout instead of being invited. You had to go to all the things on Saturdays and things on, like, chapter you had to go to. Which made you hang out together but it was kind of like formal and no one really wanted to be there. Cause you just kind of had to be there but it wasn’t like, I don’t know, I think it goes back to my new member period because I didn’t do a lot then so once I was initiated and I had to do a lot and then wasn’t, I didn’t really know anybody. Cause I didn’t take the initiative to do it but still kind of forced. Like there’s a lot of stuff you have to do. It just fills up.

Furthermore, women who left the chapters often perceived the recruitment workshops to be boring, unnecessary, or felt uncomfortable with the process. Anna pointed to issues with the recruitment process as being the primary reason why she felt she could not remain in the chapter.
As she described this realization, she suggested the parts of her chapter she did not like and did not make up what she believed a sorority should be:

I didn’t like all the stupid meetings we had to do go to. That’s pretty much it. We were required to go to all this new member recruiting stuff. When we started all this I didn’t like it. I felt like there were girls in my chapter that were fake. I didn’t want to be there. I didn’t want to be fake to girls. I would love girls to join but I couldn’t say that I liked it. I didn’t want to be there for recruitment. That’s why I dropped out.

Repeatedly, the issue of spending time on recruitment workshops and membership training arose. Jessica reflected on the requirements during the formal recruitment period (multiple days of recruitment activities with all sorority houses to attract new members) and the pressure from her chapter.

We were actually told during meeting that, y’know, this weekend is so important it should come before your schoolwork. I was like I’m not here for sorority I’m here to get my education and kind of flipped out a little. Why are you telling me this is more important? It was an entire weekend and I felt like there wasn’t time to do anything else besides recruitment. I didn’t like it at all.

In addition, Jessica felt frustrated with the additional recruitment workshops that were required throughout the year. This impacted her ability to balance work, which she needed to pay for dues and other college expenses, and the time she would like to have for studying.

Since I work Sundays, Saturdays are my days to do homework and they were telling me four-hour recruitment workshop on Saturday and chapter on Sunday right after I got out of work so I really had no time to get anything done and I just, it was just too much.
A common conflict that occurred was with the organization practices of some of the sororities. These included problems Jessica had with being charged a fee to leave the chapter and the expectation to purchase additional gifts for fellow chapter members despite already paying dues. She described her frustration as follows,

But I felt that she kind of just threw stuff on us last minute and I got really angry about that because like to make the wooden crafts for my big I was told not even a week before we were supposed to have them done and I just didn’t have the extra funding to put toward that and I said you need to let me know ahead of time so I can plan for those things. I’m not just sitting on a pile of cash that I can dip into whenever I want. So I felt kind of upset about those things, just not being as well informed as I could have been.

Jessica expressed her frustration less with the monetary requirement, although it was still an inconvenience, but more so with creating a requirement when it appeared to contradict the point of paying dues. The result was still the same and left Jessica still frustrated. The new member educator offered to loan the money but Jessica’s point was that she should not be asked to contribute extra money, period, and with little notification to do so.

For Beth, a conflict with a social event resulted in a breaking-point for her membership satisfaction. A date party held at a local bar where those who were underage could not attend so the attendance turned out to be very low. The member who planned the event vocalized her frustration via an e-mail to the entire chapter. Beth thought it would be appropriate to send an e-mail explaining why many women, including herself, did not attend the event, but she was met with an unexpected response:
No, sisterhood is not going to a bar. That’s not how I view it. Then [the social chair] said, ‘well if you have a problem then you set up a meeting with me’...The meeting turned into not me expressing my opinions but her telling me that I’m a brand new pledge so I don’t know anything about the sorority, so basically my opinions were mute. She just really attacked me ...’You don’t know anything; your concerns are invalid.’ That just really made me sit back and wonder is this what it’s going to be like? I don’t like to go out so I feel like I have to go. Socials are supposed to be fun so then I feel like I have to go out. She didn’t take any of my concerns and didn’t make any plans for suggestions I had.

Financial

As alluded to earlier, there were limited instances where finances were discussed in individual interviews. For the few where it did, financial obligation, although described as the primary reason to the chapter, was often used as a scapegoat for the real issues at hand. Several women described a point where the cost of membership was no longer worth the perceived benefit. Beth described her decision to leave her chapter.

So my feelings toward my experience and toward [the sorority chapter] are overwhelmingly negative, because the catalyst for me disaffiliating was financial. I couldn’t afford [the sorority chapter] anymore and even if everything was perfect I wouldn’t have been able to afford it. I would have had to disaffiliate anyway. But that was what I told as the primary cause and reason I told everyone. I didn’t want gossip to happen. But I knew it did happen.
Kelly felt similarly and conveyed a level of selflessness to the organization, feeling that her being in the chapter was keeping another person from enjoying it. She was so committed to her academic major that she could not see herself integrating into the social expectations of the organization. She described her thought process of leaving the sorority:

I generally considered my happiness. And I considered everyone else’s feelings because I thought well, I just felt like how many people were really, there were a lot of people that were really into it and it was something that meant so much to them and I didn’t want to ruin the experience for them by not participating and then I didn’t want to stay there just to make everyone else happy because it was something that I didn’t really like doing. I didn’t want to put my time into something that wasn’t really making me happier or benefiting my college experience.

Beth is a prime example of the cost-benefit analysis that was mentioned with the organizational conflicts that many of the members who left incurred. On the one hand, Beth says she would have left no matter what, but on the other hand, she no longer felt that she could share with the sorority members why she left. As described in chapter four, Beth described her experience as one where the cost of being a member was no longer worth the organizational and interpersonal challenges.

