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*The authors explored the attitudes and beliefs of heterosexual sorority women toward lesbian and bisexual members at an urban, mid-western, private research university. The authors used a researcher-developed tool consisting of fifty-four Likert scale questions reduced to eight factors to provide evidence of measurement validity. A key finding of this study was that sorority women viewed themselves as very accepting of lesbian and bisexual members and held the belief that same-sex attraction in women is not immoral or inconsistent with their sorority values.*

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**SPECIAL SECTION: RESEARCH REPORT**  
**COLLABORATION BETWEEN FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS AND**  
**COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN ADDRESSING STUDENT CONDUCT**  
**ISSUES**

**A WHITE PAPER PREPARED FOR THE FRATERNITY EXECUTIVES ASSOCIATION**

**BRENT G. PATERSON**

*In fall 2011, Kim Novak, a risk management consultant and Larry Wiese, then president of the Fraternity Executives Association (FEA) and Executive Director of Kappa Alpha Order approached the author about writing a White Paper that examined collaboration between staff from inter/national fraternity headquarters, chapter alumni leadership and administrators at colleges and universities in addressing student conduct by members of a chapter. The White Paper was presented at the FEA annual meeting in July 2012. The content of this article remains largely unchanged from the original White Paper and is published with permission from FEA.*

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Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors advances the study of college fraternities and sororities through a peer reviewed academic journal promoting scholarly discourse among partners invested in the college fraternal movement. The vision of Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors is to serve as the premier forum for academic discourse and scholarly inquiry regarding the college fraternity and sorority movement.

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### **SUBMISSIONS:**

Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors accepts submissions focused on articulating research involving fraternity and sorority members at the collegiate, alumni, inter/national organization, and volunteer advisory levels. Manuscripts should be written for the student affairs generalist who has broad responsibility for educational leadership, policy, staff development, and management. Articles on specialized topics should provide the generalist with an understanding of the importance of the program to student affairs overall and fraternity/sorority advising specifically.

Research articles for Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors should stress the underlying issues or problems that stimulated the research; treat the methodology concisely; and, most importantly, offer a full discussion of results, implications, and conclusions. In the belief that AFA readers have much to learn from one another, we also encourage the submission of thoughtful, documented essays or historical perspectives.

Visit <http://afa1976.org> for more detailed submission guidelines.

# INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH REPORT

PATRICK BIDDIX, ORACLE EDITOR

In this issue of Oracle, we introduce a new form of scholarship to the publication: The research report. The primary characteristic of a research report is its central purpose: To address a specific question about practice.

Research reports share some common characteristics of journal articles or book chapters. They contain the basic components of a traditional article such as an introduction with a purpose statement, research questions (which may or may not be explicit), a review of previous literature or relevant background information, and a report of findings. The findings may derive solely from the review of literature or may result from new empirical data or a study of archival data. Often, a research report does not have a methodology section or relegates those details to an appendix, largely because the audience is aimed more narrowly at decision-makers. While the most visible difference between a research report and a journal article may be the lack of an explicit and standardized format, both relate results in some way.

Depending on the audience, a research report may include discussion or implications, but this is not as customary as it is for journal articles. A key difference is that research reports are rarely peer-reviewed, as the purpose for a research report tends to be geared toward serving a more narrowly focused audience and advancing a broader, longer term research agenda. Further, peer-reviewed articles in most cases have a larger audience and wider distribution than research reports. By contrast, research reports serve more diverse actors within their audiences who are all focused on a narrower dilemma of practice. Author/s have flexibility in format, length, and style; format elements may be dictated by the organization. Further, a research report may be commissioned, sponsored, or simply requested by an organization and the degree of influence may influence the results.

So, why publish a research report in Oracle, a peer-reviewed journal? In its most recent Strategic Plan (2011-2013) the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors articulated a commitment to research and development, articulated as expanding and validating the body of knowledge related to the fraternity/sorority experience. Many of the editorial board members have either served as campus professionals or have worked in some way with inter/national fraternity/sorority offices, organizing groups such as the National Panhellenic Conference, or advocacy groups such as HazingPrevention.Org. Each of these entities regularly produce research reports that serve a variety of immediate purposes-- from grade reports on to gauge the academic performance of campus organizations to annual risk management reports to consider the current status of risk and liability among all groups. The basic tenets of such activities classify their reports as applied research-- in some ways more important, at least to their intended audiences, than journal article authors working to advance a focused conversation about facets of the field through a much wider audience. Unfortunately, much of this invaluable research is read and filed because it is not reaching practice-oriented audiences in a readily applied format.

To truly “engage in and advocate for both academic and applied research related to the fraternity/sorority experience and advising profession” (AFA Strategic Goal #2), we believe it is important to distribute other equally valuable forms of research. We also believe Oracle is a venue where this research may find an advantageous home-- providing practitioners and scholars access to the breadth, depth, and diversity of findings produced by and for fraternal organizations. To that end, we invite all comers. We cannot stray entirely from the core focus of Oracle on sparking and cultivating peer-reviewed studies. Yet, we hope to provide a space for methodologically sound research that can be beneficial to the greater field. The publication process will require some copyediting and clarification, but we are committed to preserving the content. For example, in the report published for this issue, we requested the author provide two paragraphs of context and we did not publish the original transcripts from interviews. Otherwise, the report appears as it did when submitted to Fraternal Executives Association (FEA).

We hope in the coming issues you will find this periodic section insightful and consider information you might send us for review and possible inclusion.

# ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS OF HETEROSEXUAL SORORITY WOMEN TOWARD LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL CHAPTER MEMBERS

DANIEL C. NEUMANN, MARK A. KRETOVICS, & ELISABETH C. ROCCOFORTE

*The authors explored the attitudes and beliefs of heterosexual sorority women toward lesbian and bisexual members at an urban, mid-western, private research university. The authors used a researcher-developed tool consisting of fifty-four Likert scale questions reduced to eight factors to provide evidence of measurement validity. A key finding of this study was that sorority women viewed themselves as very accepting of lesbian and bisexual members and held the belief that same-sex attraction in women is not immoral or inconsistent with their sorority values.*

The experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual members of fraternities and sororities have only recently begun to be studied closely (Rankin et al., 2007). This research area provides insight into what were once perceived as purely heterosexual organizations due to the perceived or actual need for lesbian, gay, and bisexual members to keep sexual orientation private (Case, Hesp, & Eberly, 2005). The present study sought to explore attitudes and beliefs of heterosexual sorority members toward their lesbian and bisexual chapter members. Studying the perceptions of heterosexual sorority members toward lesbian and bisexual members can provide campus administrators with an insight into a campus community where limited research has been completed (Case et al., 2005; Hinrichs & Rosenberg, 2002; Rankin et al., 2007). This understanding can aid administrators, faculty, and staff in advising, programming, and policy development affecting lesbian and bisexual student experiences on campus and especially within student organizations (Brown, Clarke, Gortmaker, & Robinson, 2004; Stevens, 2004). This insight also may inform strategies for improving the overall campus climate regarding tolerance and acceptance of others.

## TERMINOLOGY

The language, labels, and terms used to reference or identify non-heterosexual people and communities are complex and continually changing. Therefore, it is critical to define the terms used within this study. The authors referred to the Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients as adopted by the American Psychological Association (APA) Council of Representatives. The APA refers to sexual orientation as “the sex of those to whom one is sexually and romantically attracted” (APA, 2011, para. 5). Sexual orientation can take multiple forms and one’s identification of their own sexual orientation is referred to as their sexual identity. The authors were interested in the attitudes and beliefs heterosexual women had toward non-heterosexual women, most often identified as lesbian and bisexual. In addition, the authors included the options of gay, queer, and questioning when participants were asked for their sexual identity and when asked about the non-heterosexual community in general. The terms “queer” most often refers to any identity other than normative heterosexuality

and “questioning” refers to someone who is in the process of understanding their sexual orientation as non-heterosexual, but they have yet to come to a better understanding of their identity.

In this study, the authors did not include the attitudes toward and experience of transgender sorority women as the study was focused on sexual identity as opposed to gender identity. Gender identity refers to “one’s sense of oneself as male, female, or transgender” (APA, 2011, para. 3). Research has shown attitudes toward transgender individuals can differ from attitudes toward members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning (LGBQQ) community and often “much of the limited research aggregates transgender college students with their lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) peers, assuming the needs of the populations are similar” (Dugan, Kusel, & Simounet, 2012, p. 719). In order to reflect the focus of the present study, the authors did not use the common acronym, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender), but instead used the acronym LGBQQ to refer to the minority sexual identities most prevalent on campus.

### ***LGBQQ Fraternity/Sorority Members***

Hughes (1991) examined the experience of GLB members in fraternities and sororities as well as the challenges chapters faced as members struggled with accepting GLB members. GLB members reported feeling isolated and frustrated by the need to conform to the group norms. Feelings of isolation were reinforced by the social events and programming which are overwhelmingly heterosexual in nature and focus on meeting students of the opposite gender. GLB members stated they felt the need to compensate and express an overtly heterosexual orientation to feel secure within their chapters. Chapters seen as being too accepting of GLB members were often the subject of vandalism, had fewer requests for partnering on programs and events, and their

members were targeted for harassment or isolation (Hughes).

Case et al. (2005) surveyed 472 gay and bisexual men and 52 lesbian and bisexual women involved fraternities and sororities in a study assessing self-identified GLB member experiences. Questions included reasons for joining, how membership affected sexual identity development, and level of acceptance from fellow members. A snowball sampling method was used to identify participants for this study; data were collected between 1992 and 1995 and participants average age was 31 for men and 32 for women. Based on their findings, the researchers estimated 5-6% of fraternity chapter members identified as gay or bisexual and 3-4% of sorority chapter members identified as lesbian or bisexual. Seventy percent of the respondents reported they had encountered a climate of homophobic or heterosexual behaviors or attitudes within their respective chapters. However, 39% of respondents who joined after 1980 reported they had revealed their GLB sexual orientation to one or more of their chapter members while in college. Eighty-nine percent of the men and 81% of the women reported they were “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” with their overall fraternity/sorority experience; however, the majority indicated their sexual orientation detracted from their experience. The authors also found that chapters seemed unwilling to recruit or initiate lesbian or gay students, but were more accepting if they came out after initiation.

Hall and La France (2007) studied the attitudes and communication of homophobia in fraternities by administering a questionnaire to 98 fraternity men at a mid-sized, urban, non-parochial private university in the southwest. The researchers found that as attitudes became increasingly homophobic, concerns about appearing gay increased. Similarly, as participant concerns about appearing to be gay increased, their frequency of making homophobic

comments also increased. The researchers also found that as a fraternity member's attitude became more positive toward gay individuals, his perception of other members' homophobic communication increased. In addition, the more frequent a member's own negative communications about gay men became, the more frequent the member perceived others to make negative comments about gay men.

Several researchers have found sorority members have a more traditional gender role belief system than their non-member peers (Kalof & Cargill, 1991; Kamm & Rentz, 1994). The gender belief system is a "set of beliefs and opinions about males and females and about the purported qualities of masculinity and femininity" (Kite & Whitley, 1998, p. 97). This might suggest members of sororities have more negative attitudes toward lesbian and bisexual individuals, as research has shown individuals who endorse more traditional gender-role beliefs held more negative attitudes toward gay and lesbians (Kite & Whitley; Whitley, 2001). However, Robinson, Gibson-Beverly, and Schwartz (2004) found sorority women endorsed less stereotypical attitudes than non-sorority members. This was supported by Hinirchs and Rosenberg's (2002) research, which showed fraternity and sorority members did not have different attitudes toward lesbian and gay individuals than their non-fraternity and sorority peers.

The literature provided a glimpse into the experience of LGB fraternity and sorority members, but more research is needed to examine the specific experiences of non-heterosexually identified members. The literature is also lacking research on the beliefs and attitudes of heterosexual men and women in fraternities and sororities and how their attitudes and beliefs towards LGB members might influence chapter culture and operations. For this study, the authors focused on the attitudes and beliefs of heterosexual sorority members due to the perceived lack of lesbian

and bisexual sorority women as opposed to the prevalence of gay and bisexual fraternity men on-campus.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Purpose*

This descriptive study was designed to determine the attitudes and beliefs of current sorority members regarding women who identify as non-heterosexual, most commonly referred to in this study as lesbian and bisexual, and what impact those beliefs have on chapter operations. The researchers conducted a quantitative study to examine the following research questions:

1. What are the attitudes and beliefs of heterosexual sorority women toward lesbian and bisexual women in sororities?
2. How do the attitudes and beliefs of heterosexual sorority members toward lesbian and bisexual members influence chapter operations including recruitment, group cohesion, fraternity partnerships, feminine identity, communication, and alumna interactions?

### *Participants*

This study was conducted by surveying initiated undergraduate members of sororities at an urban, mid-western, private research university. The institution's undergraduate student population of just over 4,000 was 47% female with 22% of women holding membership in a sorority at the time of data collection.

In the spring of 2012, during the first week of classes, the researchers emailed an invitation to participate in the research study to all active undergraduate members of sororities (N = 393). Data were collected during January and February of 2012. In total, 66.7% of sorority

women (n = 262) participated in the study, while 62.8% of sorority women (N = 247) provided complete responses. Ten participants identified as LGBQQ and were removed from the sample, resulting in a final sample size of 237 self-identified heterosexual sorority women. Seventy-nine percent (n = 195) of the participants identified as White, 13.4% (n = 33) as Asian, and 3.7% (n = 9) identified as another racial category (American Indian, Native Alaskan, Black, Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Latino). Due to a deferred recruitment model, no first-year women were included in the sample.

### ***Instrument***

The Web-based survey was created through a collaboration between the Office of Greek Life, the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Center, and the Institutional Research Office. Participants were asked demographic questions followed by a series of Likert-scale questions ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) to obtain information on the individual's personal beliefs regarding members of the LGBQQ community. The survey considered the degree to which sorority women were comfortable interacting with lesbians and bisexuals; whether the chapter membership was supportive of lesbian and bisexual members; of the level to which alumna and alumnae groups accepted lesbian and bisexual members; and current programming about the larger LGBQQ community. Participants were also asked whether having lesbian members have/would positively, negatively, or had/have no effect on several areas of chapter operations.

Cronbach's Alpha was computed to determine the overall internal consistency reliability of the survey instrument. The alpha of 0.936 indicated that overall, the instrument was a reliable measure of the construct so an exploratory factor analysis was carried out as another measure of internal validity and also to determine if specific survey items could be

grouped together for the purpose of analysis (Gliner, Morgan, & Leech, 2009). The factors can provide researchers a tool in studying potential differences in the beliefs and attitudes of different subgroups in sororities.

### ***Data Analysis***

When using a researcher-developed instrument to measure a complex construct it is prudent to conduct a factor analysis to determine which underlying aspects or sub-constructs are also being measured (Gliner et al., 2009). These sub-constructs can then be utilized to reduce the number of independent variables to be explored. Comery and Lee (1992) stated that a factor loading was "excellent" if the loading was above 0.71, "pretty good" if it was 0.63, "good" if it was 0.55, "average" if it was 0.45 and "poor" if it was 0.32 or below. The researchers determined that any item loading above 0.32 (poor) was acceptable for an item to be included in the factor.

To determine if the data points were eligible for factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure for Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were applied. In this study, the KMO value was determined to be 0.884. Leech, Barrett, and Morgan (2005) stated a KMO value between 0.80 - 0.90 is "good." The Bartlett's Test, measuring homogeneity of variances, was significant [ $\chi^2 = 10,762.858$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ]. As a result of these tests, it was determined that an exploratory factor analysis could be applied (Leech et al.).

A common method to determine the number of factors to retain is for the eigenvalues, representing the measure of explained variance, to be greater than 1.0 for each factor (Leech et al., 2005). An eigenvalue of less than 1.0 indicates the factor explains less information than a single item (Leech et al., 2005). Using these criteria resulted in retaining 11 factors. A scree plot was then used to determine the number of factors to retain for analysis. It was found that the slope of the lines joining the

plotted eigenvalues was “more-or-less a straight line, not necessarily horizontal” after factor number eight, thus eight factors were retained (Jolliffe, 2002, p. 117). Researchers then named the eight factors after examining the content of

the survey items loading on each factor (Table 1). A summary of the eight factors including the number of items, loading, percent of variance accounted for, and Cronbach’s Alpha was determined as described below.

**Table 1**

*Primary Factors Affecting the Attitudes of Heterosexual Sorority Members Toward LGBQQ Members*

Factor	# of Items	Loading Range	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cronbach’s Alpha
1 Comfort & Engagement	12	0.825 - 0.418	16.758	31.034	0.936
2 Feminine Identity	9	0.859 - 0.659	5.564	10.304	0.936
3 Acceptance & Support	7	0.782 - 0.421	3.998	7.405	0.891
4 Personal Beliefs and Values	5	0.837 - 0.546	2.188	4.052	0.902
5 Advocacy	6	0.755 - 0.401	1.972	3.651	0.817
6 Sisterhood	2	0.734 - 0.721	1.582	2.930	0.983
7 Language	3	0.720 - 0.651	1.513	2.802	0.676
8 Programming	2	0.743 - 0.725	1.315	2.436	0.681

**Factor one (Comfort & Engagement).** This factor consisted of 12 survey items regarding the individual’s comfort level interacting with lesbian and bisexual women including how comfortable members were having a big sister (i.e., an older member assigned as a mentor) who identified as lesbian or bisexual and how comfortable they were having a member bring a same-sex date to a sorority social.

**Factor two (Feminine Identity).** This factor contained nine survey items that focused on the concept of heteronormative feminine identity, regarding the participants’ perceived expectations from their sorority sisters to dress/act like a girl/woman. In addition, this section contained several questions asking if the participant would give a bid to a prospective member if she did not meet the aforementioned expectations.

**Factor three (Acceptance & Support).** This factor included nine survey items such as “Would you accept a sister who identified as lesbian or bisexual?”, “Would you support a sister through the coming out process?”, and

“Would you encourage lesbians to join your sorority?”

**Factor four (Personal Beliefs and Values).** This factor consisted of five survey items regarding the personal beliefs and values of participants regarding same-sex attraction and same-sex relationships including “same-sex attraction is immoral” and “same-sex relationships conflict with the values of my sorority.”

**Factor five (Advocacy).** Factor five, consisted of six items regarding the participants’ interest in being an advocate for the broader lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning community. Items included participants’ current awareness about issues in the LGBQQ community, level of support for organizations that advocate for rights of LGBQQ individuals, and encouraging lesbians and bisexuals to join sororities. Items included “lesbians should be encouraged to join sororities” and “I am aware of current issues in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer community.”

**Factor six (Sisterhood).** Factor six consisted of two survey items regarding the participants' desire to remain a member of a sorority that has one or more out lesbian or bisexual sisters. These were "I would reconsider my membership if one of my sisters was a lesbian" and "I would reconsider my membership if one of my sisters was bisexual."

**Factor seven (Language).** Factor seven consisted of three survey items about the use of language in interpersonal communication, which asked the participant if "it is okay to use the phrase 'that's gay,'" what other chapter members believe, and whether "my sisters make negative comments about lesbians and bisexuals."

