Conflict in College Sororities

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May 2006

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the conflicts facing women today and identifies their influence in a popular collegiate women's organization. This qualitative study was driven by three questions: 1) what types of conflict arise in sororities? 2) what factors play a role in these conflicts? and 3) how does conflict, and the ways in which it is handled, affect sorority women's overall sorority functioning as an individual within the sorority?

Two studies examine conflict in sororities. First, a Q-sort technique asked four sorority women, recent college graduates, to categorize a set of sorority conflicts and discuss their relevance to sorority life. Second, an email questionnaire with three questions related to conflict in sororities, was distributed to women who traveled as sorority leadership consultants. Both methods provided useful data from which three themes emerged: 1) conflict in sororities stems from the sorority culture of living and working together; 2) conflict in sororities emerges from the fight for hierarchy and seniority among the members in a chapter; and 3) conflict in sororities results from pre-established organizational standards that pose conflicts for sorority women. These findings have implications for understanding and managing conflict in sororities constructively so that group life among women fosters confidence and competence in addressing challenges in college and beyond.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONFLICT IN COLLEGE SORORITIES

The newly elected President and Vice President of my chapter hosted a pre-party with alcohol in their room at our sorority house before an organized event. The gathering was small, and consisted of the two of them and their closest friends, who were also members of the sorority. After this pre-party the entire sorority attended a registered social event with another Greek house on campus. During this chapter event, the previous president and vice president found out about the pre-party and became noticeably upset. News of this situation spread throughout the chapter and by the end of the evening this pre-party was the main topic of conversation among all of us. The following day the outgoing president and vice president contacted the standards committee about the situation. The standards committee was obligated to take action, because the sorority does not condone pre-partying. The standards committee decided to call in the newly elected president and vice president for a questioning period.

During the meeting the standards committee (myself included) asked them for their perspective on the situation. Before they finished speaking, we routinely assigned them three weeks probation without any consideration of the accounts we had just heard. They were told that during their probation the two sisters could not attend any chapter social events and they had to step down from their officer positions as president and vice president. Additionally, they had to give an informative presentation to the sorority about the dangerous effects of pre-partying. The two women were visibly upset and hurt because they did not think the situation was handled fairly. During this time of probation the previous president and vice president lead the chapter meetings and took care of the chapter business.

This incident provoked heated conversations among all of us for many weeks causing a division within the chapter between those who sided with the standards committee and those who sided with the incoming president and vice president who hosted the pre-party. As a member of the standards committee I have always wondered why this event caused a continual division within the sorority throughout that academic year. While there had to be a consequence, I feel that the chapter conflict was a result of disallowing the two women a voice in the process.

While this conflict still resonates with me today, it is in no way reflective of my overall experience as a sorority member. Sorority life allowed me to acquire important life skills and confidence in myself as a woman. The following excerpt captures the appeal of sorority membership.

> Sorority sisterhood is a very unique bond of friendship. It is with true friends that you can be happy, reflect and grow. University life presents many challenges and decisions. Friends and a group identity help make the transition through the rough spots smoother and provide the support, experience and understanding of a cherished friendship. It is through your interactions with your sisters and friends that you grow and begin to develop your full potential. The reward from sorority involvement is not just what you get from it, but what you, the individual, become through it. (Pittsburg State University, 2001)

This description of sorority life highlights important benefits of sorority life, but unfortunately this is not cohesive with the public perception of sororities. However, as Green (2001) argues sororities can also assist collegiate women in their journey to self-discovery. They can provide each woman with an opportunity to achieve their academic potential, and develop leadership and important life skills, all while experiencing the power of sisterhood and mutual support.

I am interested in constructive outcomes of sorority life because I am a sorority leadership consultant, my job is to oversee everything that happens within a university

chapter of a well-respected and prominent national sorority. I work to ensure that the chapter is functioning well and is upholding the standards and expectations placed on them by the sorority's national mandate. I assist the women in creating chapter documents and planning chapter events. I observe weekly meetings and chapter functions, and meet with members both individually and in groups. Finally, because hierarchy matters in sororities and each academic cohort has a specific role, I meet with groups divided by class to get valuable perspective on chapter functioning, and I mediate when disagreements and conflicts arise.