Housing

The issue of housing requirements came up with both Anna and Jessica. Anna felt like the idea of living with so many women in one house would be too large of a challenge for her, “The fact you had to live in the house for eight semesters or one and a half years…There’s no way in the world I’d be able to live with 40 girls. There’s no way.” Jessica described feeling deceived
by the housing requirement. Initially, when Jessica joined the chapter, the particular sorority did not have a problem filling the house. However, a few months into Jessica’s membership an issue arose where the chapter had to require women to live-in which made her feel angered and question what else she may not have received the entire truth about as quoted earlier.

Overall, what can be seen is that any former member’s decision to leave did not amount to one incident or issue, but rather a series of conflicts that led them to decide the costs outweighed the benefits of membership. The women who left described a lack of connection to the sorority experience as seen through the organization and interpersonal experiences they had. When contrasted with the women who continued membership, it was clear that membership experiences greatly differed.

Women frequently described feelings of frustration, confusion, or irritation due to the often unexpected and inexplicit time requirements, events, and membership demands. These issues were often entangled with interpersonal and organizational conflicts. Doing a cost-benefit analysis ultimately led to many women’s decisions to leave the chapter.

Jessica described how she felt she could not prescribe to the organizational culture and continue those roles, “I just didn’t like the whole idea of looking a certain way and dressing a certain way.” These personal conflicts with the expected roles and adherence to membership expectations inevitably led to additional dissatisfaction with not only the idea of membership requirements but the total amount of time membership required.

As mentioned in the literature review, role-taking involves seeking to present yourself in a manner that allows others to look favorably upon you. This perception helps a person become
socially integrated. This is an important experience of a new member assimilating to a group and was evident among many of the individual interview participants.

*Attachment and Engagement*

Throughout the sorority experience, women who remained active conveyed a strong sense of attachment to the organization and engagement in its functions. Attachment was conveyed through positive descriptions of sorority ideals, satisfaction with the experiences provided through membership, and motivation to be involved with the organization. These moments of attachment provided satisfaction and further solidified members’ commitment to the cause and purpose of membership. This was seen generally and in terms of three subthemes: connection to the organization, relationships, and self-knowledge.

The 8 focus group participants joined their individual chapters for varying reasons. Each followed a variety of recruitment processes that led to involvement including formal and informal recruitment. Like the women who left their chapters, some came into recruitment unsure of what membership would entail or if it would be a good fit; others knew since high school that sorority membership was for them. For example, Ashley shared,

I was dead-set against joining a sorority. My friends and I in high school we’re like, “We’re not joining sororities, we’ll be best friends forever”… I went through informal recruitment. I went to around seven [sorority] houses and I thought none would want me and then I found my home. I love it.

Gloria shared her limited knowledge about Greek life and had not given it much consideration:

For me I didn’t know a lot of the Greek and stuff cause nobody in my family was or any friends that were…When I came here I heard about it from my roommate who was going
through formal [recruitment] so she was like, “Why don’t you do it with me?” and I was like not really” and then she dragged me to one of the Rho Gam [formal recruitment guide] meetings. I went through all 14 [sorority] houses. The one I went to I felt like I belonged there.

Some women had family members who were involved with Greek life and had mixed feelings on joining. Francine shared her story how friends who she met when she first came to college influenced her decision more than her family members’ involvement:

For me I thought I would never join a sorority. I was dead-set against it. I have cousins that go here that are in sororities. My family is Greek. I thought I’m not going to BG and following in their footsteps. Well, that kind of changed. The reason why it changed was that I met a lot of girls before formal recruitment that got me interested in signing up for formal recruitment and then I went through formal.

Christy shared her perspective on membership:

I didn’t think I would do this before I came to school. I just didn’t think I would join a sorority it just wasn’t who I am at all. My grandma was in a sorority and she talked me into going through formal [recruitment]. I fell in love with a house first [recruitment] round and didn’t get asked back. I was so close to dropping out of recruitment but my Rho Gam [formal recruitment guide] talked me into staying in and giving it another shot. Then I found the house for me and felt like it was where I should be and it felt like that right place.
Others took more time to join and considered membership after formal recruitment. Bonnie discussed how she waited until her sophomore year to join after taking some perspective on her friendships her first-year of college:

After my freshman year I had really crappy friends and I didn’t really like them that much. I knew they were just around me in my residence hall. My sophomore year I knew one person in [the sorority chapter] so I just went to their open recruitment and didn’t go anywhere else. I decided they were a good group of people I wanted to be friends with. Ashley joined because she aspired to since high school. In her perspective, this is rare among college women:

For me, they call us the 1% because there’s usually 1% that knows they wanted to join all of high school. Most don’t think that way ‘cause it’s very rare to think that you’re going to go into one. But for me I guess I’m in the 1%; it was just something I wanted to do. It was my goal to meet new girls and start completely over in college. I thought that probably by joining a sorority it would be one of the best ways to do it.

Although there were differences for why women chose to engage in the sorority community, each found levels of attachment or a feeling of “home” in the communities they selected.