**Factor eight (Programming).** The last factor consisted of two survey items asking participants if their sorority sponsored educational programs on LGBQQ issues and if the chapter considers lesbian interests in chapter programming. These items were "my sorority sponsors educational programs on LGBQQ issues" and "my sorority considers lesbian interests in chapter programming."

## RESULTS

Upon completion of the factor analysis the items in each factor were reviewed by examining their mean and standard deviation to provide

greater clarity of the participant attitudes and beliefs surrounding LGBQQ involvement in sorority life on this campus.

### *Effect of Lesbian Membership*

To measure the effect or perceived effect of lesbian members in sororities, participants were asked whether the presence of lesbians in their chapter has affected or would affect several different areas of chapter operations. Participants were able to respond with "not sure," "negative effect," "no effect," or "positive effect" for each selected area. As shown in Table 2, the majority of participants believed there has been no effect or there would not be any effect of having lesbian members on sorority image (62%), recruitment (60%), sisterhood (71%), relationships with other sororities (66%), relationship with fraternities (60%), relationship with chapter alumnae (73%), relationship with alumna adviser (78%) and relationship with the national organization (74%). The areas of chapter operations that showed the largest positive response from participants were sisterhood (21%), relationship with chapter alumna (11%), and recruitment (11%). Relationship with fraternities (14%), sorority image (10%), and recruitment (9%) showed the largest negative response.

**Table 2**

*Reported Effect of Out Lesbian Members in Chapter by Heterosexual Participants*

	Not Sure	Negative	No Effect	Positive
Sorority Image	18.20%	10.20%	61.90%	9.70%
Recruitment	20.70%	8.90%	59.90%	10.50%
Sisterhood	6.80%	1.70%	70.90%	20.70%
Relationships with Sororities	18.10%	6.30%	66.20%	9.30%
Relationships with Fraternities	23.60%	13.50%	59.50%	3.40%
Relationship with Chapter Alumna	14.30%	2.10%	72.60%	11.00%
Relationship with Alumna Adviser	15.60%	0.40%	77.60%	6.30%
Relationship with National Organization	16.90%	2.10%	74.30%	6.30%

*\*percentages are used because several of the questions were negatively worded and reverse scored for analysis*

**Comfort Level Engaging With Lesbians/  
Bisexuals**

A series of questions asked about participants' comfort level with living and socializing with lesbian and bisexual women. The mean score for factor one (Comfort and Engagement) was 49.66 (sd = 8.011) with scores ranging from a low of 23 to a high of 60. As shown in Table 3, participants did not take an individual's sexual orientation into consideration before becoming friends with them (m = 4.49 sd = 0.66). Participants were comfortable being

around lesbian and bisexual women (m = 4.46 sd = 0.66), working closely with lesbians (m = 4.45 sd = 0.66), and attending sorority socials where lesbians are present (m = 4.41 sd = 0.73). Participants were still comfortable, but to a lesser degree, having a roommate who is lesbian (m = 3.79 sd = 1.11) and having women they did not know hit on them (m = 3.88 sd = 0.93). Participants' views toward their sisters dating each other were neutral with a mean score of 3.00 (sd = 1.23).

**Table 3**

*Factor One: Comfort Level Engaging With Lesbian/Bisexuals*

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
I do not take a person's sexual orientation into consideration before I become friends with them.	4.49	0.66
I would feel comfortable being around lesbian and bisexual women	4.46	0.66
I would feel comfortable working closely with lesbians	4.45	0.66
I would feel comfortable attending sorority socials where lesbians are present	4.41	0.73
I would feel comfortable with my sisters bringing same-sex dates to sorority socials	4.40	0.83
I would feel comfortable having a best friend who is bisexual	4.32	0.80
I would feel comfortable having a best friend who is lesbian	4.23	0.88
I would feel comfortable having a big sister who is lesbian	4.23	0.89
I would feel comfortable having a little sister who is lesbian	4.22	0.89
I would be offended if a woman I didn't know hit on me.	3.88	0.93
I would feel comfortable having a roommate who is lesbian	3.79	1.11
I would feel comfortable with my sisters dating each other	3.00	1.23

\*Note: A Likert Scale from strongly disagree (1) - neutral (3) - strongly agree (5) was used

**Feminine Identity**

The Feminine Identity factor measured participant expectations and perceptions of their sisters' expectations that their sorority sisters follow the heteronormative expectations of what it means to dress and act as a girl/

woman. This factor had a mean score of 27.27 (sd = 7.49) with scores ranging from 11 to a maximum of 45, which represents strong disagreement that members of the participants' chapters have to follow traditional gender norms in the way they dress and act. As shown

in Table 4, participants' expectations that their chapter members do not have to act like a girl/woman ( $m = 2.77$   $sd = 1.05$ ), matched their perception of the expectations of their sorority sisters ( $m = 2.77$   $sd = 1.01$ ). The participants

had the same expectation regardless of sexual orientation. While the participants expected their sisters to dress like a girl/woman, they said would still give a bid to a prospective member that did not dress like a girl/woman ( $m = 3.58$   $sd = 0.98$ ).

**Table 4**

*Factor Two: Feminine Identity*

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
My sisters do not expect me to act like a girl/woman	2.77	1.05
I do not expect my sorority sisters to act like girls/women	2.77	1.01
My sisters do not expect me to dress like a girl/woman	2.79	1.06
I do not expect my sorority sisters to dress like girls/women	2.81	1.04
My sisters do not expect/would expect lesbian sisters to dress like a girl/woman	2.92	1.02
I do not expect my sorority sisters to act like girls/women regardless of their sexual orientation	3.01	1.02
I do not expect my sorority sisters to dress like girls/women regardless of their sexual orientation	3.06	1.03
I would give a bid to a prospective member who didn't act like a girl/woman.	3.57	1.01
I would give a bid to a prospective member who didn't dress like a girl/woman.	3.58	0.98

*\*Note: A Likert Scale from strongly disagree (1) - neutral (3) - strongly agree (5) was used*

### **Acceptance and Support**

The Acceptance and Support factor measured the willingness of the participant's chapter, as perceived by individual members, to accept lesbian and bisexual members into the chapter, the support and acceptance of "out" members of the chapter and the likeliness they would attend educational programs on lesbian and bisexual issues. The average score for this factor was a 37.70 ( $sd = 4.74$ ) with a range from 22 to a maximum of 45 representing the most accepting and supporting chapter members. As shown in Table 5, participants agreed their sisters would give a bid to a lesbian/bisexual if

they felt she was a good match for their sorority ( $m = 4.55$   $sd = 0.62$ ), however, they perceived their sisters were less likely to encourage lesbians to join their sorority ( $m = 3.47$   $sd = 0.76$ ). Participants felt their sisters either do or would support sisters who are open about being a lesbian ( $m = 4.46$   $sd = 0.59$ ) or bisexual ( $m = 4.31$   $sd = 0.31$ ). Participants agreed that their sisters, to a slightly lesser degree, encourage lesbian sisters to come out ( $m = 4.11$   $sd = 0.71$ ). Participants also believed their sorority sisters would accept them if they were lesbian ( $m = 4.38$   $sd = 0.63$ ) or bisexual ( $m = 4.38$   $sd = 0.64$ ).

**Table 5***Factor Three: Acceptance and Support*

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
My sisters would consider giving a bid to a lesbian/bisexual if they felt she was a good match for the sorority	4.55	0.62
My sisters support/would support sisters who are open about being lesbian	4.46	0.59
My sisters would accept me if I was lesbian	4.38	0.63
My sisters would accept me if I was bisexual	4.38	0.64
My sorority supports/would support sisters who are open about being lesbian and/or bisexual	4.31	0.66
My sorority executive board supports/would support sisters who are in the processing of coming out	4.31	0.66
My sisters encourage/would encourage lesbian sisters to come out	4.11	0.71
My sisters would attend educational programs on lesbian and bisexual issues 3	.91	0.72
My sisters encourage lesbians to join our sorority	3.47	0.76

\*Note: A Likert Scale from strongly disagree (1) - neutral (3) - strongly agree (5) was used

### **Personal Beliefs and Values**

The Personal Beliefs and Values factor consisted of five questions regarding the participants' beliefs regarding same-sex attraction and relationships. The mean score for this factor was a 21.86 (sd = 3.74) with a range from 9 to a maximum of 25 representing the most accepting beliefs. As shown in Table 6, participants agreed that same-sex attraction (m

= 4.56 sd = 0.75) and same-sex relationships (m = 4.50 sd = 0.86) are not immoral (scales were reversed for data analysis). They also agreed that same-sex relationships do not conflict with the values of their sorority (m = 4.57 sd = .67) or their personal beliefs (m = 4.35 sd = 1.03). Finally, participants agreed that same-sex attraction in women is a natural expression of sexuality (m = 3.97 sd = 0.96).

**Table 6***Factor Four: Personal Beliefs and Values*

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
Same-sex attraction in women is a natural expression of sexuality	3.97	0.96
Same-sex attraction is not immoral	4.56	0.74
Same-sex relationships are not immoral	4.50	0.86
Same-sex relationships do not conflict with the values of my sorority	4.57	0.67
Same-sex relationships do not conflict with my personal values	4.35	1.03

\*Note: A Likert Scale from strongly disagree (1) - neutral (3) - strongly agree (5) was used

### **Advocacy**

The Advocate factor consisted of five questions regarding whether or not a participant encourages lesbian and bisexuals to join sororities and if members are aware of or interested in learning about current issues pertinent to the LGBQQ community. The average score was a 23.58 (sd = 3.65) with a range from 6 to a maximum of 30. As shown in Table 7, participants agreed that they supported organizations that advocate for the rights of LGBQQ people (m = 4.25 sd = 0.81), however, they were less likely to agree that they were aware of current issues in the LGBQ community (m = 3.41 sd = 0.77) and that they were interested in learning about current issues (m = 3.60 sd = 0.95). Participants believed their sisters were likely to encourage lesbians to join sororities (m = 3.47 sd = 0.76), however, in general participants believed they were more likely to encourage lesbians (m = 4.14 sd = 0.81) to join sororities than their chapter sisters.

### **Sisterhood**

Two questions make up the sisterhood factor relating to the likelihood that the participant will remain in a sorority if one of her sisters was a lesbian or bisexual. The mean score was a 9.58 (sd = .98) with a minimum possible score of 2 and maximum of 10. As shown in Table 8, participants strongly agreed that they would not consider leaving their respective sorority if a sister revealed she was lesbian (m = 4.80 sd = 0.49) or bisexual (m = 4.78 sd = .49).

### **Language**

The Language factor included three questions that asked the participants' perceptions on negative comments about lesbians and bisexuals. As shown in Table 9, participants agreed that their sorority sisters did not make negative comments about lesbians and/or bisexuals (m

= 4.44 sd = 0.65). Participants also agreed that it is not okay to use the phrase "that's gay" (m = 4.29 sd = 0.91), however, they were slightly less likely to say their sorority sisters held the belief to the same extent (m = 3.87 sd = 0.97).

### **Programming**

The final factor, Programming, consisted of two questions and considered chapter efforts to include educational programming on LGBQQ issues as well as lesbians' interests in chapter programming. The mean score for factor eight was a 5.30 with a range from two to ten, with ten representing strongly agreeing with the inclusion of LGBQQ programming. As shown in Table 10, participants disagreed that their sorority sponsors educational programs on LGBQQ issues (m = 2.68 sd = 0.81) and includes lesbian interests in chapter programming (m = 2.64 sd = 0.82).

## **DISCUSSION**

This study examined the attitudes of heterosexual sorority women toward lesbian and bisexual members. One of the key findings of this study indicates sorority members at this midwestern institution view themselves as very accepting of lesbian and bisexual members. Participants also perceive their sorority sisters to be accepting, although to a slightly lesser degree. Participants in this study also believe that same-sex attraction and same-sex relationships are not immoral nor do these relationships conflict with the stated values of their organizations. These results are similar to those by Hinrichs and Rosenberg (2002), who found sorority members scored a 4.17 on the Homosexuality Attitude Scale where a 5 is defined as "very accepting." The belief that same-sex attraction is not immoral, combined with the lack of current educational programming on LGBQQ issues in sororities,

**Table 7***Factor Five: Advocacy*

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
Lesbians should be encouraged to join sororities	4.14	0.81
Bisexuals should be encouraged to join sororities	4.10	0.81
Lesbians who are out should be admired for their courage	4.09	0.82
I am aware of current issues in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer community	3.41	0.77
I am interested in learning about current issues in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer community	3.47	0.76
I support organizations that advocate for the rights of LGBQQ people	4.25	0.81

**Table 8***Factor Six: Sisterhood*

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
I would not reconsider my membership if one of my sisters was a lesbian	4.80	0.49
I would not reconsider my membership if one of my sisters was bisexual	4.78	0.49

**Table 9***Factor Seven: Language*

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
It is not ok to say "that's gay"	4.29	0.91
My sisters do not make negative comments about lesbians and bisexuals	4.44	0.65
My sisters do not think it is okay to say "that's gay"	3.87	0.97

**Table 10***Factor Eight: Programming*

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
My sorority sponsors educational programs on LGBQQ issues	2.68	0.81
My sorority considers lesbian interests in Chapter programming	2.64	0.82

\*Note: A Likert Scale from strongly disagree (1) - neutral (3) - strongly agree (5) was used for tables 1 through 10.

may indicate a greater readiness amongst this population for programming and activities. Perhaps a more active campaign to include sorority members in LGBQQ ally training may be appropriate, and timely? In addition to educating the membership, such as providing LGBQQ ally training or participating in a safe space program, another recommendation is to invite sorority members to demonstrate a public showing of support for the LGBQQ community which could, in turn, increase the comfort level of lesbian and bisexual students within sororities, and further empower positive identity development (Stevens, 2004).

A second finding of this study is the sorority women at this campus believe the addition of lesbian and bisexual sorority sisters into their membership will have no effect on multiple aspects of chapter operations including recruitment, chapter image, and sisterhood, as long as they look and dress like women. While no effect may appear to be better than a negative effect, Fassinger (1991) suggests due to a societal stigma attached to sexual orientation, an environment that lacks either positive or negative indicators (null environment) is similar in many ways to a hostile environment. This provides an opportunity for proactive, rather than reactive education of undergraduate and alumna sorority women about the opportunities and educational benefits of having a diverse membership. Education on lesbian and bisexual topics will also provide undergraduate members tools to help make sorority environments more welcoming for lesbian and bisexual individuals.

These data show sorority women as willing to offer membership to lesbian and bisexual prospective members, encourage sisters to come out, and were supportive of out sisters; however, previous research found that chapters seemed unwilling to invite lesbian and gay students to join, but were more likely to accept them if they came out after initiation (Case, et. al., 2005). While the sorority women were willing to give bids to lesbian and bisexual

prospective members, the researchers found sorority members were less likely to encourage lesbian women to join sororities. Although it is encouraging the members are likely to accept women coming out after they join, the lack of proactive recruitment within the lesbian and bisexual community might send the message that the sororities don't value already "out" women as positive members of their sorority. In order to reach members of the lesbian and bisexual community, undergraduate leaders can utilize the LGB resources on campus such as the professional staff providing support to the LGB community as well as the multiple LGB student groups that are likely to exist. Campus based professionals can establish these connections by inviting representatives from the student groups or professional colleagues to attend a leadership retreat or council meeting.

Throughout the study, multiple survey items grouped lesbian and bisexual women together, as similar studies have done previously (Case et. al, 2005; Engberg, Hurtado, Smith, 2007; Hinrichs & Rosenberg, 2004; Stotzer, 2009). Herek (2002), however, found that attitudes toward bisexual men and women were more negative than toward lesbian women and gay men. To examine any potential difference in attitudes between the two communities this study asked four survey items twice, the first regarding lesbians and the second regarding bisexuals. Significance testing for each survey item showed no significant difference between the means for lesbians or bisexuals. This suggests the sorority women in this community do not view bisexual women with any more or less negative attitudes than lesbian women.

While the sorority community as a whole at this midwestern campus was accepting of lesbian and bisexual members, there were a few additional areas for improvement. The participants expressed they expected their sorority sisters to dress/act like a girl/woman; however, they also agreed their sorority would give a bid to a potential new member who did

not meet these expectations. Expectations to dress/act like a girl/woman is one aspect of the traditional gender role belief system, based in heteronormative expectations, which previous research found to be present in sorority chapters (Kalof & Cargill, 1991; Kamm & Rentz, 1994; Robinson et al., 2004). The difference between expectations of a prospective member and those of a sister can result in a member feeling obligated to meet feminine expectations in regard to dress and actions. Officer training and retreats could be used to serve as an introduction to this topic. Leadership could be made aware of the potential negative ramifications of gender role stereotyping, the concept of gender expression as a spectrum, as opposed to a binary construct, as well as the potential for negative impact on women who express their gender in non-normative ways. In addition, participants indicated neutrality about their comfort level with members of the same chapter dating. Sorority headquarters professionals, alumnae volunteers, and campus-based professionals can be proactive in this regard by developing inclusive policies and discussing with chapter leadership the possibility of members dating so the leadership can respond appropriately, and sensitively, when it occurs.

In general, the majority of these findings provide a different view of sorority sisters' attitudes and beliefs toward the lesbian and bisexual community than has been depicted in the past. The researchers hope that the findings here can be seen as an opportunity for sorority organizations to more openly and actively recruit members of lesbian and bisexual community on their respective campuses as well as continue to strive to create inclusive and safe spaces for all members to participate in sorority life.

#### LIMITATIONS

There are a few limitations that must be considered when applying the results. First, Lambert, Ventura, Hall, and Cluse-Tolar

(2006) found upperclassman have significantly more accepting and tolerant views than underclassmen. A limitation to this study is the exclusion of first-year students due to the campus policy on deferred recruitment. Lambert et al. suggest if first-year students were included in the study, results would have been less accepting and tolerant.

Second, it is important to note this study focused solely on the attitudes of heterosexual sorority women toward non-heterosexually identified sorority members. This study did not consider attitudes toward, and experiences of, transgender sorority women. Gender expression was considered in the study, but only as it was connected to perceptions and assumptions of masculinity that are often associated with non-heterosexual women. Therefore, the results of this study should be limited to the attitude toward lesbian and bisexual students and not the attitudes toward transgender students within sorority life.

Additionally, this study was conducted on a single campus of a mid-sized private research university in the midwest at which the undergraduate population comprises slightly less than 42% of the total student population. The research focus and highly selective nature of the institution and the limited diversity among the participants also limits the generalizability of the study.

#### FUTURE RESEARCH

The study examined and reported the attitudes of heterosexual sorority women toward lesbian and bisexual members and created an opportunity for further research on this topic. The next step in this research is to explore attitudes and beliefs based on different subgroups of sorority women using the derived factors. Possible subgroups include: race, chapter affiliation, length of time in sorority, leadership position, friends or family who

identify as LGBQQ, and chapters with an out sister. It is also suggested future researchers expand the size of the sample and include multiple research sites.

Researchers recommend studying the perceptions of non-affiliated lesbian and bisexual students of the sororities' level of acceptance. This will assist fraternity/sorority campus professionals in assessing the comfort level of lesbian and bisexual students in joining sororities and will also provide feedback on creating a more tolerant university environment.

A study could also be conducted to examine the rate that lesbian and bisexual students receive invitations to join sororities to compare actions versus their stated values and beliefs.