This qualitative research study stems from my membership in this sorority[1]. This paper focuses on the kinds of conflicts that emerge in this sorority, how the members and the sorority chapter manage conflict, and the effect of conflict on a sorority chapter's ability to function effectively. The paper begins by discussing the ritual and history of sororities. It then focuses on sorority life and emergent conflicts within that context from the perspective of experts in the field. I present the results of two studies, 1) a Q-sort and focus group of four sorority alumni about conflicts that occurred in their sorority chapters, and 2) an email questionnaire to seven sorority leadership consultants about their current experience with conflict in sorority chapters across the United States.

Background

To study conflict within sororities' I explored three strands of scholarship: 1) literature specific to the history of sororities, including the historical context in which the first women's fraternities (now known as sororities) were founded; 2) literature on socially constructed conflicts that women everywhere face; and 3) literature on women and conflict in organizations.

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[1] Sorority will remain anonymous.

History of Sororities

The first women's fraternities were founded in America in the late nineteenth-century. This was the Victorian Era, a time characterized by the belief that men and women lived in separate spheres. In her book *Educating Women: Cultural Conflict and Victorian Literature,* Laura Morgan Green (2001) examines the explicit tension that arose in society during the initial years of women aspiring to attend college, and the threat it posed to the traditional view of women as domestic and feminine. Green argues that many of the prominent, forward thinking authors of the Victorian age maintained similar beliefs about the progress of women in society. In her book, Green states, "those [Victorian] texts are shaped by the need to mediate the conflict between the professionalism and publicity increasingly associated with education on the one hand and the Victorian celebration of women as emblems of domesticity on the other" (p. 2). *Educating Women* describes the nineteenth-century "heroines" of both history and fiction as rooted in domestic ideology and, at the same time, eager to transform it. The intersection of these conflicting identities for women is embedded in the roots and structure of the collegiate organizations that emerged during this period in history and can be recognized in present day sororities.

Ideas of coeducation posed a threat to conventional gender roles in the Victorian era. It is no surprise then that the establishment of female fraternities in the late nineteenth-century seemed unnatural and outlandish. In her book *Bound by a Mighty Vow: Sisterhood and Women's Fraternities, 1870-1920*, Diana Turk (2004) states,

> in 1870 when the first women's fraternity was founded only 11,000 women were enrolled in institutions of higher education across the United States, a number that paled in comparison to the more than 52,000 men who filled the classrooms of the nation's colleges and universities. Fewer than one-third of American schools

allowed women to enroll, and those that did treated their female students very much as second-class citizens. Often ignored in the classroom and ridiculed outside of it, the "pioneering" women who went to college in the early years of coeducation faced fierce opposition from students, faculty, and townspeople, many of whom argued that higher education would "unsex" women and thus upset the "natural" order of society. (p. 3)

Turk very clearly describes the mental and emotional dissonance between the women "pioneers" who fought against all odds for their right to a collegiate education and their male counterparts, faculty, and staff. She points out that on most coeducational college campuses segregation and inequality characterized the relationship between men and women, both within the classroom and within the extracurricular arena.

The birth of sororities. Recognizing the severity of gender oppression and inequality in higher education led to the founding of women's fraternities. They were designed to help women support one another in order to survive in their academically and socially taxing environment. Turk states, "The women who founded and joined female fraternities in the 1870s did so to provide mutual assistance and aid to those struggling to combat opposition to their presence in higher education. Their primary goal was to prove themselves capable of handling college work as women" (p. 22). To accomplish this goal, the founding members of each women's fraternity held themselves and potential new members to a very high academic standard. They sought out hard-working women who were intelligent and serious about their studies, but who also could preserve their femininity and add strength to their close-knit bonds of sisterhood. Turk points out,

testing the elasticity of, but not breaking their allegiance to, Victorian notions of the "feminine ideal," the early sisters strove to prove themselves the intellectual equals of men while at the same time continuing to fulfill the tenants of "true" and "noble womanhood." (p. 13)

Finding and maintaining the balance between educational excellence and feminine propriety was the primary focus for the original women's fraternity members, indeed, it is a dichotomy that is still expected and desired by sorority women today.