There were many experiences women who remained in sororities experienced that led not only to the initial involvement and connection as described. These women discussed instances of connection that were beyond desire to belong, but included integration into the organization and a sense of responsibility to its maintenance.
Women who remained sorority members conveyed agreement with the ideal membership experience. Women who joined sororities and stayed described very specific goals they hoped to achieve and genuine desire for a feeling of belonging. Although some focus group participants described themselves as not being the “sorority type”, they clearly understood the sacrifices necessary and how sorority membership would impact their personal goals. Ideas such as, “It was a place where I could sit in my pajamas on the couch and completely be myself” and “a group of girls that could bring out the best in me and make me who I want to be and feel confident” were expressed.

The continuing chapter members were very descriptive about their intentions and feelings drawn from the sorority membership experience. Many of these emotions were derived from their interactions with older members. Ashley explained, “I think it’s really ingrained in the newer members because they’re the future of the chapter.” While Christy described her experience with older members’ perspectives:

That’s why you know they want us to know what we know. Just jumping into it kind of just because they know because they’re not going to be there forever doing the same position. I still felt like I gained a lot more responsibility ‘cause right after I was initiated I took on two positions right away. I felt like the sorority was definitely depending on me a lot to definitely get the stuff of my positions done.

Women who remained in the chapters conveyed a sense of responsibility for continuing the merits of the organization.
Several women who joined and remained members did so in the face of breaking roles expected by friends and family at home. Two of the women, coming into college, intended to be a sorority woman; however, three women spoke openly about being made fun of by friends at home for their sorority membership. Breaking those expectations was frustrating at first but following a year of membership these women appeared comfortable with their identity as a sorority woman. For example, Ashley shared her perspective:

You’re always going to have the stereotypes and you just get to this point that you’re like I’m not even going to explain it to you because you don’t get it unless you go through it... You’re together in a chapter but the rest of the Greek community is about on the same level as you... Y’know, everybody is just like that’s what we’re all about. And you don’t have to explain that to people. You can be like, yeah, I paid for it but look at what I get out of it.

Heather felt similarly about stereotypes and adjusting to her sorority membership:

For me, when I first joined it was really stressful because everyone at home was like you shouldn’t join one. All these stereotypes... Even now, it’s just hard for people to see that. A lot of my friends still make fun of me. But I’m finally at the point where it doesn’t bother me anymore but it bothered me a lot my freshmen year. Your friends at home saying that you’re a stupid sorority girl and I’m just like if I wasn’t two hours away [from home].

In addition, several active women spoke about times when they went from an outsider to member perspective. This involved sharing when they understood the purpose of membership,
ritual, and Greek life in general. Elizabeth described her moment of connecting to the meaning of her chapter:

I guess the only difference [between new member education and being initiated] is instead of standing outside for 10 minutes of chapter I’m inside of chapter. After initiation was over, I was like, damn, they could’ve told me this stuff during the new member period. I didn’t understand why it was just a big secret. Once you’re in and you get to experience that, the 10 minutes makes the difference to me. You see what goes on and what happens and why your chapter is who it is and it just makes it that much more special. At first it was like, wow, big deal. And then it was like, this, I get it now. It was a light bulb – that’s what it was. All that time for a light bulb.

Donna shared similar sentiments when comparing her experiences in non-Greek organizations to her sorority experience:

I think it helps you get involved on campus. My freshman year I was really, really involved with [residence] life too which is kind of hard to balance out anyways. By the end of the year I knew I could do school, res life and Greek life too. I think Greek life definitely is not just a club. In other things I was involved in they were just organizations or just clubs. They’re things you just leave in college. But Greek life is so much bigger. People are like oh you’re just paying for your friends. I just laugh – you don’t even know, you don’t even understand how much bigger it is than that.

Finally, Heather also had a moment similar to the previous participant where she compared her sorority and non-sorority experiences:
It’s so the best decision I’ve ever made. I’ve been in other organizations like the Honors Program and it felt so detached, like no one cared. I’m glad I joined a sorority because you do realize that people do care and you find your niche.

In addition, some participants envisioned their impact on the future of their chapters and the influence of what their involvement would have later. This further conveyed a sense of lifelong membership and importance of sustaining the organization. Francine shared how she may impact future members that she may never meet:

I agree, looking form the outside in you don’t really see it. But being inside you see that you’re in for life. There are going to be things that you do 10 years from now that are going to affect the members in your chapter here on campus that you might now know.

Relationships

Strong relationships also contributed to the sense of attachment and engagement. Women who remained active members discussed opportunities where they could support one another. When her sorority sister came to her at three in the morning on Valentine’s Day when she broke up with her boyfriend, Heather felt that she had an opportunity to be a good sister. She felt needed by her sister and described the role she played with her fellow member:

Personally for me it has been a support system…My one good friend broke up with her boyfriend last night at midnight. Yeah, so I was up late doing homework and I noticed that her status was “being emo” on Facebook, so I called her and asked what’s wrong and she was like my boyfriend just broke up with me. She slept on my couch and talked to my roommate and I, my roommate and I are like best friends, we’re really close – and we were up until like 6 in the morning talking. It was nice to flush it all out. Last night,
sitting on my bed talking with those two girls, I was just like, this is why I’m here. I know they’re here for me and I know they know I am there for them. It’s nice to know that.

Heather found a way to be connected and involved with other women’s lives. This provided a sense of attachment and involved acting on the type of member she wanted to be to others. This affirmation through a bond with fellow members was important among other focus group participants as well. Several active members described similar experiences:

(Gloria) I agree. I live at the house and there are people at the house all the time. I live on the third floor so when I want to be alone I can just got up to my room and when I want to talk to somebody I can just go downstairs there’s always 2-3 girls who will be there. We can just be around each other, play a game, watch TV. It’s just normal.