Finally, this study did not survey the attitudes of non-affiliated students so the researchers were unable to determine whether the beliefs and attitudes reported by sorority members are less or more accepting than the non-affiliated students at the institution. The researchers recommend future studies that compare the attitudes and beliefs of affiliated students with non-affiliated students.

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# WEIGHT MATTERS: AFRICAN AMERICAN SORORITY WOMEN SPEAK UP ABOUT BODY IMAGE

ROBIN ARNSPERGER SELZER

*Seidman's (1998) Three-Interview Series was conducted with eight African American sorority women to explore history, details, and meaning of their body image. These themes were identified: Weight Trumps Everything Else, Family Criticism and Comparison, How I Look in Clothes, Intra-cultural Understanding of Black Women's Bodies, Health Awareness, Media Responsibility, and Age. Participants made connections between sorority stereotypes and body image. Participants questioned motivation (self versus society) behind their feelings and behaviors. Participants wanted to help others achieve body image acceptance. Findings challenge the notion that African American women are "culturally protected" from body image dissatisfaction. Implications for practice are discussed.*

A heightened interest in eating disorders has increased conceptual and empirical knowledge about the social construction of body image (Patel & Gray, 2001). Body image has been described as "the way we see our size, shape, and proportions, as well as how we feel about our bodies" (Hersh, 2001, p. 97) and has become a major psychological and physical problem for American women—including a recent increase in problems for women of color (Salem & Elovson, 1993). Studying body image is important because its pervasiveness in the American culture leads to significant distress including preoccupation with appearance and weight which correlates with eating disorders, low self-esteem, anxiety, vulnerability, and depression (Falconer & Neville, 2000; Hoyt & Kogan, 2001).

Mainstream American culture is dominated by an ideal body image. Studies purport the ideal woman is young, tall, thin, toned, has a fair complexion, blue eyes, straight hair, and few curves (Demarest & Allen, 2000; Hirschmann & Munter, 1995; Rabak Wagener, Eickhoff-Shemek & Kelly-Vance, 1998;). According to Thompson (1994) "Girls who don't fit the standard mold, look like tomboys, have dark skin, nappy hair, and are chubby or just plain big" (p. 27). While much of the body image

research recognizes that a "standard of beauty" has been socially constructed, there is a lack of acknowledgement that this standard promotes Whiteness as the uniform picture of beauty.

The White image of perfection has long been endorsed by the media, even in advertisements in *Essence* magazine which,

... play upon and perpetuate consumers' feelings of inadequacy and insecurity over the racial characteristics of their body by insisting that in order to be beautiful, hair must be straightened and eyes lightened; and employing models with fair skin, Anglo-Saxon features, and hair that moves (Bordo, 2003, p. 263).

Throughout history, media representations have been replete with stereotypical images of African American women like the "Jezebel" and "Mammy." Jezebels are portrayed as promiscuous and closely linked to White standards of beauty, often shown with light skin and straight hair (Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, 2004). The matriarchal Mammy image is framed as unattractive, asexual, and representing the ultimate stereotype of the contented slave (Jones, 2000). The dominant ideologies expressed by these stereotypes equate African American women with sexuality and labor. The psychological impact of experiencing such systematic devaluation can

produce struggles with self-esteem in African American women. Acknowledging racist and sexist constructions of African American women's bodies is essential for understanding their experience of body image.

Cultural messages promoting White standards of beauty have targeted African American women throughout history. As early as the 1950s, African American women used skin-bleaching cream to lighten their skin (Brumberg, 1997). Over time, they have used chemical straighteners or hot irons on their hair because White standards of beauty defined their natural hair as "bad." Currently, the overarching compliance of women of color with White standards of beauty is illustrated by many women of color's choice to undergo cosmetic surgery in order to change "ethnic features" into more "western looking" appearances (Kaw, 1993). Wolf (2002) references a cosmetic surgery clinic's service offering to change "a fat and rounded Afro-Caribbean nose that needs correction" (p. 264). According to Barrow (2005), plastic surgery among African Americans increased 24% from 2000 to 2004. Steinem (1992) comments, "Hierarchies of skin color and racial features are sad testimonies to racism's power to undermine self-esteem, and thus to maintain a racial status quo" (p. 218).

While emerging research shows African American's ideal standard of beauty may differ from the prevailing White standard, the pursuit of the ideal image is normative for most women (Polivy & Herman, 1987; Rodin, Silberstein & Striegel-Moore, 1985). Various feminist theorists argue that cultural messages about beauty were created and sustained by a patriarchal structure that "intends to keep women in their place" (Maine, 2000, p. x). However, such feminist approaches have limitations. The early feminist movement assumed that White women's experiences were universal and often failed to validate that African American women are doubly oppressed

by virtue of race and gender, which results in unique experiences for them (Hill Collins, 1991; Yancy, 2000).

The literature on African American women's body image is contradictory and inconclusive with some studies conveying that African American women are satisfied with their bodies (Altabe, 1998; Gore, 1999; Hawkins, 2005; Henriques, Calhoun, & Cann, 1996; Malloy & Herzberger, 1998; Nichter, 2000; Powell & Kahn, 1995; Rhea, 1999; Smith, Burlew & Lundgren, 1991). In these studies African American women reported: 1) satisfaction with their weight, facial and overall appearance, 2) less preoccupation with thinness, 3) choosing a significantly larger ideal body size, and 4) less social pressure to be thin. Overall, their desired body image corresponded with a curvaceous look rather than a particular weight (Hawkins).

This same research makes reference to "cultural protection factors" that prevent the development of body image dissatisfaction by providing a broader definition of the ideal, acceptance of a larger body size, less emphasis on physical appearance, family support, accurate perceptions of African American men's preference, a strong racial identity, and a masculine gender role orientation (Demarest & Allen, 2000; LeGrange, Telch & Tibbs, 1998; Patel & Gray, 2001; Powell & Kahn, 1995; Pumariega et al., 1994). However, notions of such cultural protection have been criticized due to pervasiveness of the media. According to Bordo (2003), "No body can escape either the imprint of culture or its gendered meanings" (p. 212).

Some studies find African American women are just as likely as White women to have body image concerns about weight, shape, and eating (Brooks, 2000; Dacosta & Wilson, 1996; Demarest & Allen, 2000; LeGrange et al., 1998; Nova Online, 2002; Patel & Gray, 2001; Pumariega et al., 1994; Thompson, 1994). In

these studies, when compared to White women, African American women were found: 1) to possess comparable Eating Disorder Inventory scores, 2) to desire to be thinner than they were, 3) to have no greater satisfaction with their bodies, 4) to experience pressure to be thin from their families, and 5) to have a high frequency of laxative abuse.

Research that asserts African American women's vulnerability to experience body image dissatisfaction implicates acculturation (identification with White standards of beauty) (Kenny & Runyon, 1998; Osvoid & Sodowsky, 1993; Thompson, 1994). Dittrich (1996) explained, "The more a person is pressured to emulate the mainstream image, the more the desire to be thin is adopted, and with it an increased risk for the development of body image dissatisfaction and eating disorders" (¶4). The National Eating Disorders Association (2002) concluded that acculturation is influential, but that it is complex and not a stable indication of immunity to developing body image problems.

Inconsistencies in the literature are attributable to stereotypic profiles of those affected by body image concerns, the conceptualization of body image as a uni-dimensional construct (looking only at weight), the overgeneralization of Euro-American norms, and reliance on studies conducted in settings that may have limited exposure to

women of color (Harris, 1995; Thompson, 1994). The empirical understanding of body image is limited to data based almost exclusively on White, middle class, heterosexual college students or clinical samples of White women (Altabe, 1998; Rhea, 1999).

Among college women, sororities are identified as high-risk groups for experiencing body image concerns because their high socioeconomic status forces them to meet social expectations (Alexander, 1998; Crandall, 1998; Hoerr, Bokram, Lugo, Bivins & Keast, 2002; Mecham, Pole & Bonifazi, 2001; Meilman, von Hippel & Gaylor 1991; Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox, & Miller, 2010; Schulken, 1997; Schwitzer, Rodriguez, Thomas & Salimi, 2001). When compared to other college students, sorority women showed 1) a greater fear of becoming fat, 2) more dissatisfied with their bodies 3) increased experiences with diet pills, 4) reduced high-fat foods from their diet more often, 5) allowed weight concerns to interfere with relationships at a higher rate, 6) possessed more harsh judgments of their bodies, 7) engaged in a very high rate of binge eating, 8) were more likely to purge, 9) reported greater bulimic symptomology than, and 10) possessed a higher drive for thinness. Despite these findings, African American sorority women (AASW) largely have been ignored in such studies (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Sorority Studies and Racial Demographics of Participants*

Author	Date	# of Participants	% of White Participants
Reeves and Johnson	1992	372 sorority women	96 %
Kashubeck et al.	1997	478 sorority women	95.8%
Schulken et al.	1997	627 sorority women	91%
Mecham et al.	2001	230 sorority women	100%
Sapia	2001	80 sorority women	92.5%
Hoerr et al.	2002	1620 students, 10.9% sorority women	81%
Allison and Park	2003	205 sorority women	94%

Newly emerging empirical research that has included African American fraternities and sororities commonly has focused on five areas: hazing/pledging, civil rights/civic participation, cultural aesthetics (stepping), media representations and race/ gender identity (Hughey, 2012). The research on sororities has experienced a type of silo syndrome that segregates studies of NPC and NPHC groups. Most sorority studies have not acknowledged the homogeneity of the population in the research design nor as a limitation of the study. Several did not acknowledge the racial composition of the participants, thereby inferring that White sorority women represent all sorority women (Alexander, 1998; Crandall, 1998; Lea, 2004). Only one study explored body image among AASW (Gore, 1999). In an effort to explore weight control behavior among middle class African American women, the author drew most of her sample from the four historically African American sororities. However, this was not a clear part of the research design.

These studies are not generalizable to AASW because of the cultural distinctions between historically White and African American sororities. African American sororities were founded to provide community development and engagement, racial uplift, and to address inequality (Berkowitz & Padavic, 1999; Lee-Olukoya, 2010). The lifetime commitment to African American sororities is another distinguishing factor with many members active long after graduation making career networking a salient part of membership (Giddings, 1998). Delta Sigma Theta sorority alone has over 125,000 members and 730 chapters worldwide (Giddings). More recent statistics indicate that Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority maintains a sisterhood of over 260,000 members (House Stewart, 2013). Yet, these women are underrepresented in sorority-related body image research.

This study addresses the following gaps in body image literature: 1) the marginalization of AASW as research participants and 2) the lack of empirically-backed conclusions and implications regarding African American women's body image satisfaction. The intent is to give voice to AASW, by answering the question: "How do AASW experience and make meaning of body image?" "Giving voice" derives from feminist movements and conveys that marginalized people should have a chance to speak about their lives (Bogdan & Biklin, 1998). A qualitative approach is used because little information is actually known about the cultural context of African American women's body image (Falconer & Neville, 2000).

Seidman's (1998) Three-Interview Series was used to conduct structured, 90-minute phenomenological interviews with eight AASW between the ages of 20-30. The three interviews allowed each participant to place body image in the context of her life by: 1) addressing the history of her body image, 2) describing details of her current body image, and 3) reflecting on the meaning she has assigned to her body image experience. Some interviews were conducted in three separate meetings over a three week timeframe while others were conducted back-to-back for a total of 24 interviews.

Eight participants were recruited through liaisons. Pseudonyms were assigned to ensure confidentiality. A lay summary form explained the intent of the study and informed participants about their rights. There are several important demographic identifiers in this study: the participant's sorority membership, their length of participation, and educational attainment. Eight women participated in the interviews: four members from sorority Y, two members from sorority W, and one member each from sorority X and Z. Seven participants completed

a master's degree. Four of these seven master's degree holders were working on their doctorate degree. Educational attainment is an important identifier because of it influences acculturation. Half of the participants joined their sorority during their undergraduate experience and half became members through a graduate chapter

(for women who have earned a degree and did not apply for membership in an active chapter on campus). Eighty percent were actively participating in their sororities. Six years was the average length of sorority participation, with eleven years the longest and two and half years the shortest.

**Table 2**

*Participant Demographics*

Psydonym	Sorority	Length of Participation	Degree Status
Peggy	Sorority W	2.5 years	Master's, coursework doctoral
Mary	Sorority Z	5 years	Bachelor's
Kathy	Sorority Y	3 years	Master's
Patty	Sorority X	3 years	Master's, ABD doctoral
Sandy	Sorority W	9 years	Master's, ABD doctoral
Linda	Sorority Y	9 years	Master's, applying doctoral
Maureen	Sorority Y	11 years	Master's, ABD doctoral
Cathy	Sorority Y	5 years	Master's

It is important to remember that generalizing the findings is not a major purpose of qualitative research. Rather, phenomenology is concerned with uncovering the essence of lived experience. Limitations of this study include: 1) selection bias and 2) the fact that results could differ if participants had joined their sorority at an HBCU.

**RESULTS**

I analyzed the data for themes by examining repetition of key words in the transcripts, determining similarities across experiences, and exploring the context of key words (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Seven themes were identified as being salient to the participant's experience of body image.

***Weight Trumps Everything Else***

Weight appeared to be more important in determining attractiveness than other parts of a person's identity (facial beauty, education, personality). The majority of participants defined body image as both "how you feel about yourself on the inside and how you look on the outside." Weight was the defining feature for "how you look on the outside." Participants were asked to describe their body and most expressed unfavorable feelings about their size and shape. Sandy described her body as "Not good. There's still an athletic body underneath a couple layers of fat that seem to keep growing. I would definitely say large—and unfamiliar, just not used to being this size or looking like this." Linda said, "I have hips and a butt (pear-shape). I have a big ol' chest. I feel like I don't fit."

Three participants expressed dissatisfaction with their bodies in the past. For example, Mary spoke of her unhappiness:

I didn't like myself. I was not happy with my size. I was always trying to find ways to get smaller, but I couldn't understand. The more and more I worked out, the thicker I became. I hated going to the store. I didn't like who I was. I didn't like seeing myself as a beautiful person. I thought if you have long, slender legs and a nice, small waist, then maybe you would be considered a pretty person. I saw other people who looked like me; and I thought they were beautiful, but I didn't think I had what they had.

When she was younger, Peggy used diet pills because she felt fat. She said, "I did diet pills in my teenage years and snuck and did it because I was not happy with myself. When Metabolife came out, that's when I bought some. I don't know how old I was, maybe 15 or 16." Two participants stated that they were not concerned with their body image in the past, but were currently conscientious about their body image because of health issues in their family, the media, and changes in their bodies.

Six participants presently were not satisfied with their bodies and cited "being overweight" as the primary reason for their dissatisfaction and referenced weight as what they would change about their bodies. Mary said she "thinks constantly about trying to lose weight." Linda expressed her thoughts on losing weight by stating, "If I can just get to that healthy size, where I feel comfortable, I'd be happy." Kathy commented, "It's just like if you are skinny, everybody in the world would be happy."

Participants specified where body parts would be smaller and more toned. The mid-section (butt and stomach) were mentioned most often; other body parts included arms, hair, thighs, hips, legs, and height. Of the two

participants who were satisfied, one said that she could still "improve."

Participants also described the societal standard of beauty and the "perfect" woman as having a thin body. For example, five participants described the perfect woman as being a certain size (between sizes 5-12), having a small waist, muscular/toned arms stomach, and displaying good skin, and being tall. Only a few participants described the perfect woman with internal qualities (confidence), whereas most connected perfection to external qualities (smaller size). Sandy described the societal standard of beauty as "tall, thin, young, no wrinkles, skinny legs, small waist, larger breasts, more White feature-wise." Other participants noted additional specific characteristics including long hair, flawless skin, and healthy teeth. Many participants summed up the societal standard of beauty by referring to people in the media (magazine, television and movies) as representations. Peggy explained, "Magazine covers or thin White girls (represent the societal standard of beauty)." When asked what the societal standard of beauty was, Cathy replied, "whoever the latest person is on television."

Participants had mixed responses to the question "Do you hold yourself to society's physical standards for women?" Two participants expressed their standards did not align with societal standards as there was one way to define beauty. Two participants said their standards did align; and two others said they resist and comply with societal standards. The last two participants explained they neither complied nor resisted.

Several participants' comments suggested that weight trumps everything else. When talking about her particular body image developed, Sandy spoke of her modeling experience where she heard she had a very beautiful face, but needed to change her body. Kathy shared similar examples and went on to share how skin color plays a role in beauty and weight. First, she shared, "I have friends that are pretty but

heavy-set, and the first thing somebody says is they are too big. They look at their weight first as opposed to their face or personality.” While speaking about White standards of beauty, she said, “Jokes are made about a really dark skin color, unless the dark skin person has a good figure.” Peggy reflected, “When the weight was off, more people starting saying how attractive I am. It almost makes you look at yourself like, was I ugly? I guess I do equate weight with not being attractive.” Lastly, Kathy shared:

My Godfather hadn’t seen me in a couple of years, and said, “Oh you got fat.” Meanwhile I received a bachelor’s and master’s, got a job and won sorority awards. I asked my father to say something to him a couple years later, but he said I don’t think so. So, if you don’t have a good body image, you can really go into depression. There is more emphasis on weight than stuff I think is more important, like education, trying to be financially stable, trying to be healthy.

### ***Family Criticism and Comparison***

Participants acknowledged family influence on their body image when discussing the receipt of critical feedback about their bodies and comparison to other family members. Family criticism often focused on weight. Sandy said her mom and dad teased her and called her father’s comments, “brutal, mean, and hurtful.” Once her mother said, “Sandy, I just never thought you’d look like this.” She also shared the following example of her father’s criticism:

When we were younger, we would come running down the stairs; and he’s like, you sound like a herd of cattle or that we had big legs like horses. Recently, my father was picking on my weight. He said, ‘I’m not picking on your weight. If I was, I would’ve told you that they should have made you buy two seats on the airplane

because you’re so big.’ I kind of laughed it off, but it was pretty hurtful.

In several instances, when participants shared anecdotes regarding family criticism, they also shared that the criticism did not have a negative impact. For instance, Patty noted that her “feelings don’t get hurt, by her mother’s bluntness about her body and it’s made her stronger.”

Participants also compared their bodies to other family members. Mary explained her family comparisons:

Growing up in my household, I’ve had big-boned people, and my mom, who’s very petite, had four children. You know, I’ve wondered why I was such the big one, why I was so big. I was bigger than the majority of my brothers and sisters and cousins.

Sandy spoke of the inevitable comparison with her twin sister and explained that other people compared them more than she did. She said, “People will go home to family reunions and it’s like, Susie’s the skinny one and Sandy’s the fat one.” Peggy shared:

I look at my family, not my immediate family, but like Great Aunts and Uncles and Grandparents. Overweight and obesity is in the family. I look at family members and say, “Is this going to be me in ten years?” I just want to make sure I stay slim and trim. Obesity does run in my family. My family plays a big role. My sister is like a size zero, and my mom is voluptuous. I try to be like my sister, but I don’t want to be like my Great Aunt, who is really heavy.