(Christy) I feel like, going along with that, there’s always somebody there everyday. Even when I’m in my room I’m never alone. I have to go to the library to do my homework ‘cause there’s always somebody coming in my room which is nice since I like having the company. But it also gets frustrating because I live in my house and you’re around the same people everyday. You just get little things that you just nit-pick on. At the end of the day they’re your sister. You’re not going to be mad you’re just going to get over it. It’s nice too, if you get mad at somebody you can yell at them, they’re going to sit there they’re going to take it. That’s what they’re there for to let you vent and do whatever you want. I don’t know, that’s what I like the best.

(Bonnie) I think we’re saying the day to day isn’t the operations and business of the chapter. It’s the personal relationships that make up the day to day. But Sunday or
whatever day you go to chapter and you get the business side over with and you go back to your personal relationships. You don’t have to talk about what your sorority is doing and you can talk about whatever you want. That’s what gets you through on the day to day basis.

In addition, women described the initial challenges of navigating with whom they fit within the organization. Finding relationships they could feel connected with made a difference in this as Donna described:

The difficult part for me, being from a larger chapter with a lot of girls, was finding my niche. It seems some of the chapters are diverse and have lots of different people. I hang out with completely different people now than when I joined. You’d hang out with one group and you’re like this isn’t why I joined, to go out all the time, that sort of thing. But then you’re fine, you meet new people and the girls you fit more with then everything kind of lined up. For awhile it was like maybe I joined the wrong chapter.

For some women there was a difference between the relationships of non-sorority friends and sorority friends and the level of understanding of the active members’ personal circumstances they found. Elizabeth described going through a particularly difficult time with a sorority sister yet still fighting the perception of her friends at home of her sorority membership:

All my friends, mostly from home that aren’t Greek call me “Suzy Sorority”...one of my friends just like yesterday asked me how my “Check Friends” were; am I getting my money’s worth? One of our sisters right now is in the hospital and it’s this horrible experience the past couple days and I yelled at him, this is what’s going on with one of my friends in my sorority almost died and when you have 65 women that are all pulling
together and there are 50 of us sitting at three in the morning holding hands in a circle and crying because this apartment holds maybe 25 people comfortably. That’s what I paid for. I paid for the love. I paid for the support. I paid for someplace to go when I don’t know what to do with myself. I don’t know what I would’ve done on Monday night having gotten the phone call I had gotten except go to that apartment and know that my sisters would be there to hold me. That’s what I paid for. And he was just like, oh, I’m sorry. There was no “Suzy Sorority” There was no laughing at me. He really understood just then what I’ve been going through. Seeing people write on my [Facebook] wall, ‘I heard about your sister, I hope she’ll be okay.’ It’s not just writing a check. This experience I’ve had is going to carry with me forever.

Self-Knowledge

Several women described a desire to be changed, develop as a leader, and become a better person. Gloria described her experience, “I used to be really shy but joining my sorority gave me more confidence to speak up and speak my mind. It’s a great experience.”

Donna shared her perspective on the challenge of recruitment and determining how she saw herself fitting within a given sorority chapter:

It got difficult for me because I saw different parts of myself in different houses. I could see where one part of me would really fit in with one house and another part in another. So I had to think about the kind of person I wanted to be in college. This part may bring out the part of me that wants to go out on the weekend or the part that really needs to focus on school. I had to really think about how I wanted to spend my time here. I wound up finding the house that could make me the best person I could be.
Among focus group active members, there were multiple desired outcomes of sorority membership shared. For example, Heather shared:

For me, I wanted a group of girls that could bring out the best in me and make me who I want to be and feel confident. I definitely found that. I’m doing things now that I never would’ve done in high school or anything…it’s the best decision because half of the things I do now I’m a much better person. My grades are better. I’m more outgoing.

Francine was seeking an academic support network:

I think one thing I forgot to add too was to have a group of girls that would academically support me while I was at school. A lot of my sisters have similar majors so we can support each other academically.

Others sought leadership opportunities, such as Christy who wanted to continue similar involvement levels she had in high school:

I felt like with my positions that this is what I wanted to do on campus. Use my leadership skills since I was very involved in high school and not just sit back and not be active in college. I wanted to use the extra energy somewhere to hold my position. Being on exec I feel like that was what I was looking for. I don’t really have any experiences where I didn’t feel like my expectations didn’t match my experience.

Overall, Francine summarized how she felt her membership may serve in the future:

I think it’s given me a lot of opportunities that I wouldn’t have been offered if I hadn’t joined a Greek organization like traveling, leadership opportunities. I’m grateful for those. In the end they’ll help me in the future with a job and just like good life skills and experiences.
Many of the active women aimed for varying levels of personal gain, achievement, and overall individual improvement. Whether the change was expected and intended or if it was the outcome looking back and met their satisfaction, self-knowledge and with making strides to become a better person was important to the majority of the focus group participants.

When comparing the experiences of former members and current members, there remains the question of how a membership experience can be created where each woman who joins can have a positive experience. It became clear through the individual interviews that several women described sorority membership marked by conflict, frustration, and disappointment. However, others described an experience with high levels of satisfaction and enjoyment. What can one draw from the experiences of former members to educate future practice and impact overall sorority membership satisfaction?
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

To understand why members leave, it is valuable to anchor the aforementioned overarching themes in theory. The use of theory can provide a lens through which understanding the general experience of students can create specific meaning for sorority membership. In addition, the use of the research questions to understand what has been gained through this study provides guidance as to what steps professionals can take and where future research is needed.

Conflict and Disconnect

Founded after men’s fraternities, women’s fraternal organizations typically echo the structure of men’s groups. In fact, many women’s organizations were founded with the assistance of a fraternity man or other male college administrator (Turk, 2004). The problem is that the blueprint created for men’s organizations sometimes fails to meet women’s developmental needs. Gilligan (1998) argued that we have come to know that women in many instances, particularly in an organizational setting, make decisions with a different progression of thought and intentions than men in similar situations. The difference is due to many women’s tendency to focus on relationships and care for others as compared to the common male justice orientation. However, when conflicts arose in these sororities, some leaders utilized the rules and structure in place for decades whereas psychologically the participants in this study were seeking a caring response.

This is seen in several conflicts in this study from women who left the sorority. Issues pertaining to organizational conflict involving rules and policies, the structure of recruitment workshops, the amount of time necessary and the required activities were met with dissatisfaction, frustration, and disappointment. These feelings stemmed from former members’
discontent with the opportunities to build the relationships and experiences they hoped to have. For example, Anna described her experience where she asked the sorority chapter president what to do in regards to members not attending social activities. The president responded with little support other than to make the social events mandatory. Anna’s desire for a social experience that would create relationships was not met by an answer from a relational perspective, it was met by a justice or rules orientation. The president’s perspective, according to Anna, appeared to be acknowledging the problem and creating an answer. The member had difficulty getting other members to events, therefore the events can be mandatory and she will have members at events. Anna and the chapter president were speaking from two different relationship orientations and therefore were unable to see the real issue at hand.

Gilligan (1982) argued that men typically view decisions and relationships from a framework oriented to justice, doing what is right regardless of who is affected. However, women’s decision-making more often follows an ethic of care. Usually woman’s first instinct will be to consider who the decision will affect. Within a social organization women are collectively more in tune to what others are doing and its affect on organizational operations. However, when women’s organizations get caught up in the day-to-day operations to the point that individual member’s needs are overlooked the appropriate ethic of care can be neglected.

Brown and Gilligan (1992) described the experiences of women who realized the self-silencing actions that caused young women and girls to adjust behavior and not stir conflict. Self-silencing occurs when a person decides to withhold their opinion, perspective, or experiences for the sake of not risking their relationship through conflict. According to Brown and Gilligan, it is in the embrace of conflict and the ability to grow in relationships through disagreement that
women are able to break through a relationship barrier often not crossed. This was described in the context of teachers and students, but can also be understood in the role of advisors and students and older and younger members. In their study, the female teachers learned to embrace what had been taught by society to avoid and discourage: disagreement and emotional conflict. Through providing a safe and supportive space to explore these disagreements, students and teachers were able to learn from one another’s perspectives and no longer silence voices based on seeking the textbook answer or subscribing to traditional gender roles.

The ability to translate this into the sorority organization could add to members’ abilities to look at fellow members’ experiences not solely through the black and white, right and wrong regarding which rules to follow and how standards are upheld. Rather, by listening to one another’s experiences, perspectives, and voices, a more open dialogue can occur between members. With the women who chose to leave the sorority, if one had felt their perception of their experiences to be more accepted by fellow members, would they have stayed in their organization and had a different experience? Instead it appeared the self-silencing that took place between teachers and students in Brown and Gilligan’s (1992) study occurred within the sorority context of this study, and when members did speak up the organization’s “voice” was stronger than its individual members.

This brings up two issues: first, women’s organizations need to spend time defining themselves and communicating their expectations to members. This needs to occur particularly at the local level. Several women said they liked the idea of a sorority, just not the one they joined. Therefore, if sororities promoted their individual identities versus creating a catch-all for
the sake of recruitment, more women might experience a stronger fit and remain in the organization.

As the aforementioned ethic of care suggests, attention to the individual is necessary and in a sorority setting, essential. The intention of fraternal organizations on many college campuses is to make the big, small, to take an otherwise sprawling campus and provide the place called “home” so often described by this study’s participants. Therefore, examining potential adjustments to requirements is needed. Although the many benefits of Greek life organizations were highlighted earlier, these benefits will only remain so long as the activities involved are relevant to members. The challenge is to align what is relevant to the members of the sorority with the expectations of the organization. Studies of Millennial students reveal that they are the most diverse set of college students ever to attend institutions of higher learning and they are also the most expectant. The diversity is not just one of racial or ethnic background, but in financial backing, academic interests of women, and life responsibilities (Coomes, 2004; DeBard, 2004). To attempt to impose an organizational setting that is rigid, goes against the ethic of care and is bound to cause conflict and ultimately can lead to attrition.

The issues of time and requirements are not necessarily tied to larger theoretical constructs, but is important to note the changing demographic of students today and the effect of students balancing multiple commitments. In the case of this study at BGSU, it appears that women who are sorority members could benefit from flexible requirements, in particular for those who work jobs to pay for sorority membership. In addition, the time necessary for membership needs to be made clear from the beginning. Hiding requirements will be a deterrent for sustained membership. However, it is important for organizations to determine what is really
worth being mandatory or required when this is an organization that women select to join as much as they are selected to join.

Overall, the conflicts that existed among women who selected to leave appear to be ones that can be addressed through reasonable steps to create an organizational environment that is intentionally designed for sustaining women’s relationships. Former members looked for genuine friendship and relationships they felt they could sustain. The bond of women’s fraternal organizations is based on relationships, therefore, the operations and treatment of members should operate from the same relational care.