One participant related her body image to family experiences of growing up poor and childhood sexual and physical abuse. When

asked about how she came to have her particular body image, Linda said:

I wasn't a wealthy kid, so I didn't have the clothes everybody else had. So, equate that with being big, and then you couldn't get your hair combed like everybody else. Just the fact of how I grew up and maybe being poor contributed to that 'cause I didn't have what everybody else had. And some abuse went on in my childhood too, early childhood sexual and physical; so that developed how I felt about myself too.

### ***How I Look In Clothes***

Many participants related body image to their appearance in clothes. For instance, Cathy spoke about how deciding what to wear and shopping for clothes connected to her body image: "I think about my body image every day, especially when I'm finding something to wear, which is like the most stressful part of my day-finding something to wear to work. Or when I'm doing my hair. Or when I go shopping, trying on clothes or how they fit." Sandy included how she looked in clothes as a part of her definition of body image. Peggy explained that her body image has been affected by her ability to fit into clothes that she couldn't fit into before:

I picked up weight. I could tell when I tried on my pants and I couldn't get them up. Shirts were too tight. I was like, "Oh my God, enough of this." I was not happy. Since losing the weight, I feel better about myself. I guess part of the body image is getting into clothes I couldn't get into before.

Kathy spoke about how shopping for clothes influenced her. She said, "If I'm looking for an evening dress, the cuts and styles are just not made to tailor towards different body types. Situations kind of make you feel that way, like,

I'm fat." Mary expressed she hated shopping because clothes did not fit. She dreaded the Easter holiday because that meant shopping for an Easter dress. Linda also talked about how shopping for clothes had not been not easy for her. She shared the following example:

I was in Dillards, and was looking like, oh, they got my size over here, a 14. So this other woman, she wasn't White; she may have been Asian. She was like, this isn't my size, this is for a lard-ass; and it was only a 14.

### ***Intra-cultural Understanding of Black Women's Bodies***

Participants agreed that a White standard of beauty exists, although some said it was "evolving." For example, Maureen affirmed the existence of White standards of beauty:

Most definitely it (the societal standard of beauty) is racially defined. Even if you look at Tyra Banks, she doesn't look like she's—she's not like the image of a Black woman who has the boobs, the butt, and the thighs. You know, you need to be in a size 2 or 4. So it definitely is racially defined and it hasn't changed.

Meanwhile Sandy explained the evolution:

I think it [the societal standard of beauty] is evolving to accept more ethnic kinds of beauty as long as they're still tall and thin. They can be darker skinned or have darker hair or have more ethnic features as long as they're still tall and thin—and young and wrinkle free. Somewhat, I think it's evolving and broadening to include features that are definitely more ethnic, just the whole thing with Jennifer Lopez's ass or wanting to have fuller lips. I think it's definitely broadened to include more heterogeneous kinds of different

features that cross ethnic boundaries. But I still think it leans to a White standard of beauty.

Half of the participants commented on their understanding of how African American culture understands Black women's bodies. Some participants validated the idea that the African American community accepts women with larger body shapes and sizes. When addressing societal standards of beauty, Kathy commented, "African American women can be satisfied with a little more weight." When asked about how she came to have her particular body image, Sandy stated, "It's a little more accepted in society for African American women to be a little bit bigger, a little bit curvy." Sandy also provided an example from her sorority. She said:

We'd tease each other when they'd lose weight. We'd be like, "Girl, what's wrong with you? You need to eat." You know, versus saying you're looking little fat. I don't even think that [looking fat] was ever really talked about. We had a couple of girls who were a little heavier and it wasn't, well let's all go on a diet together. It was just like, that's you. You're beautiful. Let's make you up and put some cute clothes on you and make you as cute as you are because that's just you.

Cathy said, "People in the African American culture think it's okay to be thick, or to not be skinny." She also said that body image has not really been addressed in her sorority. She said, "I think that, as Black people, we're not as affected, and caught up in the whole body image thing as a White woman would be." Maureen acknowledged that body image was not discussed in the Black community, "You don't have an eating disorder. And it was a secret if you did because you do not think of Black women being bulimic or anorexic. That's

something that's been culturally a secret."

However, other participants acknowledged acceptance of larger shape and size by the African American community does not equate to body image satisfaction. Linda stated, "A lot of the time, people think Black people don't think about weight, but they do. Black people do view their bodies differently and eat differently, but it's becoming the same [as White people]." Mary said, "Women of all backgrounds are getting cosmetic surgery; it's not just a European thing." Maureen shared, "The media has impacted African American women so much that we are losing focus on what is important and how to be happy about our looks."

### ***Health Awareness***

Being healthy was a priority for most participants. Kathy indicated this when describing the perfect woman as "somebody that's healthy." All participants expressed a desire to lose weight through diet and exercise to improve their health and avoid future health problems. A family history of health problems increased the participant's body image awareness. Patty described her health awareness as the reason why she had been making changes in her life. She said:

Health is a lot of the reason why I'm choosing to make a change in my life. I've seen too many people pass because of some medical reason that could have been altered had their lives been better and their food intake and taking care of their body overall. That's real significant when you watch two to three people die of heart disease or diabetes. You really have to think about if you want to suffer like that when you could prevent it at an early age.

When asked what she would change about her body, Maureen replied:

Just losing a couple pounds because it's a health issue, especially with my family history of diseases—cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure. Just staying in tune health-wise, making sure later in life I'll be okay. I know I need to lose some weight just because I could be a diabetic at any time if I don't eat the right things and work out all the time.

### *Media Responsibility*

The media (advertising, television shows, magazines and music videos) was described as a powerful force promoting an unattainable standard of beauty and negatively influencing participant's body image. Sandy spoke about an experience at the mall where advertising negatively affected her:

I'll walk by and see big ads. I can't remember what they are wearing, what it was advertising for. I don't even remember the colors. My whole focus was like, look at how skinny they are.

Sandy also shared how images portrayed by the media have not been representative of the average woman. She said:

I think that's why women spend a lot of time not feeling good about their bodies because even when you look at reality television, you don't see short, fat, non-attractive people on reality TV. There's never anybody who's ugly on reality TV. It's supposed to be a reflection of reality, but it's not real. I know that's probably part of the reason why I don't feel great about myself. It's not just celebrities anymore. It's just people that are supposed to be real are skinny.

Kathy explained how she resisted media images. She said:

I don't watch too many videos. You're like, I'm fat because everybody has a bra on basically, a short top or halter-top. I can't do that. I think that the media doesn't really do a healthy job because when you don't see yourself, you think, maybe I'm not the norm. There's something wrong with me because everybody else think differently; but then you have to put it back in your head like it's just TV. So I'm going to pull a book out on my shelf to get some truth.

Kathy also provided an example of the media's attention on weight when she shared that television programs, such as *The Parkers* made fat jokes. Maureen discussed the power of media. "It has this whole hold on younger people and what they should be and what they should look like. Media by far has the biggest influence on people and their image, inner and outer." Peggy recognized the media's power influence on her when she said, "A lot of women today are dissatisfied with some area of their bodies based on media. Media tells you what you need to look like. I'm a victim because I keep buying all that crap that's out there."

Two participants mentioned that media can have a positive influence on body image by showing healthy role models, like Oprah Winfrey. Yet, Linda quickly noted that even the healthy role models have lost weight. She said, "You have different people come out who are bigger, like Monique, Angie Stone and Jill Scott, but even they have lost weight. Image is everything."

### *Age*

Age influenced the participant's body image experience. As they got older, some women accepted their bodies more, while others struggled with the pressure to look young. When speaking about their current body image, Sandy and Mary explained that their bodies

shifted over time and didn't match up with their ideal body. Mary said:

I'm going against the fact that I'm not as young as I used to be. Over 25, when you try to lose weight, it's a little harder. I think about losing weight now because I am 28, and I find myself sometimes being winded going up the steps.

Sandy agreed, "It gets harder the older you get." She stated, "Maybe it's just a function of my body changing, and I'm not used to that. But I definitely have more concerns now."

Participants spoke about society's obsession with youth. Sandy included being "wrinkle free and young looking" in her description of the societal standard of beauty. Kathy talked about the media's part in this by targeting young girls and conditioning them to look and be a certain way. Maureen reflected on how much things changed. She said:

I think the younger generations want to look like what the media portrays, and they can do it in ways that are unhealthy. It's so amazing to me because when I was here, it was like, hey I know [Maureen] and she's a good person. But now it's like, I need to get into a size 2 because I want to wear some low-ride pants. They don't eat. They're talking about getting boob jobs, and I'm like, you're 16. Are you serious?

Kathy and Sandy talked about the changing standard of beauty, noting that when they were younger, the societal standard of beauty had been much more racially defined (White standard of beauty was more prevalent) than it is now. Three participants mentioned that working on a college campus and being surrounded with young college students affects their body image. Patty said, "Being an educator is a struggle because you work with young people a lot, which is not always a positive thing."

A few participants did suggest that as they have gotten older, they have grown to appreciate their bodies more, and in turn, had better body image. For instance, Patty said:

It's something about coming of age, and at this point, I feel pretty good. A friend told me that you're going to know what your faults are, your good points, your bad points about your body, about you. You also know as you age, things will change because that's just natural in life. You just have to be okay with it. I think feeling good about yourself happens to women in an older age. They finally say, this is how I want to be. This is how I want to look.

### *Participants Reflect on the Meaning of Their Body Image*

The final interview focused on the meaning participants assigned to their body image experiences. Overall, participants wanted to continue working towards their own body acceptance by accepting changes and making healthy choices. All participants stated that they were more aware of their body image compared to before the study and how it developed. They identified past emotional experiences that impacted their body image and questioned whether their thoughts, feelings, and actions had been motivated by self or societal standards. For instance, Sandy shared thoughts on her motivation:

If I choose to [change something about my body], why am I doing something about it? Are those things an expectation for me or a societal expectation? Making me think about where that comes from and if I feel the need to change myself, why? I think that's a good thing to make sure that if you're changing something about yourself, it's because you want to or because it's something you value, not because it's something other people value.

Many of the participants saw themselves helping others in the future. Mary said:

I see myself actually counseling and talking to women who are my age or younger, and even older about the same issues and letting them know it's not necessarily about your outer appearance all the time. I would love to see myself helping a woman for a more permanent type of change for body weight and body image, versus just temporary. Before I couldn't talk about it, but now I can. I find myself growing from this, also making healthier choices, whether it be people, the kind of things that I do in spare time, and how I eat.

Not only did Sandy want to give her daughters a healthy body image by combating negative influences that shape body image, she also wanted to give her sons healthy expectations of what women should look like.

### ***Sorority Stereotypes and Body Image***

Only three participants agreed their sorority had an image related to body image. Two participants acknowledged differences in sorority image are dependent upon chapter and region. Kathy described her sorority's stereotype as "friendly, but fat," but explained she did not fit this stereotype. Someone actually said to her, "I thought you were supposed to be fat." Linda said her sorority was "stereotyped as big, and known for being smart, nice, shy, alright looking and a little chubby." Patty shared:

My sorority prides themselves on being graceful, stylish, petite, classy, confident, and convinced that they are the crème de la crème. You have to look good to carry those characteristics. We don't go anywhere unless we're dressed up. You have to have your look together at all times.

Maureen said there was no description of what you needed to look like in her sorority. Instead, they focused on personality and contributions that could be made, not looks. However, she went on to say, "You shouldn't look a mess with your hair everywhere and should represent yourself as a lady at all times whatever you look like." Sandy also did not think her sorority's image related to body image, but described her sorority as "typically darker skinned and sometimes from affluent backgrounds." Peggy didn't think her sorority had an image that related to body image. Yet, she said "Sorority sisters will make a comment when another sorority sister picks up weight." Two other participants expressed that everyone in their chapter looked different, and reiterated, "What mattered was not looks or size, but attitude and what one can offer."

Half of the women talked about other sororities' images and stereotypes. They described sorority X as having an image that included, "having light skin, long hair, and coming from an upper class background." Historically, this has been considered the "measuring stick" or "standard" for being a member of sorority X, and "is still prominent today." The standard "is hard to change because it's embedded in the history and founding." Linda suggested sorority X "has to maintain the pretty girl image." Maureen went on to say, "It's not talked about," although jokes have been made about it." For instance, Sandy joked, "I'm way too dark to be in sorority X." She said, "I laugh about it, but it's true. I don't look like a member of sorority X. If I met someone and told them I was in sorority X, they would be like, what?" Other sorority images and stereotypes were also noted. Sandy stated, "Sorority Y is kind of the fat girls sorority, and sorority Z were the ghetto girls who didn't have middle class values and attitudes like girls from sorority X or my sorority."

Half of the participants thought their body image changed as a result of being in their

sorority. Two women said it changed for the better. For example, Sandy said:

I think my body image got healthier at that point, given the context of where I was. The school that I went to was predominantly White with a very small African American population. Because of my experiences there, it became much more important for me to align myself with the African American community within the school. And so then I found my way into a sorority. Had I not, I might have been more affected by the White European standard of what is acceptable. Being around a group of women that looked very similar to me, we all kind of had similar bodies. So I had a more healthy and accepting image. I think that's what played in to my being able to more easily accept my body as the way that it is, and just work within those parameters rather than try to pigeon-hole it into, okay my legs are just too fat—I need to get my legs skinnier.

Additionally, Mary shared how her body image changed for the better as a result of being in her sorority:

Through my sorority, I was introduced to some beautiful, great women who were a lot larger than me. The confidence they had made their inner beauty shine outright so I found myself wanting to be like them. I opened my eyes to see that it's not just what size you are.

Patty's body image changed as a result of being in her sorority, but in a different way. After becoming a member, she remembers thinking she "would not wear her hair back anymore, but instead keep it curled." She said,

"I am more conscious that I represent a group of women, and try hard to make sure that my total look is together."

## CONCLUSION

The literature on African American women's body image satisfaction is contradictory and inconclusive. However, the results of this study clearly add to the growing body of research that African American women are just as likely as White women to have body image concerns about weight, shape and size. Most AASW in this study wanted to be thinner and cited the media as a reason for feeling bad about their bodies. Participants spoke about being depressed, having low self esteem, and in several extreme cases, talked about the use of diet pills and laxatives to cope. Furthermore, the emergence of how the participants looked in clothes placed continued emphasis on physical appearance.

The AASW in this study share similarities and differences with White sorority women in previous studies. For example, both groups are generally dissatisfied with their bodies, practice weight control, and judge their bodies harshly, and experienced some related interference in relationships (Alexander, 1998; Crandall, 1998; Hoerr, Bokram, Lugo, Bivins & Keast, 2002; Mecham, Pole & Bonifazi, 2001; Meilman, von Hippel & Gaylor 1991; Rolnik, Engeln-Maddox, & Miller, 2010; Schulken, 1997; Schwitzer, Rodriguez, Thomas & Salimi, 2001). However, for the AASW, fear of becoming fat had more to do with their family history of health problems. Additionally, the AASW did not reveal bulimic symptomology, like bingeing or purging by vomiting or excessive exercise.

Perhaps the most important finding in this study is that the participants did not appear to be culturally protected from experiencing body image dissatisfaction. To the contrary, many participants experienced pressures to be thin

from their family. Even though participants acknowledged that the African American community accepts a larger body size among women, they spoke at length about their personal dissatisfaction with their own weight, appearance, size and shape. The participants mentioned that body image concerns typically are not acknowledged in the Black community; but all of them said they thought about their body image “everyday.”

The cultural protection literature asserts that African American women embrace a broader ideal. That did not appear to fully be the case with the AASW in this study. The literature also suggests that accurate perceptions of African American men’s preferences for body shape serves as cultural protection. Yet in this study of AASW, men’s preferences were only briefly noted as minimally influencing two participants. As the literature states, acculturation could be a possible explanation. The participants in this study were highly educated which could have resulted in greater compliance with White standards of beauty. This study supports Dacosta and Wilson’s (1996) claim that cultural protection should be questioned.

After drawing interpretive conclusions, a few items remain unclear, prompting the following recommendations for future research. It is worth exploring whether AASW connect their pursuit of the ideal to the feminist argument that cultural messages are created by oppressive patriarchy. Aspects of this research imply that social class (levels of education and income) are factors that may influence AASW and adherence to White standards of beauty. Thus, this should be considered in future research. Additionally, AASW in this study did not discuss internalization of stereotypical portrayals, such as the “Jezebel” and “Mammy.” Evolving standards of beauty and the differences between White and Black standards of beauty should be considered as well. Lastly, the AASW acknowledged that sorority stereotypes exist

and are connected to appearance. It would be useful to examine sorority stereotypes based on appearance in depth, especially since two participants mentioned that their body image changed for the better as a result of sorority participation. This could be an important data point for national organizations to develop formal initiatives on health and body image awareness. Larson (2011) found that being a valued member of a group creates a sense of belonging which fosters self-esteem and was positively correlated to body image. Museus (2008) touts the benefits of ethnic student organizations ability to provide cultural familiarity, expression, advocacy, and validation. Sorority members also were found to be successful at building a sense of common purpose and ownership in the decision-making process in a study on socially responsible leadership (Martin, Hevel, & Pascarella, 2012). So, it seems that AASW women may be able to turn to their sororities for developing positive body image. Harper (2007) documents the benefits of participation in historically Black sororities and verifies that social support is needed for members.

Even though it was evident that AASW had been affected by cultural messages, after placing body image in the context of their lives, they began to question whether their thoughts, feelings, and actions had been motivated by self or society. Given this information, suggestions for practice include educational programming that addresses body image acceptance for AASW groups specifically. Schwartz (2012) has issued a call for sorority professionals to address the potential negative experiences of sorority members. Dalton & Crosby (2012) examined peer culture and the extracurriculum. These authors said, “student affairs staff play a critical role in helping to design and manage many of the influential out-of-class experiences that students have in college” (p.7). Sorority members should be collaborators in dissonance-based prevention

that influences the norms of their members (Becker, 2008). If sorority women rely on their peers for social cues and sororities act as enforcers of unattainable cultural beauty ideals, members are likely to experience body dissatisfaction.

It is time for people who work with AASW to move beyond conclusions based upon anecdotal evidence and intuition (Hughey & Parks, 2012).

Peer-led intervention programming that aligns with institutional diversity values and integrates formal aspects of the academic curriculum are recommended. This study creates a knowledge base and helps sorority advisors gain insight into how AASW experience and make meaning of body image. Body image dissatisfaction is pervasive among women in our culture. According to this study, AASW appear to be no exception.

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# SORORITY MEMBERS' VIEWS OF NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES

BEATE WILSON AND CRAIG TOLLINI

*The purpose of this study was to have sorority members identify the negative stereotypes they believed other members of the university community had of them and the extent to which they believed these stereotypes were both accurate for and damaging to their chapters. To gather these perspectives, four focus groups were conducted with thirty-six women from four National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) member sororities at a medium-sized, midwestern, public university. In addition to the findings, implications and recommendations are also provided.*

Researchers have pointed out various issues or problems attached to sorority membership. Molasso (2005) found the majority of articles about sororities, as well as fraternities, in two professional journals addressed drinking, hazing, or sexual assault. Other recently studied problems include a lack of diversity and academic excellence (Matthews et al, 2009), the presence of cliques and a lack of community (DeSantis, 2007; Matthews et al), racism (Park, 2008), eating disorders (DeSantis), and a focus on reputation and conformity (DeSantis; Robbins, 2004). In short, the research provides a predominantly negative view of sorority members, one reminiscent of their portrayal in the television series *Greek* and such films as *The House Bunny* (2008) and *Sorority Row* (2009).