Attachment and Engagement

The ability to create attachment to an organization or to an idea is a challenge. Marketing executives spend their lives attempting to create it. In Greek life it often seems that some organizations have the ability and others do not. However, in reviewing communication and organizational theory it becomes more clear why some women felt connected and others were left wondering what went wrong.

According to Lester’s (1987) axioms, developing organizational identity based on formal and informal rituals that communicate expectations as well as goal clarity will provide an increased level of behavioral certainty. In the sorority context, if the intentions of membership and behavioral expectations are made clear, members will know and understand the desired behavior. Additionally, members will also know the organization's goals for the future, helping them to see whether their goals align with the organization’s plans.

Throughout the study, women described desired relationships: the friendship that “felt like home,” friends for life, people who could be trusted, and women who were genuine. Many
women enter the sorority context with these ideas in mind. It is then that they utilize Hewitt’s (1976) concept of role-taking. New members will do what they can to emulate active members to show organizational fit, behavioral alignment, and overall socialization, including mimicked behavior and group attitudes. Therefore, the active members set the stage for behavioral expectations and whether or not the desired outcomes of sorority membership are met. The image is created and new members are put in the position to mirror the behavior, refute the behavior and leave the organization, or refute the behavior and attempt to change the culture. This was the resulting issue for many dissatisfied participants. Alternatively, women who joined and felt satisfied with their membership felt a high level of acclimation early on and through the first semester of active membership. Therefore, for these women the role, behavior, and organization all aligned.

This is an area particularly applicable to membership development. One of the participants, Carly, raised an important point, that even after initiation, those who were new members one day are still new members the next despite participating in organization ritual activities. As we look to the organizational climate and women’s development, to build the connection that is sought after in Greek life organizations, purposeful transition and attention to members is needed outside of new member education leading up to initiation alone. Therefore, it is important to provide ongoing membership development not only to the whole chapter but geared to the unique needs of each woman’s organizational transition. In doing so, this provides the attention that many women, remaining active members and those who left, desired.

The experiences shared by current and previous members provided a variety of circumstances to draw upon for analysis of motivation to join. It is clear that both women who
left the sorority and those who stayed initially desired a level of friendship and social interaction. However, the degree to which they expected this interaction to occur varied. These common themes, as outlined throughout the overviews of the individual interviews and focus group, demonstrated the prevalence of the initial desire for friendship as the primary motivator to sorority membership.

Women who remained in their sorority chapters felt, as with the organizational axioms discussed, that they found clear goals and direction that equated to a good fit for their personal needs (Lester, 1987). The intentions of joining were met by the reality of an enjoyable membership experience. Among the benefits were moments where women felt they were able to give back to fellow members and contribute to the organizations. As one sorority member described, when she became an initiated member she looked forward to taking on an elected position and having the opportunity to contribute. Overall, the women who remained members shared several stories and examples of how they felt connected to a larger group of women, despite conflict or tough times. For them, this day-to-day friendship rather than organizational operations were what made their membership worthwhile.

However, several clear trends emerged for women who left their sororities. When women were met with conflict, whether through questioning a policy or an interpersonal dispute, and it led to an invalidation of intended outcomes of membership disconnect occurred. Each time a setback or disappointment happened this further disengaged the member from the organization, and the negative issues accumulated.
Recommendations for Practice

The study is limited in generalizeability due to its focus on one campus’ sorority community. However, there are several ways that chapter advisors and Greek life stakeholders can utilize the results to educate future practice as well as recommendations for further research.

The first recommendation is based on the dichotomy that exists between sororities as membership and sororities as sisterhood. It was clear throughout the study among the women who left organizations that they had an expectation and picture of sisterhood. Therefore, when the organizational needs dominated the role of sisterhood and sisterly behavior, this sent a mixed message: what is more valuable to this organization – me as a sister and member or me as a paycheck and expectation? Certainly there is business that takes place as an organization; however, it is the need of today’s sororities to approach membership with transparency and clarity. The fact is that these women have options and will exercise their options. How can today’s sorority remain not only a relevant and compelling option for the undergraduate experience? It likely goes beyond being a sister or being a member and instead about meeting needs and creating dynamic organizations. The dynamic organization will grow with the life changes and needs of its members whereas the static organization will result in the same experience for every member regardless of individual needs. Often membership and sisterhood are positioned against one another, but today’s sorority women are looking for a place where there are both expectations, but individual needs are also considered. They seek a group of women they can turn to in need and for challenge to reach the next level of development.

A second recommendation pertains to the current image of sororities and what can be done to enhance the ability of the average chapter and member ability to enhance it. During the
current member focus group, several minutes were spent on media influence. Many national sorority organizations provide extensive recruitment manuals likely constructed by eager and caring volunteers and talented national headquarters staff members. As well intentioned as these are, they do not meet the need of the current sorority to fully understand their own mission, public relations battles, and unique chapter identity as posited through the institutional culture that they are a part of. Work is needed to help chapter leaders to guide fellow members in understanding that they are as a unique chapter, their membership goals, and how to communicate their own strengths, talents, and shortfalls in the recruitment process. Perhaps some organizations already do that, but clearly not enough or not in the frequency that it should as there were six too many women who desired to join sororities but felt disappointed by the outcome largely due to being sold a sorority experience that the given organization did not actually put into practice.