A topic that has been largely neglected by researchers is how sorority members themselves view the generally negative stereotypes of their organizations. Information on this topic may help explain members' resistance to certain policies, as well as identify potential ways to overcome this resistance and to work with members to address these issues. The current study begins to address this gap by having members of (NPC) sororities identify the negative stereotypes they believe other members of the university community have of them, as well as the extent to which these stereotypes are both accurate and harmful to their chapters.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

One reason to expect sorority members to reject their portrayal in research and the media is that they often believe other chapters reflect the stereotype, but theirs does not. There is some empirical support for the underlying argument that there are differences between chapters, which provides support for the sorority members who have this belief. Larimer, Irvine, Kilmer, and Marlatt (1997) found that members of different fraternity and sorority chapters vary in their level of alcohol abuse. In addition to potentially affecting members' acceptance of their portrayal, the differences that may exist between chapters may also affect members' support for programs and regulations.

In addition to largely ignoring the possible impact of chapter variations, the majority of researchers have also failed to address how sorority members themselves view the issues mentioned above. Research in this area is limited. Three studies were found that do so, and two of these studies focus on hazing. Owen, Burke, and Vichesky (2008) found members of various student organizations, including sororities, thought hazing was expected by new members and widespread in other organizations/chapters. They also provided the participants' preferences for how individuals, organizations, and universities should address hazing. Gordon,

Hall, and Blankenship (1979) found 57% of the fraternity and sorority members who participated in their survey thought no form of hazing was beneficial and 23% said hazing was harmful. But, 25% said hazing was an important part of their new member process and 55% said their chapter did not set any limits on the types of activities that happened prior to or during initiation. All of these percentages need to be interpreted cautiously because roughly half of the respondents selected “don’t know” to all of the questions on the survey. The final source located was a report on Greek Life at the University of Minnesota, which included a section on participants’ concerns before they joined a sorority or fraternity (Harrold, 1997). Among the frequently cited concerns were the organization’s reputation, poor academics, and alcohol/drug use.

Gaining a better understanding of how members perceive themselves and the issues they face- or are believed to face- will allow student affairs professionals to better understand sorority members’ behaviors. It may also reveal issues of which administrators, faculty and staff members, and non-affiliated students are unaware, but which sorority members believe are particularly pressing. This information may be particularly useful to both campus and organization-based fraternity/sorority professionals and volunteers as well as to consultants working to help members address perceptions and highlight the positive aspects of affiliation. Authors conducted a similar project with fraternity members (Tollini & Wilson, 2010). The present study addressed the same issues for sororities, and one part of the results section will compare the findings of this project with the previous project.

## METHOD

### *Sample and Procedure*

During the spring 2011 semester, focus groups were conducted with members of four National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) member sororities at Western Illinois University (WIU), a medium-sized, midwestern, public university with an affiliated population that was almost 11% of the approximately 9,600 undergraduate students who were enrolled full-time. Following NPC and IRB approval, the authors attended a collegiate Panhellenic Council meeting to describe the project. After that meeting, the chapter presidents from all six PHC chapters were sent an email soliciting participation. Four chapter presidents agreed to allow the second author to attend a chapter meeting to explain the goals of the study and request focus group participation. On average, the participating chapters had about 50 initiated members.

Separate focus groups were conducted with members from each of the participating chapters. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours. The first author recorded and took notes at each focus group, while the second author facilitated the focus groups. To protect confidentiality, each chapter was assigned a Greek letter that was not used by any of the chapters at WIU. Chapter focus group demographics are summarized in Table 1, though the amount of demographic information presented is limited in order to protect the confidentiality of the chapters.

### *Procedure*

The focus groups were semi-structured to allow for additional questions to be asked based on the participants’ comments. The first question

**Table 1**

*Focus Group Demographics*

Name	Total Participants	Participants who were Initiated Members*	Participants who were Chapter Leaders**
Eta	9	5	9
Gamma	7	5	7
Nu	10	9	9
Pi	10	8	8

\*Participants who were initiated in the Fall 2010 or Spring 2011 semesters were treated as uninitiated members since they had less experience in the chapter

\*\*These participants were either current officers or chairs of committees or had held such positions in the past

for every group was “What do you believe is the most commonly held negative stereotype of the sororities at WIU?” Participants were then asked to define and describe each stereotype and to discuss the accuracy of each stereotype, including the extent to which each stereotype was applicable to certain chapter or to certain members within every chapter. Towards the end of each focus group, participants were asked “Of the listed stereotypes, which is the most damaging for the sororities at WIU?”

**Data Analysis**

The recordings of the focus groups were transcribed, and any information that could potentially identify a participant or a chapter was removed or substituted with more general language in order to protect confidentiality. The first author’s notes were used to check and clarify the recordings, and the recordings and notes were destroyed once the transcription process ended.

Each focus group was analyzed separately using an approach suggested by Maxwell (1998), whereby responses were organized first by the major topic they addressed and then by the content of the responses. A summary was created for each focus group, and a member check was performed by having participants review the summary for errors and to provide additional comments. Only two participants responded, only one of these participants

provided additional information, and neither of these participants indicated any of the material in the summaries was incorrect. The reviewed summaries were combined to create the outline for this article.

Since there did not appear to be any systematic differences in the opinions of the non-initiated and initiated members, their statements were presented together. The results section does not designate how many participants made or agreed with a given statement because this number could not always be determined, in part because there was no systematic recording of body language. In general, at least one other participant echoed each statement, and the few disagreements that occurred are noted.

**LIMITATIONS**

The participants could have provided socially desirable results, particularly in regard to the accuracy of the stereotypes, given the sensitive nature of the topic. For instance, it is possible a participant might feel pressured by the other members of her chapter to state that a particular stereotype is not true or does not apply to her chapter. In fact, one participant told the second author after the focus group that she did not say certain things because they contradicted the statements of another participant. Furthermore, some participants spoke often and at length, while others were

**RESULTS**

largely silent. Each participant interacted, even if only by nodding; was asked to provide input at multiple times during the focus groups; and provided at least a few substantive comments. The participants also disagreed with and contradicted each other and referred to specific negative behaviors in their chapter. Therefore, it appeared the participants largely felt free to express themselves and contributed as they saw appropriate.

Results are presented in narrative format, differentiated by which stereotypes members believed were most common, which they believed were most accurate, and which they believed were most damaging. Table 2 provides a summary of the stereotypes provided by the participants in each focus group when they were asked to provide the most commonly held stereotypes of sororities at WIU.

**Table 2**

*Summary of Major Results*

Chapter Response to Stereotype	Partying	Promiscuity	Drugs	Hazing	Dumb	Poor Relationships	Rich
Commonly Held	Eta Gamma Nu Pi	Eta Gamma Nu Pi	Gamma	Gamma Pi	Gamma Nu Pi	Eta Gamma Nu Pi	Eta
Not true				Pi	Eta	Eta Gamma Pi	
True for certain women within every chapter	Eta Nu	Eta			Gamma Nu		Eta
True for certain chapters	Gamma Pi	Gamma Nu	Gamma	Eta Gamma		Nu	
Most damaging	Gamma Nu Pi	Eta Gamma		Gamma Pi		Eta Gamma	

### ***Most Commonly Held Negative Stereotypes Members Perceived***

Partying. Participants from all chapters said the stereotype that sorority members party a lot was the most commonly held stereotype. Participants from Eta, Gamma, and Pi included drinking a lot in their description of this stereotype, and participants from Eta added, in the words of one participant from this group:

...if you are affiliated [with a sorority], you are affiliated with excessive partying, excessive drinking, getting arrested.... Not just us going out and celebrating a sister's 21st birthday, having a margarita, and going home. Its getting wasted out of your mind, not knowing who you are, and then doing the bad behaviors associated with that.

While the participants from Nu did not explicitly include drinking in their definition of partying, they arguably implied it in statements like "we're presumed to get on top of the bar and dance." Participants from Pi included two other aspects in their description of the partying stereotype: doing drugs and promiscuity. The only further description of drug use these participants provided was doing drugs a lot. In regard to the promiscuity aspect, participants from Pi described it as "making out in public," "dressing provocatively," and "get[ting] with every guy in a fraternity." While participants from the other chapters did not include promiscuity in their description of the partying stereotype, they did list promiscuity as a stereotype that was separate from the partying stereotype, and Gamma listed drug use as a separate stereotype as well (see those sections below).

**Promiscuity.** Participants from Eta, Gamma, and Nu indicated promiscuity or sleeping around was one of the most commonly held negative stereotypes. Participants from Nu describe this

stereotype as "sleeping around with fraternities. It's not just sleeping around in general." In contrast, participants from Gamma described it as sleeping with everyone. The participants from Eta did not agree that the stereotype was limited to fraternity men, but they all agreed that there was at least an emphasis on fraternity men. In addition, all participants from Gamma agreed that there was a hyper-sexualized view of sorority women as part of this stereotype, including the belief that there were naked pillow fights in sorority chapter houses. As noted above, participants from Pi did not mention promiscuity as a separate stereotype, though they did include it as part of the partying stereotype.

**Drugs.** The women from Gamma listed drugs as one of the most commonly held negative stereotypes. As a participant from Gamma put it, "Some sorority girls are on drugs....They like to party, including drugs." Another participant from Gamma added to this description when she said "I think one of [the stereotypes] could be that some of the girls are just so skinny because they do drugs." As noted above, participants from Pi indicated that drugs were one component of the Partying stereotype instead of a separate stereotype.

**Hazing.** Participants from every chapter except Nu included hazing as one of the most commonly held negative stereotypes. Women from Gamma and Pi described hazing as, as two participants from Gamma put it, "anything that can make [an uninitiated] member feel uncomfortable." Participants from Eta and Pi described hazing as anything that took away uninitiated members' dignity or embarrassed them, as well as anything that caused harm to uninitiated members. For example, one participant from Eta said hazing was "mainly the embarrassment and the physical harm, like making us do crazy, ridiculous stuff that no one would do in 30 degree weather." Finally, women from Pi included the ideas that (1) uninitiated

members are required to do things that initiated members are not required to do and (2) uninitiated members have to do these things in order to be accepted.

**Dumb.** All of the chapters mentioned a stereotype that was related to intelligence. The participants from every chapter except Nu used the word “Dumb” as at least part of their description of this stereotype, and the participants from Nu described this stereotype as not caring about school, having test files, and skipping class. The participants from Gamma agreed that the “Dumb” stereotype could be combined with a stereotype that they initially listed separately and that they described as liking clothes and being girly and superficial. While the participants from Pi listed and described a “Dumb” stereotype, they connected it with stereotypes that were included as part of the “Poor Relationships” stereotype (see next section). As a result, the participants from Pi were not asked any questions about the accuracy of the “Dumb” stereotype.

The women from Eta and Gamma described the “Dumb” stereotype as the belief that sorority members are dumb, and the participants from Nu described this stereotype as the belief that sorority members do not have good grades. The participants from Nu also mentioned skipping class and having test files, and participants from Gamma mentioned showing up late for class. The participants from Gamma and Pi provided descriptions of this stereotype focused on issues with sorority members’ priorities (i.e. focusing on appearance rather than grades for the participants from both chapters and focusing on the chapter rather than grades for just the participants from Gamma).

**Poor Relationships.** Participants from each chapter mentioned stereotypes that dealt with the poor quality of sorority members’ relationships or interactions with others, both within and outside of their organizations. The participants from Eta discussed the following stereotypes related to poor relationships: paying

for your friends, which was described as the beliefs that members only interacted with each other because they paid dues and that they did not have genuine relationships with each other; being clingy, which they described as the beliefs that members did not interact with anyone outside of their chapter; and members of each chapter having certain traits in common, which they described as members being conceited, only thinking about themselves, and believing they are better looking than unaffiliated students. The participants from Gamma also discussed two stereotypes that related to the general idea of poor quality relationships.

The first centered on having money and the idea of “buying your friends,” which the participants from Gamma described similarly to the participants from Eta. The second was commonly described as being “bitchy and stuck up,” which was further described as fighting with other sorority members, only talking to members of one’s chapter, and only partying with fraternity members. The participants from Nu discussed the following stereotypes related to poor relationships: “buying your friends,” not having lifelong friendships, being stuck-up, not interacting with members of other sororities, and being “too good” for unaffiliated students. Finally, the participants from Pi provided only one stereotype they referred to as being “cliquey.” Participants described this multifaceted stereotype as the belief that sorority members only interact with members of their chapter because they believe they are better than other people, that there are cliques within each chapter, that members of a sorority will dislike the members of another sorority if only one member of their sorority has an issue with that other sorority, that sororities will only interact with members of certain fraternities, and that sorority members only have friends because they paid for them.

**Rich.** Participants from Eta viewed being rich as one of the most commonly held negative stereotypes. These participants agreed that this

stereotype was tied to having lots of money. As one participant from Eta said:

I've been called numerous times a little rich daddy's girl, and they all assume that my father pays for my dues and my father pays for my school...I think people perceive, especially on this campus, that...as soon as something goes wrong, we cry and throw a little bitch fit...until we get the money.

As noted above, the participants from Gamma described having money as part of the Poor Relationships stereotype, rather than a separate stereotype.

### *Accuracy of the Perceived Stereotypes*

Participants from all four chapters had differing views of the accuracy of each stereotype individually, though there was general agreement that the stereotypes were not true. Table 2 provides a summary of their perceptions. Participants from three chapters argued that some of the stereotypes were not true at all. More specifically, the participants from Eta indicated that the Dumb stereotype was not true, and the participants from Pi said the Hazing stereotype was not true. While there was some argument between the participants from Pi regarding whether or not certain chapters were more likely to haze, they ultimately agreed that they did not have enough evidence to know whether or not this was true. In addition, the participants from Eta, Pi, and Gamma all indicated that most of the various aspects of the Poor Relationships stereotype were not true. The exceptions for Eta were the beliefs that sorority members thought they were better than independent students or members of other sororities, which the participants thought was true for some chapters. The belief that members of each chapter had certain traits in common was thought to be true by one participant.

The exceptions for Gamma were the beliefs that sorority members do not get along and are rich; participants thought both stereotypes were true for some individuals in different chapters. The exceptions for Pi were the beliefs that sorority members are cliquey, which the participants thought was true, and the belief that members are stuck up and rich, which the participants thought was true for certain chapters.

Participants from Eta, Gamma, and Nu also indicated that only certain women within each chapter engaged in other stereotypical behaviors. Participants from Eta indicated this was the case for the Promiscuity, Partying, and Rich stereotypes, participants from Gamma indicated this was the case for the Dumb stereotype, and participants from Nu indicated this was the case for the Partying and Dumb stereotypes. The participants from Gamma and Nu also argued that those stereotypes were truer for certain chapters because of the individuals in them. As one Eta participant stated regarding the Promiscuity stereotype:

...there may be certain women who choose to behave that way, but I know a lot of people in many chapters that have never behaved that way and would never behave that way, and I don't think that joining any sorta chapter would... promote that behavior cuz we all have our standards and our morals, and I don't think that the people we hang out with would totally change [them].

These findings may provide additional evidence that participants did not believe the stereotypes were true. Contrary, participants argue that the stereotypes were, at best, only true for a limited number of members.

Further evidence that the participants did not believe the stereotypes were true for all sorority members included participants from all four chapters indicated there were stereotypes

that were only true for certain chapters. Participants from Gamma and Nu indicated this was the case for the Promiscuity stereotype; participants from Gamma also indicated this was the case for the Partying stereotype and, with a lesser degree of confidence, the Drugs stereotype; and participants from Pi indicated this was the case for the Partying stereotype, which included drug use and promiscuity for that group. In addition, participants from Eta and Gamma indicated this was the case for the Hazing stereotype. Finally, the participants from Nu participants indicated that all aspects of the Poor Relationships stereotype except “buying your friends,” which they indicated was not true at all, were more true for certain chapters, though one participant thought the accuracy of the belief that members only interact with each other was difficult to determine and another participant thought the “stuck up” aspect was true for certain individuals.

### ***Most Damaging Negative Stereotypes Members Perceived***

***Multiple stereotypes.*** At the end of the focus group, participants were asked which stereotype was most damaging for the sororities at WIU. The participants from Gamma, Eta, and Pi selected more than one stereotype as the most damaging. More specifically, participants from Eta and Pi named two stereotypes as the most damaging while participants from Gamma selected four stereotypes. The participants from Nu mentioned one stereotype. The details about which stereotypes they selected and their reasons for selecting these stereotypes are presented below, and a summary can be found in Table 2.

***Partying.*** Participants from Gamma, Nu, and Pi mentioned partying as one of the most damaging stereotypes. The participants from each of these groups also provided the reasons why they selected this stereotype. The participants from Gamma and Pi argued that partying was the most damaging stereotype

because it negatively affected recruitment. As one participant from Gamma put it, “girls don’t want to go through recruitment because they think, ‘Well, those houses, all they do is party. I don’t just party.’” The participants from Gamma, Nu, and Pi also indicated the partying stereotype could hurt members by negatively affecting their reputations. For instance, one participant from Gamma said:

I also think it can hurt when it comes to...the people of Macomb or like the administration, teachers, and staff, if they hear stories of, you know, girls out partying, or the people of Macomb see those few girls walking home from the bar, you know, acting outrageous...I think that can be pretty detrimental to our image.

In addition, participants from Gamma and Nu said this stereotype is the most damaging because it impacts the other stereotypes. For instance, one participant from Nu said,

If you party, you’re gonna miss class. Your teachers are gonna know you’re coming hungover. They’re gonna know that you’re leaving class to go to the bars straight after, and chances are, if you are rumored to be a slut, it’s because you were drinking heavily.

Finally, participants from Pi said this stereotype can lead to legal problems. While the participants from Eta did not list partying as one of the most damaging stereotypes, one participant from Eta indicated that partying could be damaging because potential members who only want to party may not be high quality members.

***Hazing.*** Participants from Gamma and Pi said hazing was one of the most damaging negative stereotypes for sororities at WIU. Participants from both chapters contended that

this stereotype was the most damaging because it negatively affected recruitment. For example, a participant from Pi stated, “when I was going through [recruitment], I heard rumors [about a certain chapter hazing], and it totally made me not want to go to that house.” Participants from Pi also indicated hazing can harm a chapter’s reputation and lead to legal trouble. While the participants from Nu did not list hazing as one of the damaging stereotypes because they did not see it as a problem for their chapter, they did perceive hazing as the most damaging stereotype because one of the first questions potential members ask is about hazing and hazing can lead to death and, as a result, the loss of a charter.

**Promiscuity.** Participants from Eta and Gamma selected promiscuity as one of the most damaging stereotypes, though not all of the participants from Eta agreed. While the participants from both groups indicated this stereotype could help recruitment by attracting some women to the chapter, they also stated this stereotype would lead to both short-term and long-term recruitment problems. For instance, one participant from Gamma said,

...you got some girls that don’t want to go through certain houses...because they think of a stereotype that they’re sleeping around, but then you have other girls that are saying, “Oh, I want to be a part of that house because I’m going to meet the most guys and sleep around,” and then those are...the people that are going to be leading that house later, so if you have a bunch of girls coming in there for the wrong reasons, its kind of like a set-up for failure for that house.

While the participants from Nu did not list this stereotype as one of the most damaging, they did contend that some chapters embrace or promote this stereotype in order to recruit.

**Poor Relationships.** Participants from Gamma indicated two aspects of this stereotype may be the most damaging because of their impact on how sororities are seen and, therefore, recruitment. The first is the idea of “buying your friends.” The participants from Gamma argued this stereotype could be the most damaging stereotype because, as one participant put it:

A lot of people won’t go through [recruitment] because of that, even after you tell them, “Well, you can be put on a payment plan.”...It still is a huge turn-off to them, that they have to pay money just to be accepted or whatever they’re thinking in their heads....Even if they get in, they’re like, “Well, I won’t have as nice as stuff as everyone else.”

The second aspect is a lack of acceptance, which one participant said could impact recruitment because “going off of people are too scared to go through recruitment because they’re not sure that any house will take them.”

Participants from Eta indicated one aspect of this stereotype, namely being conceited, was one of the most damaging stereotypes. These participants agreed that this stereotype leads to competition that negatively affects the fraternity/sorority community. As one participant said, “the more conceited we are about our own chapter, the more we talk and bash other [chapters]...We’re all trying to one-up each other all the time.” Furthermore, participants from Eta agreed this stereotype could, as one participant put it “definitely [bring] down other chapters and it definitely [tear] the community apart.” While the participants from Eta did not list the “clingy” aspect of this stereotype as the most damaging stereotype, they did argue that it could be the most damaging since other people may think sorority members exclude other people because they think they are better than other people.

### *Similarities to and Differences from Fraternity Members' Views*

The authors had previously conducted a similar project with members of five fraternities that were affiliated with the Interfraternity Council at WIU (Tollini & Wilson, 2010). Like the sorority participants in this current study, the fraternity participants studied in 2010 listed seven stereotypes, and the list provided by the participants in each focus group varied. Furthermore, fraternity and sorority participants from both studies listed stereotypes that focused on or at least included drinking, promiscuity, hazing, poor academic performance, arrogance, being rich, and paying for friends. The sorority participants discussed additional aspects of poor quality relationships and also provided a larger discussion of partying, which included drug use, than the fraternity participants, while the fraternity members mentioned sexual assault and date rape. The most notable difference between the stereotypes listed by the fraternity and sorority participants was that fraternity participants listed not performing community service.

There were more differences between the fraternity and sorority participants regarding their views of the accuracy of the stereotypes. While sorority participants thought the stereotypes were at best only true for certain individuals or chapters, at least some of the fraternity participants stated there was at least some truth to all of the stereotypes they listed. The fraternity participants also argued at least some of the stereotypes were more/only true for the members of certain chapters, but they made this argument less often than sorority participants. Furthermore, the fraternity participants stated the hazing stereotype was true. One notable similarity between the fraternity and sorority participants was the different focus groups did not have the same view of the accuracy of some stereotypes.

Both fraternity and sorority participants listed four stereotypes as most damaging to their organizations: hazing, drinking/parting, promiscuity, and arrogance. However, the sorority participants listed other aspects of poor relationships as damaging to their chapters. Hazing and partying/drinking were the stereotypes selected by members of the most focus groups in both projects, and the number of stereotypes selected by members of each focus group varied for both the fraternity and sorority participants. Both the fraternity and sorority participants stated these stereotypes were damaging primarily because of their negative impact on recruitment and/or the quality of members that are recruited, though participants from both projects indicated that some of these stereotypes could boost a chapter's reputation.

### **DISCUSSION**

Participants listed the following as the most commonly held negative stereotypes of sororities: Partying, Promiscuity, Hazing, Dumb, Poor Relationships, Drugs, and Rich. The participants from each group did not discuss all of these stereotypes, and the difference in the number of stereotypes discussed in each group cannot be tied to the number of participants in the group because nearly all of the groups had essentially the same number of participants and the smallest group actually one of the groups that discussed the most stereotypes. The differences in the listed stereotypes indicate chapters differed in their views of which stereotypes were the most commonly held. The participants also differed in how they defined these stereotypes, and at least a couple aspects of the definitions that some of the participants provided for the Poor Relationships stereotype (i.e., paying for friends) have not been the focus of previous research.

Overall, participants from each focus group

argued the stereotypes were not accurate for all sorority members. More specifically, they argued the stereotypes were either not true or were only true for certain chapters or certain individuals within each chapter. The participants from each group did not view the same stereotype in the same way, however. For instance, participants from Pi argued the Hazing stereotype was not true, while participants from Eta and Gamma contended this stereotype was true for certain chapters.

At least some participants believed the Partying, Hazing, Promiscuity, and Poor Relationships stereotypes were the most damaging stereotypes for all sororities at WIU. In general, participants, even those who did not rank these stereotypes as the most damaging, believed these stereotypes negatively affected recruitment, though some participants stated that these stereotypes could also have a positive, if short-term impact on recruitment. The Partying stereotype was selected as the most damaging stereotype by women from three chapters, while the Hazing and Promiscuity stereotypes were selected by participants from two chapters. Poor Relationships was selected by participants from one chapter. Finally, women from two groups named two stereotypes as the most damaging, while the women from another group selected four stereotypes and women from the final group only mentioned one stereotype.

### ***Implications***

Campus and organization-based sorority professionals and volunteers should seek the perspectives of sorority members on their campus, perhaps by replicating the present study and/or holding public forums and online discussions. One benefit of obtaining this information is that programming could be designed based on whether members would classify a concern as major or minor. For instance, educational programs could be created

to inform members about the concerns they do not seem to view as major concerns (e.g., racism and eating disorders), while programs regarding the issues about which they are aware (e.g., partying and hazing) could focus on strategies for addressing these concerns.

Practitioners may learn members believe they face issues of which the practitioners are unaware. Perhaps the clearest example of this is the stereotype that sorority members “pay for their friends.” Gaining this knowledge may lead professionals to develop new programming and to work with members to address these “new” concerns which may encourage additional positive interactions between sororities and university personnel.

Insight into sorority members’ beliefs about the accuracy of the negative stereotypes of their organizations enables sorority professionals to identify those concerns about which members need more information in order to perceive them as legitimate, either for all chapters and/or for their chapter specifically. Members may also be likely to address the concerns they believe are the most damaging to them. Determining why members believe a particular stereotype is damaging can also be useful; fraternity/sorority professionals could incorporate this reasoning into policies and discussions with members. During the focus groups, participants found stereotypes damaging predominantly because they affected recruitment. If sorority professionals focus on how certain actions may negatively impact recruitment results and/or provide evidence regarding how sharp the decline in recruitment numbers may be, sorority members may be particularly likely to change their behaviors.

Campus and organization-based sorority advisors and volunteers should also be aware of differences between chapters. Participants in each focus group did not list the same stereotypes, nor did they define or describe the same stereotype in the same way. In addition,

participants in each group ranked between one and four stereotypes as most damaging. Furthermore, participants from each group who mentioned a given stereotype did not necessarily agree on why the stereotype was damaging or even if it was damaging. Participants from some groups even provided reasons to believe that a stereotype could have positive consequences (i.e., chapters that match the Partying stereotype may be more appealing to potential new members because they have a lot of parties), though they acknowledged that these benefits may be short lived (i.e., chapters that match the Partying stereotype may have problems completing the work of the chapter because their members focus on having parties). All of this indicates there is variation between and within chapters. As a result, a “one-size-fits-all” approach is unlikely to be well received.

In addition, the comparison of the results from this project and previous studies involving IFC fraternities (Tollini & Wilson, 2010) indicate sorority and fraternity members have similar perceptions of the negative stereotypes that others have of their organizations. Therefore, similar programming could be used for both fraternities and sororities. That being said, there should be at least some differences

in this programming because there are slight differences in the stereotypes listed by men’s and women’s groups. Perhaps more importantly, fraternity members may be more open to programming because they were more likely to believe there was at least some accuracy to the stereotypes, though fraternity and sorority members are somewhat likely to believe the stereotypes are truer for chapters other than their own.

### *Suggestions for Future Research*

Additional research on how sorority members view the negative stereotypes of them is needed, in no small part because the research described above is preliminary. This study needs to be replicated at other universities, especially those with a larger fraternity/sorority population. Future research should also address each commonly held stereotype in more detail and determine the extent to which sorority members (1) are aware of the various stereotypes of them, (2) would rank the same stereotypes as damaging, and (3) have the same definition of the stereotypes. Finally, additional research should address how sorority members believe these stereotypes should be addressed.

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## SPECIAL SECTION: RESEARCH REPORT

# COLLABORATION BETWEEN FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS AND COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN ADDRESSING STUDENT CONDUCT ISSUES

A WHITE PAPER PREPARED FOR THE FRATERNITY EXECUTIVES ASSOCIATION

BRENT G. PATERSON

*In fall 2011, Kim Novak, a risk management consultant and Larry Wiese, then president of the Fraternity Executives Association (FEA) and Executive Director of Kappa Alpha Order approached the author about writing a White Paper that examined collaboration between staff from inter/national fraternity headquarters, chapter alumni leadership and administrators at colleges and universities in addressing student conduct by members of a chapter. The White Paper was presented at the FEA annual meeting in July 2012. The content of this article remains largely unchanged from the original White Paper and is published with permission from FEA.*

Not a month goes by without a headline of inappropriate behavior by members of an undergraduate chapter. Some headlines from August/September 2011 include: “UT Fraternity Accused of Live Sex Shows, Hazing” (Kreytak, 2011), “University of South Carolina Suspends Fraternity Rush” (Hoover, 2011), “Princeton to Ban Freshman Affiliation with Fraternities, Sororities as of fall 2012” (Staff, 2011), and “After Student’s Death, Cornell Moves to End Hazing” (Associated Press, 2011). As stated in an August 26, 2011 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, colleges and universities have,

a perpetual but perhaps futile goal: to preserve the best and prevent the worst of the Greek system. Of course, fraternities aspire to ideals of leadership and service, and often achieve them. But then, too often, initiates get hurt – or die (Lipka, 2011, para. 2).

Colleges and universities face greater expectations from parents and the public for the safety and security of students than ever before. The public perception is that college and university campuses have become violent and dangerous places. According to Sloan and Fischer (2010), because colleges and universities do not adequately address campus safety and security, they have failed in their duty to protect students from dangerous conditions. Fraternity houses create special difficulties for colleges and universities and inter/national fraternity headquarters. Often these houses are owned or leased by a local housing corporation and may be off campus.

Both colleges and universities and inter/national fraternity headquarters have limited authority and ability to change the behavior of a chapter that does not want to change. Kappa Alpha Order headquarters discovered how difficult it can be when a local fraternity chapter refused to accept the suspension of its charter from the inter/national headquarters

and formed a local fraternity in the same house (Kreytak, 2011). Colleges and universities experience similar frustrations when a chapter's recognition is suspended by the college or university and the chapter continues to operate in the community with the support of inter/national headquarters.

Situations like these create greater tension between inter/national fraternity headquarters and colleges and universities; however, colleges and universities are not without blame. It would not be uncommon for a college or university senior administrator to voice his or her strong displeasure with behavior by fraternity members, especially when an injury or death is involved. Lower level administrators will be pressed to find a way through existing conduct processes to meet the senior administrator's expectations. College or university administrators will feel it necessary to make a public statement condemning the acts and indicate that strong action will be taken against those responsible.

Trust can be difficult when the stakes are high. When there is a serious injury or a death a fraternity, it is very difficult for colleges and universities and inter/national fraternity headquarters to trust each other. In the opinion of the author, legal counsels for colleges and universities and inter/national fraternity headquarters too quickly insert themselves in the situation. The role of legal counsel is to protect the entity they represent. It is natural that legal counsels for colleges and universities do not want staff sharing information with inter/national fraternity headquarters that might somehow harm the college or university in a lawsuit. Legal counsels for inter/national fraternity headquarters similarly advise their clients.

The role of the alumni chapter advisor and housing corporation cannot be overlooked. It has been the author's experience that chapter advisors who are dedicated to the ideals and values of the fraternity and understand the place

of fraternities and sororities in the education of young adults are interested in collaborating with colleges and universities. In turn, these institutions are interested and willing to collaborate with and support the chapter advisors. On the other hand, some chapter advisors are absent, meaning they rarely visit the chapter and advise the chapter leadership, or are not interested in working with the college or university and, perhaps, not the inter/national headquarters.

Fundamental to collaboration is effective and timely communication as well as trust between the parties. Ideally, there are regular communications between colleges and universities and inter/national fraternity headquarters. However, it seems communication between colleges and universities and inter/national fraternity headquarters often occurs only when there is a problem. It is difficult to build trusting relationships when the first time these entities communicate is when there is a serious incident involving a fraternity. The result is frustration between the entities and a perception that neither entity is truly interested in working with each other to address conduct issues with a fraternity.

In exploring the tensions between colleges and universities and inter/national fraternity headquarters the author examines the need for collaboration and the difficulty in achieving it. The philosophy regarding student conduct at colleges and universities and key legal issues and court decisions are explored. The author shares findings from dialogue with student conduct officers, fraternity/sorority advisors, senior student affairs officers, higher education legal and risk management specialists, and inter/national headquarters staff. The paper concludes with recommended procedures for collaboration between college and university administrators and inter/national fraternity headquarters staff in addressing inappropriate behavior by undergraduate chapter members.

### ***History of Student Conduct***

Much has changed since the founding of the colonial college. The first colleges in America (Harvard, Yale, The College of William and Mary, Princeton, etc.) were established to provide training of affluent young (as young as 12 years old) males for the clergy. Live-in tutors tightly controlled student behavior acting in place of the parent with the president having final say on a course of action (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976). During the Colonial period, the first Greek letter student organization at a college in America, Phi Beta Kappa, was founded at the College of William and Mary (Binder, 2003, p. 32).

### ***The Changing Student Era***

The Morrill Act of 1862 opened a college education to the masses with the founding of land grant colleges to provide a more career-oriented education in agriculture and mechanics (engineering). The second Morrill Act of 1890 established historically Black colleges and universities, mostly across the south. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (GI Bill) brought an older student to campus, one that expected to be treated as an adult.

The counter culture movement of the 1960s changed how students at colleges and universities were viewed and treated. The youth of that era challenged traditional authority and materialism while advocating civil rights and women's rights, and an end to America's involvement in Vietnam. Students protested these issues on college campuses across the country and in the community. Colleges and universities took disciplinary action, sometimes harsh action, against students participating in protests. In response, students challenged the college's actions in court. In many cases, the courts found in favor of the students and established reasonable due process considerations in student conduct cases. The days of a college or university administrator summarily deciding the fate of students without

providing due process were gone. No longer could administrators make decisions and claim they were acting in place of the parent, in loco parentis.

### ***The Bystander Era***

Bickel and Lake (1999) characterize the period of the 1970s and 1980s as the Bystander era in higher education. Students were no longer considered under the control of their parents, but were not yet mature adults. Based on court decisions at that time, colleges and universities adopted a "hands off" approach to dealing with student organizations. With this approach, colleges and universities operated in the role of bystanders with no legal duty to protect students. Four court cases – *Bradshaw v. Rawlings* (1979), *Baldwin v. Zoradi* (1981), *Beach v. University of Utah* (1986), and *Rabel v. Illinois Wesleyan University* (1987) - represent the no-duty philosophy of the courts during this era.

In *Bradshaw v. Rawlings* (1979), a student was seriously injured while riding as a passenger in a vehicle driven by an intoxicated fellow student. The students had been at a sophomore class event at an off campus park. Fliers for the event were copied on college duplicating equipment and posted around campus. The class president, although underage, purchased at least six kegs of beer from a local distributor for the event. The Third Circuit in announcing its findings stated,

Our beginning point is a recognition that the modern American college is not an insurer of the safety of its students. Whatever may have been its responsibility in an earlier era, the authoritarian role of today's college administrations has been notably diluted in recent decades. Trustees, administrators, and faculties have been required to yield to the expanding rights and privileges of their students. By constitutional amendment, written and unwritten law, and through the evolution of new customs,

rights formerly possessed by college administrations have been transferred to students.

Injuries suffered in a car wreck during a speeding contest involving underage drinking were the impetus for *Baldwin v. Zoradi* (1981). Baldwin asserted the university failed to enforce its own rules prohibiting the consumption of alcohol in university residence halls; thereby creating an unsafe condition. In other words, the university had a duty to prevent students from harming themselves by consuming alcohol in the residence halls then getting in cars to drive under the influence of alcohol. The appellate court found that “there was a lack of close connection between the failure of the trustees and dormitory advisors to control on-campus drinking and the speed contest.”

In *Beach v. University of Utah* (1986), a student wandered off from the group on a required field trip, fell off a cliff and was rendered quadriplegic. The student had been drinking alcohol along with other students and the faculty advisor on the trip immediately prior to falling off the cliff. Citing the *Bradshaw v. Rawlings* (1979) and the *Baldwin v. Zoradi* (1981) court decisions, the *Beach* court stated, “Not only are students such as Beach adults, but law and society have increasingly come to recognize their status as such in the past decade or two. Nowhere is this than in the relations between students and institutions of higher education.” Thus, the University did not have a duty of care for the student.

As part of a fraternity “tradition,” a fraternity member abducted a female student from a residence hall lobby, placed her over his shoulders, and began to run through a gauntlet of fraternity brothers. While running the student fell resulting in a crushed skull for the female he was carrying. The female student was left with permanent brain injuries. The fraternity member had consumed alcohol at a fraternity party immediately prior to

entering the residence hall and grabbing the female student. The injured student filed suit against the fraternity member, the fraternity, and the university. The fraternity member and the fraternity settled out of court. The court determined that “there was no duty owed to the plaintiff by the university and no issue as to the negligence of the university” (*Rabel v. Illinois Wesleyan University*, 1987).

### *The Duty Era*

Since the mid 1980s the courts have steadily eroded the legal concept of no duty to care for the student and replaced it with a “shared responsibility and a balancing of university authority and student freedom (Bickel & Lake, 1999, p. 105). Expanded liability for colleges and universities has been defined in court decisions when dangerous conditions exist, when dangerous practices are common, and when dangerous activities occur without attempts to minimize risk.

The Delaware Supreme Court decision in *Furek v. Delaware* (1991) illustrated the new era of shared responsibility. Furek was a fraternity pledge at the University of Delaware. During a “hell night” activity, a fraternity member poured oven cleaner over Furek, which resulted in chemical burns and permanent scarring. In its review of lower court decisions, the Delaware Supreme Court stated,

While we acknowledge the apparent weight of decisional authority that there is no duty on the part of a college or university to control its students based merely on the university-student relationship, where there is direct university involvement in, and knowledge of, certain dangerous practices of its students, the university cannot abandon its residual duty of control (*Furek v. Delaware*, 1991, @ 520).

The lesson for higher education in *Furek* was that universities should take all reasonable steps to prevent an incident from occurring; but students also have some responsibility for their behavior.