Third, once members have made the initial new member education commitment, it is important to solidify that decision through intentional membership development. The use of Gilligan’s (1981; 1982; 1998; Brown & Gilligan, 1992) research on women’s development and relationships or other student development theories could be beneficial to the development of women’s Greek life communities and individual chapters. Sorority organizations could benefit from building stronger women leaders by providing resources that will enhance member’s experiences in an intentional manner based on student development theory and the current needs of women in higher education.

Finally, it is evident that fraternity and sorority communities need to be in tune to the larger membership culture. This means understanding how the majority of members pay dues,
the goal for students on that campus in joining, and members’ desires to live in chapter housing. Women in this study who had to choose between sorority activities and work felt alienated and left behind; their need to work was not valued by members who did not share that struggle. The silent divide often neglected among many members is socioecomic status. Although finances were not the primary reason for ending membership, the requirements and time necessity stacked up against the value of the organization. Today’s college women view their time as a resource they carefully allocate and give to causes that they believe will help them in their collegiate experience for a multitude of reasons. For the chapter and campus-based advisor, the role in this situation is to question what is worthy of member’s time and begin to counter the culture of filling up schedules and acting as the dominant force in a member’s life. This means questioning requirements, considering how to make each activity meaningful and focused on intended outcomes, and working with chapter leadership to reevaluate how sisters who work outside jobs, internships, or other significant academic activities are treated according to organizational expectations.

Recommendations for Future Research

Continued study and published research results of the experiences of fraternity and sorority members would be beneficial to the ability of many practitioners to serve Greek life organizations. In particular, the relationship of other women’s development theories as it relates the sorority membership experience could provide beneficial insight as to the experiences women are having through these organizations. In addition, overall statistical compilation of membership withdrawal records is needed on the campus and fraternal organization headquarters levels. The more one can understand about the genuine reasons for why members decide to join
and then leave, the better able one is to provide improved services based on preventing membership attrition of remaining members. Finally, fraternity and sorority organizations could benefit from additional research on the membership experience and what resources are needed at various phases of membership. This study revealed levels of dissatisfaction that occurred during the first year, resulting in withdrawal from the organization. Through additional research, understanding membership needs and relating them to practice for the varying stages of membership would be beneficial to the Greek life community.

In conclusion, there are many strengths and challenges in today’s fraternal organizations, specifically Panhellenic sorority communities. However, with the commitment of current members and alumnae to continual improvement, sororities will be able to achieve and realize their full potential. This research presents lessons for future practice and a springboard to continued study in the field to understand not only the experience of sorority members, but the nature of women’s development within these organizations.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A:

Informed Consent Form – Focus Group

Dear Participant,

The Department of College Student Personnel at Bowling Green State University supports the protection of human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University.

The purpose of this study is to understand the membership experience of Bowling Green State University undergraduate women who have been members of recognized campus sororities affiliated with the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC). Procedures for this study include a one-hour to ninety minute focus group with 6-8 BGSU sorority women with a graduate student in the College Student Personnel program regarding your experiences when in the process of joining and being a member of a NPC-affiliated sorority. The interviews will be tape-recorded for accuracy and later transcribed. We do not anticipate any potential risks to participants in this study, nor do we anticipate any direct benefits to those who participate. There is no financial compensation for your participation in this research.

If you agree to participate, your information will be kept confidential. Your name will not be associated in any way with the information collected or with the research findings from this study. The researcher will use a study number, initials, or a pseudonym instead of your name. Furthermore, you may withdraw your consent to participate in the study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose information collected about you at any time by personal request to Renee Piquette-Wiedenhoeft at the College Student Personnel department at Bowling Green State University. If you cancel permission to use your information, the researchers will stop collecting additional information about you. However, the research team may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above.

Participant Certification:

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask and I have received answer to any question I had regarding the study and the use and disclosure of information about me for the study. I have been informed that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board (419) 372-6916 or write to The Office of Research Compliance, 201 South Hall, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH 43403-0183. In addition, if I have questions or concerns about the study I may contact Principal Investigator Renee Piquette-Wiedenhoeft and project advisor Dr. Robert Debard through the College Student Personnel program at Bowling Green State University at (419) 372-8342 or by mail at 330 Education Building, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH 43403.

330 Education Building  Phone: 419-372-7382  E-mail: hesa@bgsu.edu
Bowling Green, OH 43403-0244  Fax: 419-372-9382  http://www.bgsu.edu/colleges/edhd/hesa
I agree to take part of this study as a research participant. I further agree to the uses and disclosures of my information as described above. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

____________________________________  __________________
Type/Print Participant’s Name                      Date

____________________________________
Participant’s Signature
Informed Consent Form – Individual Interview

Dear Participant,

The Department of College Student Personnel at Bowling Green State University supports the protection of human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University.

The purpose of this study is to understand the membership experience of Bowling Green State University undergraduate women who have been members of recognized campus sororities affiliated with the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC). Procedures for this study include a one-hour personal interview with a graduate student in the College Student Personnel program regarding your experiences during the process of joining and being a member of a NPC-affiliated sorority. The interviews will be tape-recorded for accuracy and later transcribed. We do not anticipate any potential risks to participants in this study, nor do we anticipate any direct benefits to those who participate. There is no financial compensation for your participation in this research.

If you agree to participate, your information will be kept confidential. Your name will not be associated in any way with the information collected or with the research findings from this study. The researcher will use a study number, initials, or a pseudonym instead of your name. Furthermore, you may withdraw your consent to participate in the study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose information collected about you at any time by personal request to Renee Piquette-Wiedenhoeft at the College Student Personnel department at Bowling Green State University. If you cancel permission to use your information, the researchers will stop collecting additional information about you. However, the research team may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above.

Participant Certification:

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask and I have received answer to, any question I had regarding the study and the use and disclosure of information about me for the study. I have been informed that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-6916 or write to The Office of Research Compliance, 201 South Hall, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH 43403-0183. In addition, if I have questions or concerns about the study, I may contact Principal Investigator Renee Piquette-Wiedenhoeft and project advisor Dr. Robert Debard through the College Student Personnel program at Bowling Green State University at (419) 372-8342 or by mail at 330 Education Building, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH 43403.
I agree to take part of this study as a research participant. I further agree to the uses and disclosures of my information as described above. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

______________________________________
Type/Print Participant’s Name

______________________________________
Participant’s Signature

______________________________________
Date
APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Script:

“Hello, I am Renee Piquette-Wiedenhoeft, a current graduate student in the College Student Personnel program here at Bowling Green State University. As you know, today you are participating in a [focus group/interview] regarding your experiences with Panhellenic sororities on our campus. I have handed out to you an Informed Consent form. Know that at any point during the research you are free to leave and remove yourself from the room. In addition, you do not have to answer any questions posed today by the researcher. Your identity and any specific chapters or individuals you discuss will be kept confidential and will remain only between the participants of this room. Specific names of any participant, chapter or significant identifying information will not be used in the final research project. All identifying information used by the researcher for the purpose of analysis, including the audio tape used today and any transcripts will be kept safe, whether locked or password-protected, throughout the research analysis and writing process and will be destroyed when research is complete. Please read the Informed Consent form. Are there any questions before the [focus group/interview] begins? When you are ready, please sign the informed consent form. Thank you for your time.”
APPENDIX D

BGSU Sorority Membership

*Table details members who affiliated and were initiated during the 2006 fall semester and total members lost from each chapter as of 1/15/2008.*

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<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Total Fall 2006 Membership</th>
<th>Total Members Lost (as of 1/15/2008)</th>
<th>Percentage Retention</th>
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<td>A</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3</td>
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<th>All Chapter Fall 2006 Membership</th>
<th>Total Chapter Membership Loss</th>
<th>Percentage Total Chapter Retention</th>
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</table>
APPENDIX E

E-mail to Greek House Directors and Current Sorority Chapter Presidents:

Dear [Greek House Director/Chapter President],

I am Renee Piquette-Wiedenhoeft, a current graduate student in the College Student Program at Bowling Green State University. I am currently working on a thesis research project pertaining to Panhellenic sorority women at BGSU. This research is affiliated with the College Student Personnel program, approved by the BGSU Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB), and endorsed by the Center for the Study of the College Fraternity and National Panhellenic Conference (NPC).

As part of the research, I am looking to conduct a focus group of current sorority women who affiliated during the fall 2006 semester. If there are any women who are still members of your chapter that would be interested to discuss their experiences with, please send me their name and phone number and I will get in contact with them.

In addition, I am also looking to talk to women who joined the chapter you work with during fall 2006, but quit and remain students at BGSU. If you could provide these women’s names and any contact information you have that would be great. I will be looking to conduct individual interviews with six to eight previous sorority women total.

The purpose of this study is to further understand current membership attrition of Panhellenic sorority women in the BGSU community. Qualitative research methodology will be used to investigate trends and common themes between a variety of sorority chapters and through the lens of a number of women’s experiences. This includes both women who have decided to end their membership and those who have continued being a member. This research is
supported by BGSU Office of Greek Affairs, the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC), and the Center for the Study of the College Fraternity.

Thank you for your time. Please e-mail me or call me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Renee Piquette-Wiedenhoef

reneemp@bgsu.edu
APPENDIX F

Phone Call to Participants Script:

“Hello, I’m Renee Piquette-Wiedenhoeft, current graduate student in the College Student Personnel program at Bowling Green State University. I’m wondering if you have a couple minutes to talk about your involvement experiences so far. [Pending answer from potential participant]. Great, as part of my graduate research, I am interested in talking with you more about your experience joining a sorority last year. I would greatly appreciate your time to discuss this more in depth. I would only need [60-90 minutes for a focus group/an hour for individual interviews] from you. Would you be interested in being part of my [focus group/individual interview] on [date to be determined for focus group/mutually determined date for interview]?”
APPENDIX G

Interview Questions:

Questions for member and non-member women (to be used in the sorority current member focus group and the previous-member interviews):

1. Describe the process you went through when selecting a sorority to join?
   a. Potential follow-up/probes: What did you look for?
   b. What was important to you?

2. How would you describe the beginning of your membership, also known as the new member education period?
   a. How did you feel as a new member and then as a new initiate?

3. What were your expectations for sorority membership?
   a. Was there anything you hoped to gain or experience from being a member?

4. Was there a point where you felt that what you expected and what you experienced did not align?

5. How did you reconcile that feeling?

6. What feelings and experiences do you currently associate with sorority membership?

Questions for remaining sorority members (focus group only) include:

7. What do you think when women from your chapter decide to quit?

8. Describe your current experience in your chapter. How do you feel about it day-to-day?

9. Looking three to four years from now, what do you think your expectations for sorority membership will be?
Questions for previous sorority members (individual interviews only) include:

7. Describe your decision to leave the sorority.
   a. What factors did you consider?
   b. Was there a time or moment when you knew that was the right decision for you and what was that like?

8. What are your relationships like now with women who you met through sorority membership?

9. Do you think there is anything that would have made your sorority experience different?
   a. Would that have affected your decision to leave the chapter?