However, the court in *Furek v. Delaware* (1999) determined that the national fraternity was not responsible for the actions of a fraternity member in part because the national fraternity did not have control over the day-to-day activities of a local chapter. Courts took similar positions in *Walker v. Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity* (1997) and *Jones v. Kappa Alpha Order* (1997). In contrast, the court in *Ballou v. Sigma Nu* (1986) determined that the national fraternity did have a duty to care for pledges participating in an initiation ceremony. In reaching its decision the court noted that Ballou was required to participate in initiation activities to become a member of Sigma Nu; that the active chapter members created a hazardous situation by forcing Ballou to consume large amounts of alcohol in a short period of time; that the active chapter members failed to recognize Ballou's condition and seek medical treatment; and that the active chapter members were operating within the scope of authority granted to them by the national fraternity.

Another case in which the court determined the university had a duty to protect the student is *Knoll v. Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska* (1999). Knoll, a fraternity pledge, was "kidnapped" by fraternity brothers from a university building, taken to the fraternity house, forced to consume large amounts of alcohol, and handcuffed to a pipe in a house bathroom. Knoll broke free and fell three stories attempting to escape from the fraternity house. He suffered serious injuries from the fall. The Nebraska Supreme Court determined, "... the University owes a landowner-invitee duty to students to take reasonable steps to protect against foreseeable acts of hazing, including student abduction on the University's property, and the harm that naturally flows therefrom."

The 1980s and 1990s were also marked by a change in the relationship between students, parents and the university. An age of consumerism developed as institutions increased tuition and fees charged students to make up for declining financial support from state and federal governments. Parents had ever-increasing expectations for institutions of higher education in part based on the feeling they could demand what they were paying for. Parents said that they expected the university to provide for the safety of their son/daughter and take whatever means necessary to prevent harm. The nature of consumerism implied a contract between the student and the university. While contractual relationships had been used by the courts to describe the relationship between private institutions and students, this was a new adaptation to public universities (Frank, Janosik & Paterson, in press).

A tragic rape and murder of a student in her residence hall room at Lehigh University in 1986 forever changed how colleges view their responsibility to care for its students. The killer entered the residence hall and gained access to the student's room through three propped-open doors. The parents of the student, Howard and Jeanne Clery stated,

We learned from the outcome of our lawsuit against Lehigh that campus administrators have a duty to protect their students from crime. In addition, we became convinced that such litigation may be the single most effective way to pressure academic officialdom to: 1) recognize campus violence as the threat that it has become; and, 2) do something about it (Clery & Clery, 2011).

The Clery's went on to found Security On Campus, "a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the prevention of criminal violence at colleges and to assisting campus victim nationwide" (Clery & Clery, 2011). Security On Campus is most known for working with Congress to pass the Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act of 1990, which required

colleges and universities to report crime statistics. Security on Campus continues to push for legislation to address violence at colleges and universities.

### **Post Virginia Tech Era**

Ferraro and McHugh (2010) noted, “the ideal university is an institution of social harmony built on charitable foundations that works to enhance the intellectual abilities and professional capabilities of all members of a collaborative community” (p. 1). On April 16, 2007 that belief was shattered as a single student attacker killed 32 members of the Virginia Tech community, including 27 students. This tragedy resulted in federal and state mandates that place even greater responsibility on the university to protect its students from harm.

The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 amended annual security reporting requirements of the Clery Act that requires institutions to:

- Report their policies regarding emergency response and evacuation procedures;
- Immediately notify campus community upon confirmation of a significant emergency or dangerous situation involving an immediate threat to the health and safety of students or staff, unless the notification at that time will compromise efforts to contain the emergency;
- Publicize emergency response and evacuation procedures on an annual basis to students and staff; and
- Test emergency response and evacuation procedures annually.

Some states approved laws that established additional campus safety requirements. For example, the Illinois Legislature approved the Campus Security Enhancement Act of 2008. This Act requires universities to develop and

implement an all hazards campus emergency plan that coordinates response to a crisis with local, state and federal emergency response agencies. A campus violence prevention plan and a campus threat assessment team are also requirements of the Act.

Clearly, there is an expectation from parents and society that universities should and can prevent violent acts on their campuses and thus insure the safety of its students. In their book, *The Dark Side of the Ivory Tower: Campus Crime as a Social Problem*, John Sloan and Bonnie Fischer (2010), posit that messages spread by mass media have led to public acceptance of campus crime as a social problem and a norm on university campuses. They suggest that the public believes universities are more violent and dangerous places today. The public perceives a “party culture” on campuses that encourages alcohol abuse and leads to student deaths. By permitting this “party culture” to exist, the public believes that universities have failed in their legal duty to protect students from criminal victimization.

New pressures, regulatory and media, have been applied to universities to act swiftly in notifying the campus of emergencies and to be aggressive in protecting the safety of students, faculty, staff and visitors. With the prevalence of cell phone and other electronic devices today, word of an incident often spreads before emergency responders have had a chance to investigate the incident. These informal communications shape public perception often making it difficult to address incidents in a logical step by step approach.

### **PHILOSOPHY OF STUDENT CONDUCT**

The underpinnings of universities’ approach to student conduct can be found in student affairs’ foundation document, *The Student Personnel Point of View* (American Council on Education, 1937). Among other emphases, *The Student Personnel Point of View* strongly advocated

for the importance of educating the whole student and student affairs role in providing this education. This emphasis remains true today as student affairs administrators who “advocate for the common good and champion the rights of the individual; encourage intelligent risk taking and set limits on behavior; encourage independent thought and teach interdependent behavior” (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1987, p. 19).

Perhaps the philosophical foundation for student conduct can best be described by the mission of the Association for Student Judicial Affairs (ASJA), the first professional association dedicated solely to student conduct officers and those working in related areas of higher education and the law:

The mission of this Association shall be to facilitate the integration of student development concepts with principles of judicial practice in a post-secondary educational setting . . . (ASJA, 1987, p. 1).

Student conduct administrators understand that interpersonal and intrapersonal changes occur during the time a student is enrolled in college and there are many factors that influence a student’s intellectual and ethical development during this time (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Thus, the purpose of the student conduct process is to help the student gain a greater self-understanding and accept responsibility for their actions (Waryold & Lancaster, 2008).

A recent movement in student conduct is the application of social justice principles in the conduct process. Jennifer Meyer Schrage and Nancy Geist Giacomini in their book *Reframing Campus Conflict: Student Conduct Practice through a Social Justice Lens* (2009), suggest a spectrum of resolution options to conduct issues on university campuses. The spectrum ranges from informal to formal options. At the informal end of the spectrum are the options of no conflict

management followed by dialogue/debate/discussion, and conflict coaching. These options require little to no structure or administrative involvement. The involved parties control the process and outcome. Moving along the spectrum, facilitated dialogue, mediation, restorative practices, and shuttle diplomacy are structure options where the parties control the outcome and administrators are involved as third-party facilitators. At the formal end of the spectrum are adjudication (informal) and adjudication (formal hearing). In adjudication the outcome is controlled by administrators or a hearing panel through a defined process. This spectrum suggests that student conduct officers at universities have several tools to address inappropriate behavior by students and that a formal hearing is not always necessary or the best method.

#### FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

Do fraternities have a legal right to exist on university campuses? The answer to the question can be found in a strange association between fraternities and radical groups of the 1960s. With the turbulent activities on campuses in the 1960s as a background, Central Connecticut State University sought to deny the recognition of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) as a student organization on its campus. SDS chapters on other campuses were widely involved in civil disobedience, which sometimes led to vandalism and seizure of buildings. The U.S. Supreme Court in *Healy v. James* (1972) stated that “the College, acting here as the instrumentality of the state, may not restrict speech or association simply because it finds the views expressed by any group to be abhorrent” (at 187-188). The Court distinguished the importance in protecting the advocacy of ideas, but not lawless actions (Burke, 2003, p. 253).

Freedom of association is not a one-size fits all right. Rather, there are three primary distinctions of freedom of association under

the First Amendment. The right to intimate association is best characterized by a family. This type of association is recognized as the strongest freedom of association. Recognizing the strength of family bonds, government attempts to avoid actions that would interfere with family bonds. Expressive association is the second strongest freedom of association. The right to form groups around common ideas and to express those beliefs characterizes expressive association. These groups range from religious organizations to Mothers Against Drunk Driving to Occupy Wall Street. Social association is considered the weakest of these forms of protected speech. Social organizations are generally thought of as groups that form for no real purpose than having fun (Lukianoff, 2011).

The Higher Education Amendments of 1998, as adopted by Congress, set out to address private colleges' ability to restrict fraternities from existing on their campuses. The "Sense of Congress" sought to require private colleges to recognize and respect the constitutional rights of their students. It was commonly believed that the Congressional action was intended to protect fraternities and their members (Burke, 2003, p. 269).

In his commentary in the *Huffington Post*, Lukianoff (2011) suggests that fraternities might well not have association rights because they are viewed as social organizations. He cites the court decision in *Chi Iota Colony of Alpha Epsilon Pi Fraternity v. City University of New York* (2007) in which the U.S. Court of Appeals, Second Circuit, characterized the fraternity as a social organization with limited associational rights and allowed the university to deny recognition to the fraternity. Lukianoff also cites at Third Circuit Court decision in which the court found that the fraternity did not have an expressive association claim (*Pi Lambda Phi Fraternity Inc. v. University of Pittsburgh*, 2000). In its decision, the Court stated, "While the intentional organization of Pi Lambda Phi

has admirable history that includes being the country's first non-sectarian fraternity, there is no substantial evidence in the record that the University chapter of Pi Lambda has done anything to actively pursue the ideals underlying this stance."

In 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court considered the right of universities to require organizations requesting recognition by the university to "allow any student to participate, become a member, or seek leadership positions in the organization, regardless of [her] status or beliefs" (as cited in Pavela, July 9, 2010). The court case, *Christian Legal Society v. Martinez* (2010), followed a series of lawsuits that questioned common practices at universities to require recognized student organizations to abide by institutional non-discrimination policies. The Supreme Court concluded that the so-called all-comers policy at Hastings College of Law was "a reasonable viewpoint—neutral condition on access to the student-organization forum." The Court further noted that "substantial alternatives for expression" exist even without registered student organization status.

Citing *Christian Legal Society v. Martinez* (2010), the Ninth Circuit Court in *Alpha Delta v. Reed* (2011) ruled that San Diego State University could refuse recognition to a Christian fraternity and sorority who asked that members share the group's faith (Creely, 2011). The court noted that it could not find a "material distinction between San Diego State's student organization program and the student organization program in *Christian Legal Society*" (as cited in Creely, 2011).

## DUE PROCESS

In very simple terms, due process means what procedures (process) are students entitled (due) when alleged to have committed a violation of the institution's student conduct code. Due process has two parts – procedural due process (fair procedure) and substantive

due process (fair outcome) (Pavela, January 29, 2010). While the US Supreme Court has never issued a decision that due process is a requirement of colleges, lower court decisions commonly have been believed to establish reasonable due process standards for colleges.

The Fifth Circuit decision in *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education* (1961) is the case that first defined expectations for due process in college student conduct cases. The court established that a student was entitled to a notice of the charges and an opportunity to be heard. More specifically, the court stated, "The notice should contain a statement of the specific charges and grounds which, if proven, would justify expulsion." The court is careful to not suggest that a "full-dress judicial hearing" is necessary for conduct proceedings. However, the court defined the elements it believed were appropriate for a conduct proceeding to include providing the accused student with the names of witnesses against him[or her], a report of the facts, and an opportunity to present a defense to an administrator or board.

In *Esteban v. Central Missouri State College* (1969), the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a college's authority to promulgate rules, expect students to follow those rules, appropriately discipline students, and protect the college and its property. In terms of procedural due process, the court determined that a college should provide:

adequate notice, definite charge, and a hearing with opportunity to present one's own side of the case and with all necessary protective measures; that school regulations are not to be measured by the standards which prevail for the criminal law and for criminal procedure; and that the courts should interfere only where there is a clear case of constitutional infringement (at 1090).

The courts have held that due process in educational settings is not a rigidly defined process (*Goss v. Lopez*, 1975 and *Gorman v. University of Rhode Island*, 1988). The courts recognize that institutions are structured differently and that a simple noise violation committed by a student is differently from an assault with injury. Specifically, the First Circuit Court in *Gorman* stated, "Due process, which may be said to mean fair procedure, is not a fixed or rigid concept, but, rather, is a flexible standard which varies depending upon the nature of the interest affected, and the circumstances of the deprivation" (at 13). Thus, the nature and amount of due process afforded a student is dependent upon the potential for a more severe sanction.

The introduction of attorneys in the student conduct process is often a point of contention between a student's attorney and the college. Attorneys often are not familiar with student conduct procedures and attempt to impose criminal trial procedures into the student conduct process. In *Gabrilowitz v. Newman* (1978), the First Circuit ruled that students have the right to have an attorney at student conduct proceedings to serve as an advisor, but not actively participate in the proceeding by presenting a defense for the student or cross-examining witnesses (Carletta, 1998, p. 44). Having an attorney advise a student in a conduct proceeding is most appropriate when the student faces criminal charges resulting from the same incident.

### ***Due Process at Private Institutions***

In discussing the distinction between public institutions and private institutions under the law, Peter Lake (2011), a professor at Stetson College of Law, stated, "Actually the public/private is a complex and related set of distinctions and, in many ways, they are lawyers' distinction" (p. 76). That said, the basic legal

principle is that public institutions are subject to the authority of the government that created them, most often the state, whereas private institutions are protected from governmental control. In student conduct cases, courts have applied contract theory to support the need for due process. In *Carr v. St. John's University* (1962), the court stated, "... there is an implied contract between the student and the university ...The university cannot take the student's money, allow him to remain and waste his time in whole or in part ... and then arbitrarily expel him" (at 633). Similarly, the New York Supreme Court ruled in *Kwiatowski v. Ithaca College* (1975) that an institution's conduct charges against a student "...must be predicated on procedures which are fair and reasonable and which lend themselves to reliable determination" (at 45). As a matter of practice, private institutions provide due process rights to students in conduct proceedings that mirror those found at public institutions.

### **Student Conduct Processes**

A *21st Century Model Student Conduct Code* developed by Stoner and Lowery (2004), is commonly held as the model that institutions should follow in developing or revising their codes of student conduct and student conduct procedures. The code is based on "generally prevailing law and practice" (p. 16). Stoner and Lowery emphasize that student conduct proceedings are not criminal proceedings and institutions should avoid using any language in the code that suggest otherwise. The model code is not intended to be adopted by institutions without revision. In drafting the model code, Stoner and Lowery recognized that institutional culture and practice impact the student conduct practice on that campus. Instead, the model code serves as a "checklist" when revising a campus code of conduct and in training hearing boards and hearing officers. They remind us that "the institution will want to remember the basic student affairs precept that it is important

to treat all students with equal care, concern, honor, fairness, and dignity" (p. 15).

Thomas R. Baker (2005) discusses complaint resolution models commonly used by colleges and universities to address student conduct issues in *Judicial Complaint Resolution Models for Higher Education: An Administrator's Reference Guide*. As Baker states, resolving student conduct complaints involves three simple concepts:

1. Determining what happened
2. Determining whether one or more institutional rules were violated
3. Determining whether disciplinary sanctions should be imposed.

However, the task of making the determinations identified in these concepts become complex as colleges and universities insert their culture of decentralization and separation of duties into resolving student conduct complaints. The complaint resolution process may be assigned to one institutional representative, an institutional committee or board, or involve a series of individuals and boards. Depending upon the size and complexity of the college or university, it is common to employ division of labor to varying extents. For example, one person may conduct an initial investigation of the incident to determine the facts. This information would be shared with the student conduct office, which would assign a staff member to determine if there is sufficient information to initiate charges against a student for violations of the code of student conduct and, perhaps, initially attempt to resolve the charges informally. If the charges cannot be resolved informally, the case may be sent to hearing panel to determine if a violation occurred and appropriate sanctions if a violation was found. Another staff member, usually at a higher administrative level (Dean of Students or Vice President for Student Affairs), may hear the appeal, if the student chooses to file one or a board might hear the appeal.

At small colleges, one person may conduct the investigation; determine if there is sufficient information to issue charges; conduct both informal and formal hearing processes; and determine if a violation occurred and appropriate sanction if a violation was found. Another person or a board would hear an appeal. Baker describes eight models for resolving student conduct complaints that provide various degrees of formality. Colleges and universities to fit institutional culture and practice may adapt the models.

Stoner and Lowery's (2004) model code of conduct and Baker's (2005) judicial (conduct) complaint resolution models are intended for use for both individuals and student organizations. In student organization cases, the organization president serves as its representative. Typically, there is some type of investigation prior to addressing the concerns through an informal or formal process. Sanctions taken against student organizations may be similar to those issued individual students (censure, probation, suspension, expulsion) but have different implications. When a student organization is suspended, the student organization loses its recognition from the college or university and cannot operate as a student organization on campus or represent itself as an organization affiliated with the college or university. However, colleges and universities lack the authority to prevent members from affiliating with each other or organizing as a group not affiliated with the college or university. The conditions of an expulsion are similar except that under an expulsion the organization will not be permitted to affiliate with the college or university at any time in the future. With a suspension, the organization may request to regain its affiliated status with the college or university sometime in the future. Educational sanctions may also be imposed.

Baker's (2005) judicial (conduct) complaint resolution models use an informal review for the appeal. An informal review means a college or

university would review the information from the original hearing and make a determination on whether or not to uphold that decision, modify the sanction(s), or find insufficient evidence to support a finding of a violation. Many conduct resolution processes have a formal appeal that is heard by a board. However, even these formal appeals have limitations. Formal appeals are not de novo hearings, but are reviews to assure the process utilized to reach the original finding or decision was fundamentally fair.

A recent Office of Civil Rights (OCR) "Dear Colleague Letter" questions university practices for addressing sexual violence and prescribes expectations for universities to address sexual harassment, including sexual violence, under Title IX. Among the expectations, "If a school [university] knows or reasonably should know about student-on-student harassment that creates a hostile environment, Title IX requires the school to take immediate action to eliminate the harassment, prevent its recurrence, and address its effects" (Ali, 2011, p. 4). OCR further indicates that universities must address sexual harassment complaints regardless if the conduct occurred on or off campus. Universities must conduct impartial investigations of allegations of sexual harassment and should not wait for the conclusion of police investigations or criminal investigations before proceeding with their own investigation. Universities must provide appropriate due process considerations in a conduct process to both the alleged perpetrator and alleged victim. Thus, individuals and student organizations may be subject to procedures including investigations and immediate action by the college or university to stop the harassment, prevent it from reoccurring, and address its impact on individuals and the campus.

The Association of Title IX Administrators has developed a model grievance process to comply with the Office of Civil Rights expectations for addressing sexual harassment. The basic components of the model are:

- Notice of alleged sexual misconduct received by university
- Initial remedial action, if necessary
  - Duty to Warn under Clery Act
  - Interim suspension
- Preliminary investigation
  - No reasonable cause of violation of sexual violence policy (Title IX) or conduct code, then investigation ends.
  - If reasonable cause of sexual violence policy (Title IX) or conduct code, the process continues.
- Formal Investigation
- Investigation Findings (preponderance of evidence)
  - No further action if evidence not support potential violations
  - Notice of Charges if evidence supports potential violations
- Hearing(s) (preponderance of evidence)
  - No violation/Violation of sexual violence policy
  - No violation/Violation of conduct code
- Sanction(s), if violation
- Appeal  
(Association of Title IX Administrators, 2012)

As previously mentioned, the concept of social justice has made its way into student conduct processes. One component of social justice that is incorporated in many college and university conduct processes is the principle of restorative justice. Instead of violations of the code of student conduct being viewed as actions against the college or university, they are viewed as violations of people, relationships, and the community. According to Zehr (2002),

Restorative justice considers that these violations create obligations, the greatest of which is to identify and repair the

harm. This is accomplished, to whatever extent possible, by holding offenders directly responsible to those harmed, rather than or in addition to the state [institution]. This is usually done in face-to-face encounters.

The community is a very important component of restorative justice. The restorative justice process seeks to create change in the community and prevent similar actions from recurring while addressing the needs of victims and holding offenders accountable.

#### **PERSPECTIVES ON STUDENT CONDUCT PROCESSES**

To garner perspectives on the relationship between colleges and universities and inter/national fraternity headquarters and on their involvement in student conduct processes, the author created four groups of “experts” that were asked questions about their perceptions. The four groups included (1) senior student affairs officers, (2) legal and risk management specialists, (3) fraternity and sorority life staffs and student conduct officers, and (4) fraternity executives. The number of members in each group was purposely small to encourage dialogue and manage the responses. Similar questions were asked of each group and group members were encouraged to comment on the responses from other members of the group. The questions were submitted to members of the groups through email and respondents were asked to respond to all to stimulate a discussion between group participants on each question. The responses provided some interesting perspectives and showed difference of views based upon their roles. The respondents participated with the understanding that they would not be personally identified in this White Paper. Formal research methods were not employed in determining group membership, gathering the information or analyzing the responses. The information presented is simply

a representation of comments from those invited to participate in the dialogue.

The members of the senior student affairs officers group included five vice presidents for student affairs who are recognized as leaders in their profession. Three of the vice presidents are at public universities and two of the vice presidents are at private colleges. They were hand-selected by the author because of their knowledge and experience in student affairs and in working with fraternities and sororities on their campuses.

The legal and risk management specialists group included attorneys, higher education faculty, college general counsel, and risk management specialists. The two higher education faculty members have a national reputation on higher education legal issues, publish in this area, and are frequent presenters on legal issues. The two risk management consultants are nationally known for their work with colleges and universities. The author chose these individuals for their knowledge of risk management and higher education law.

The student conduct officers/fraternity and sorority life group included student conduct officers and professional staff employed at colleges and universities with responsibility for Fraternity and Sorority Life. The members of this group were recommended by valued colleagues who serve as student conduct officers and are active in the Association for Student Conduct Administrators as well as valued colleagues who serve as Directors of Fraternity and Sorority Life and are active in the Association of Fraternity Advisors. Three of the persons in this category serve as student conduct officers at their universities. Two of the members of the group serve as directors of fraternity and sorority life on their campuses. Three of the members are employed at private universities and two members at public universities.

The members of the fraternity headquarters group were recommended to the author. There were five members of the fraternity

headquarters group. Group members included two fraternity executive directors and three fraternity headquarters staff members. Unfortunately, the timing of the informal study was not convenient for fraternity headquarters staff. Thus, the responses from this group were limited.

## QUESTIONS POSED AND RESPONSES

### *Effective collaboration*

Members of the fraternity headquarters group, the senior student affairs officers group, and the student conduct/fraternity and sorority life advisor group were asked to describe briefly a situation where the college/university worked collaboratively with the chapter, local fraternity alumni (house corporation), and fraternity headquarters staff to address the conduct violations and reach a positive result.

While the situations described were based upon the individuals' experiences, there were common themes. Respondents from all groups repeatedly mentioned timely notification of the incident. Although notification typically involves the college/university notifying fraternity headquarters, one respondent indicated that the university learned of an incident from a fraternity headquarters weeks after fraternity headquarters was aware of the situation. By contrast, one student conduct officer shared a situation where, "Within 72 hours, HQ was on campus and concurrently running an investigation for organizational/membership purposes." Another student conduct officer commented, "Almost immediately upon learning of the incident, the national headquarters was notified by our student activities staff. . . Reps from the national office visited campus and conducted their own independent investigation."

A second theme was communication. Respondents emphasized the importance of communications between involved parties throughout the conduct process. One senior

student affairs officer wrote, "The national and alumni were accessible and very communicative with us as we investigated and they investigated and we each came to our conclusions." Another senior student affairs officer wrote, "Our goal was that the national fraternity and the university would be on the same page regarding the findings, the seriousness of the violations, and the appropriate disciplinary action. The national permitted us to conduct the investigation and then we shared everything with them." A fraternity headquarters staff member commented, "The host institution provided great insight as to larger issues currently plaguing the chapter and how they connected to the violations that took place."

The third theme was collaboration. A fraternity headquarters staff member stated, "The University spoke to Chapter officers/members, local advisors, and fraternity headquarters staff in determining the facts surrounding the incident and what course of action would best serve to educate the chapter, give them consequences and show that the University was taking the situation seriously since there was so much media attention surrounding the incident." A fraternity and sorority life staff member commented, "As per our protocol, we invited the national fraternity to assign a staff member to work with our Student Affairs investigation team. . . Following the conduct proceedings . . . they [national fraternity] initiated a new membership program that would require commitment from both the alumni and the university – this usually results in a positive result." One senior student affairs officer commented about fraternity headquarters staff alerting the institution of an incident involving the fraternity chapter. "They [fraternity headquarters] investigated and shared the information with us, they took action to sanction members and the chapter and worked collaboratively with us."

### *Ineffective collaboration*

These groups then were asked to briefly describe a situation where the university and the fraternity headquarters staff did not work collaboratively to address conduct violations resulting in a negative result. Naturally, college/university officials reported issues with fraternity headquarters and local alumni while fraternity headquarters staff reflected on college/university failures to cooperate.

A fraternity headquarters staff member best summarized the issue from a national fraternity perspective when he stated,

Because we were unable to work in partnership through investigation, there was no opportunity to collaborate together and compare information obtained in our respective investigations. . . the General Fraternity was then made to decide whether to A) support the chapter's appeal of the University decision and possibly cause harm to the relationship between the University and General Fraternity or B) not support the chapter's appeal and possibly cause harm to the relationship between General Fraternity and chapter.

Conduct officers, fraternity and sorority life staff, and senior student affairs officers described situations where fraternity headquarters chose not to become involved in the situation and created adversarial relationships. One student conduct officer wrote, "The local leadership and national office spent several weeks arguing about our process and how it was unfair. . . the organization had their lawyers write their appeal and they wrote an appeal which was personally insulting to members of the university administration." A senior student affairs officer commented, "When the university suspended the group, the national did not pull the charter. The local continued to accept new members into the group during the entire time it was suspended and all were accepted by the national as members in good standing."

Another senior student affairs officer described how they discovered that a national sorority was investigating the same alcohol related incident as the university. "They [fraternity headquarters] never indicated that they even cared about it when we contacted them. After we contacted them [again] they said they were finding things that disturbed them but would not share anything."

Senior student affairs officers, student conduct officers, and Greek advisors also commented on the difficulty in working with chapter alumni. One conduct officer bluntly stated, "We've found that the local or regional representatives are more likely to be obstructionist or 'run interference' and challenge the University's actions." A fraternity and sorority life staff member described a particular case where "the fraternity's national organization turned over control to the alumni board for them to provide oversight. . . . However, alumni do not live locally and have only had regular contact via telephone and email communication, with monthly meetings with officers. Consequently, behavior issues have continued." Another conduct officer described how after the fraternity national decided not to collaborate with the University in investigating hazing incidents, "Several alumni and advisors to the organization filled the void, and took an adversarial approach to both the investigation and with the University." In discussing the college's attempts to address a host of behavioral issues inside a fraternity house owned by the college, a senior student affairs officer stated, "Eventually we stopped receiving responses from the national office when we expressed concerns about recent behaviors and the lack of action from local advisors appointed by the national."

Partnerships seem to be the key to successful fraternity chapters even when there may be a conduct violation. As one senior student affairs officers stated, "A successful Greek chapter has four partners: the students, the national office,

local alumni, and the college. If any of those four partners is not constructively engaged in the life of the chapter, the group will not survive." Another senior student affairs officer added, "The only way to assure successful outcomes in these types of cases is to have all stakeholders fully engaged and ultimately on the same page."

### *Changing relationships*

The legal issues and risk management specialists had lively online discussions to a different set of questions. The first question addressed the changing relationship between universities and inter/national fraternities. They concluded that both universities and inter/national fraternities are more likely to be held liable for the actions of individual chapters and/or chapter members than 30 years ago. According to an attorney in the group, colleges and universities liability arises from the failure to establish and enforce reasonable policies; whereas inter/national fraternity liability most often arises from the failure to adequately train chapter leadership and alumni advisors. The group concluded that "neither nationals nor colleges can be sure of a commonality of interests in court."

The next two questions dealt with universities collaborating with fraternity headquarters on investigations and conduct proceedings. Again, the assumption that a commonality of interests exists between universities and fraternity headquarters was questioned. As a college general counsel stated, "Fear of liability in an increasing litigious society has had the effect of pushing colleges and fraternities apart and leading to more finger-pointing, particularly in high-stakes cases." Most of the group indicated that they support collaboration between universities and fraternity headquarters in investigations of alleged conduct violations and in determining appropriate sanctions, both from the university and the inter/national fraternity. There was discussion concerning the ability of inter/national fraternities to conduct

appropriate investigations. The discussion focused on the maturity of chapter consultants and the lack training they receive on conduct processes.

The next question addressed how a university should balance individual and organization rights in student conduct proceedings. The balance of rights seems especially difficult to maintain when the offense may result in criminal charges and various entities (criminal investigators, district attorney, inter/national fraternity headquarters, and chapter alumni) all believe they should control the process. One attorney suggested that memoranda of understanding (MOU) be developed with local legal entities and other invested parties from the beginning. The MOU should address expectations for sharing reports and communicating with each other, the investigation process including how to proceed with different investigations without interfering or obstructing justice, how decisions will be made regarding moving forward with stakeholder processes, and how the media will be addressed. It is wise to develop relationships with stakeholders before a serious incident occurs. A general MOU might be shared with local law enforcement and district attorneys and their support garnered in advance of incidents. All members of the group agreed that it is important to set expectations and seek the support of those stakeholders who have a vested interest in the proceedings.

#### **RETHINKING FRATERNITY AND SORORITY ADVISING**

A recent article in *Leadership Exchange*, "Rethinking Fraternity and Sorority Advising: The Role of Coaching and Technology" (Hogan, Koepsell & Eberly, 2011), was shared with the groups by the author to promote discussion. The article derives from discussion at the 2011 Greek Summit of senior student affairs officers and national fraternity and sorority leaders. The question being addressed by participants in

the Greek Summit was how can campuses and national organizations maximize the impact of the staff and volunteers they deploy to support fraternity and sorority life on campus?

The Summit participants recognized that campus fraternity/sorority advisors, chapter consultants, volunteer faculty and alumni advisors "often have common personal experiences in a fraternity or sorority, limited professional experience in student and/or organizational development, and little or no training" ( p. 13). Instead of continuing the current central campus advising model, the article authors suggest that a new model be employed that expands the use of volunteer alumni, redefines their role, and provides for a certification process.

#### **COACHING STUDENT LEADERS MODEL**

1. Shift the focus to leadership coaching
2. Take a team approach.
3. Expand volunteer alumni involvement as coaches and advisors
4. Reshape the roles of fraternity/sorority advisor and chapter consultant.
5. Provide uniform training to certify coaches and advisors.
6. Encourage preparation programs to address volunteer development as a required professional skill (Hogan, Koepsell & Eberly, 2011, pp. 13-14).

While supportive of a coaching model, senior student affairs officers voiced concern for the time and effort such a model would take and skepticism about change the model might bring. As one senior student affairs officer stated, "I have fraternities now that have very positive engaged alumni groups and the chapter generally performs better when that is the case. But I also have chapters that suffer from lack of alumni engagement and those who suffer from negative alumni influence . . . to assure a positive alumni coaching team within each of

these environments would be a challenge.” The higher education legal experts concurred with the senior student affairs officers. As a general counsel wrote, “In theory, this sounds like a great approach, but in practice, I can’t imagine it would work out as described very often. It would require a great deal of commitment and work from people whose reasons for participating probably aren’t these [attempt to improve individual performance of student leaders within a team context] and who probably aren’t invested in making it work.” One student conduct officer responded, “I don’t think they need to reinvent the wheel.” Fraternities and sororities do not use the resources available to them now. Why would we think fraternities and sororities would use the resources in a new model?

All groups involved in the discussions recognized that current processes are not working as well as they should. The place to start improving relations in the student conduct process is to develop a shared understanding of investigative and student conduct processes followed by collaboration in conducting investigations.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING STUDENT CONDUCT**

##### ***Recommendation 1***

The Fraternity Executives Association (FEA) should spearhead the development of a training module for conducting investigations of alleged conduct code violations involving fraternities and sororities and implementation of a pilot project involving selected colleges and universities and inter/national headquarters. Support for the investigation module and pilot project should be garnered from the Association of Fraternity Advisors (AFA), Association for Student Conduct Administrators (ASCA), and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). Fraternity and

sorority life staff, fraternity and sorority chapter consultants, and campus student conduct officers would receive the training and be asked to utilize the training in conducting collaborative conduct investigations. An outline of suggested components of the training appears later in this paper.

##### ***Recommendation 2***

Develop and implement a pilot project involving selected colleges and universities and inter/national fraternity headquarters to train staff in the conduct investigation process and to conduct collaborative investigations of alleged conduct violations involving fraternities and sororities for a period of one year.

NOTE: If plans exist to create a pilot project for the Coaching Student Leaders Model suggested at the 2011 Greek Summit, conduct investigation training might be included in the education of fraternity and sorority life staff, chapter consultants, and alumni advisors.

##### ***Recommendation 3***

Conduct a thorough evaluation of the investigation training program and collaborative investigations at the pilot program colleges and universities. Determine if the pilot program was successful and should be expanded. If so, determine what improvements can be made to the training and investigations. Determine how to provide the training on a larger scale.

#### **INVESTIGATION TRAINING**

When the author served as Dean of Student Life at Texas A&M University, he recognized the need for training staff to conduct investigations of alleged violations of code of student conduct. Many, but not all, of the investigations were of alleged hazing violations that involved student organizations including fraternities and sororities and the Corps of Cadets. Quite frankly, the department did not have the staffing

in its Student Conflict Resolution Services Office to spend time investigating incidents and also conduct hearings. It was also an attempt to avoid a conflict of interest where the investigator was also the hearing officer. The author bases the recommended outline for investigation training largely upon the Conducting Student Investigations training manual developed by the Department of Student Life at Texas A&M University, a presentation by the author at the Stetson College of Law, Law and Higher Education Conference (see appendix), a webinar on investigating hazing incidents presented by Dave Westol for HazingPrevention.org, and lessons learned by the author.

### ***Key Components of Investigation Training Program***

1. Purpose of investigations
2. Authority to initiate investigation
  - Authority within college or university
  - Authority of inter/national fraternity headquarters
3. Role of investigators
  - Promptness
  - Thoroughness
  - Impartiality
4. Preparation for investigation
  - Referrals of incidents
  - Timeline for investigation
  - Who to interview
  - Interview questions
  - Investigation File
  - Applicable university and inter/national fraternity policies
5. Conducting the investigation – Investigation interviews
  - Responsibility of students, advisors, staff, and alumni to participate in investigation interviews
  - Group vs. individual investigation interviews

- Role of advisor or support person in investigation
  - Access to investigation records
  - Written statements vs. verbal statements
  - Interviewing witnesses
  - Clarifying interviews with witnesses
6. Preparation of investigative report
  7. Submission of report
  8. Role plays of investigation
  9. Report writing practice
  10. Review of investigations and roles
  11. Brief Overview of Student Conduct Processes
    - Notice of Charges
    - Hearings
    - Sanctions
    - Appeals

### ***Pilot Project Participants***

FEA along with the other participating professional associations would identify colleges and universities to participate in the pilot project. FEA would identify which inter/national fraternity headquarters would participate in the project.

1. Identify and gain commitment from senior student affairs officers at 10 colleges and universities in the United States to participate in the pilot project. Author recommends that the pilot project group include five public universities, three private universities, and two small colleges (less than 3,000 students).
2. Identify and gain commitment from inter/national fraternities with chapters on the identified campuses to participate in the pilot project.
3. Conduct investigation training for fraternity and sorority life staff, student conduct officers, and other faculty/

staff who may serve as investigators on the pilot campuses.

4. Conduct investigation training for inter/national fraternity headquarters staff who may serve as investigators.
5. Provide consultation services (investigation training facilitators) to campuses and inter/national fraternity headquarters regarding investigations on campuses.
6. Check on status of investigations on campuses at least four times during the academic year.
7. Provide status update to FEA and other participating associations in December with final report in July.

Obviously, there are considerable logistics to be finalized before such a program could be implemented. The author suggests that the 2012-2013 academic year be spent in gaining support for the program and addressing the logistics of implementing the pilot program in summer 2013.

### CONCLUSION

A close colleague of the author and the author were recently lamenting how student conduct processes have changed since both were student conduct officers early in their careers. Student conduct processes are becoming more complex every year despite attempts by many to simplify procedures. Expectations of parents and special interest groups and regulation from state and federal government have created quasi legal systems to address alleged acts of behavior that violate institutional codes of conduct. Gone are the days of what the author refers to as the Dean's chat, where the Dean of Students would sit with a student and discuss the reported inappropriate behavior before determining what action would best help the student learn from his/her mistake(s). Colleges and universities

find themselves in a new era of compliance where state and federal regulations govern nearly every aspect of college and university operations including conduct processes.

Colleges and universities are being held more accountable for the actions of its students and for taking preventative measures to assure that students do not harm themselves or others. The time is right for colleges and universities to improve collaborations with inter/national fraternity headquarters on prevention efforts and processes that address conduct violations.

Persons interviewed by the author in developing this paper agreed that collaboration is necessary and would improve relations between colleges and universities and inter/national fraternity headquarters. All sides voiced an eagerness to improve relationships while citing distrust based on poor experiences. The reality is that colleges and universities are very diverse as are the administrations that run these institutions. Institutions will seek to protect themselves when situations may lead to legal action and/or media coverage. Similarly, inter/national fraternities are diverse in their values and ways they operate. Complicating this factor is the maturity of the staff, both at colleges and universities and inter/national fraternities charged with working with collegiate fraternity chapters. Many Greek advisors and chapter consultants are recent college graduates who lack professional maturity in addressing significant problems.

The original premise for the paper was to consider ways for collaboration in the student conduct process. Many campuses already involve inter/national headquarters staff in investigations of alleged violations of the code of student conduct involving campus fraternity chapters. However, untrained headquarters staff and perhaps, untrained staff at colleges and universities are conducting investigations. To be truly collaborative, staff from both entities should be trained in the same methods of

investigation.

The author believes that both colleges and universities and inter/national fraternity headquarters will benefit from receiving consistent training in conducting investigations. It will be important to define the roles of the investigators and have an understanding of

acting as equal participants with one common goal. Communication and collaboration are the keys to success with not only investigations, but also successful relationships between colleges and universities and inter/national fraternity headquarters

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