The demand to succeed and pave the way for future generations of women was a primary focus for the founding sorority members. An original "pioneer" of coeducational universities stated, "somehow we realized that we were not going to college just for ourselves—but for all girls who would follow, if we could just win out" (Turk, 2004, p. 18). These women had to fight for acceptance in a climate of opposition, ridicule, and resentment. To prove themselves worthy of education and positive recognition, women's fraternities maintained exclusive membership criteria to which each sister was held accountable. Turk's analysis provides a good background for sororities' beginnings, though it is limited in that it stops at the 1920s.

Pioneering women and the culture of coercion. The culture of coercion and the pressure felt by the "pioneering" women of the late nineteenth-century is relevant to sorority women today. Feeling the need to prove oneself as worthy of membership in the organization and of being a representative of a large group of women has remained constant. This is clear in Alexandra Robbins's (2004) book *Pledged: The Secret Life of Sororities.* This book looks at the current lifestyle of sorority women. The book focuses on four women's experiences as members of nationally accredited sororities and also refers to national reports and information gathered through observation and research. Her work argues that in modern day sororities women are more objectified and experience more mental and emotional abuse than in the past, as a result of the unavoidably prescriptive nature of the Greek system. I argue that Robbins does not go

far enough. Like the objectification and abuse of women in the larger society (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Cook-Huffman, 1998; Kilbourne, 2000) the Greek system also objectifies and abuses women in that it allows social interaction between fraternity men and sorority women that is dangerous and oppressive to women.

Robbins spends a great deal of time reporting and writing about the various social engagements required for each of her four sorority subjects. She reports, for example, that all four women took an active role in serenading fraternity men through song, dance, or physical touch – and sometimes all three combined -- during fraternity recruitment, initiation, and theme parties. This exploitation of the women's sexuality was continuous and, arguably, unavoidable because sorority women were also strongly "encouraged" to date men from particular fraternities. This was in an effort to gain approval both internally (from their sisters) and externally (from other sororities and fraternities), and hopefully to win top sorority status on campus. The stress of trying to prove oneself as a woman worthy of membership in this organization was felt by founding members and is also felt by current members.

Robbins describes the sorority culture of ambiguity and manipulation as resulting from women's low power status and lack of voice in society. Their low power status is due to the complicated intersection of roles women maintain and the essentialization of femininity (Grillo, 1995). Lack of voice is a consequence of the tendency for women to de-legitimize experienced injustice and resort to a state of self-silencing behavior as a result (Crosby, 1993). Robbins's study captures the conflicts between preserving and respecting sorority ritual and history, and dealing with modern day women's issues and conflicts.

<u>Socially Constructed Conflicts Facing All Women</u>

To understand conflict within a specific subculture, such as sororities, it is wise to consider and become familiar with the conflicts facing all women in society today. Academics have studied this relationship and identified some obstacles and contradictory expectations facing women (e.g., Cook-Huffman, 1998; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Grillo, 1995; Heilman, 2001; Leibow, 1993; Opotow & Khaminwa, 2000). These include: objectification, low power and learned submissiveness, stereotypes, and essentialism.

<u>Objectification.</u> One conflict facing women today stems from being treated as an object. Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts (1997) propose Objectification Theory, which argues that women's bodies are constantly looked at, evaluated, and objectified in American culture. They state,

> sexual objectification occurs whenever a woman's body, body parts, or sexual functions are separated out from her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or regarded as if they were capable of representing her…when objectified, women are treated *as bodies*—and in particular, as bodies that exist for the use and pleasure of others. (p.175)

As a result of being treated as an object, Fredrickson and Roberts argue, women view themselves from an outsider's point of view, rather than finding their identity from within.

This theory also points out that women spend inordinate effort on transforming themselves into women they see on television, women who attracts men, and the women that other women envy. In her documentary *Killing Us Softly* Jean Kilbourne (2000) argues that American society coaxes women into embracing an unrealistic and damaging view of the self. This inner tension often produces oppressive thoughts, anxiety, sexual

dysfunction, eating disorders, and depression, causing women to devalue and feel ashamed of their identity as individuals. Fredrickson and Roberts's Objectification Theory argues that socio-cultural barriers diminish women's well-being and limit their potential. They predict that the process of self-objectification will intensify and worsen when groups of women spend time together because the influence of what the group thinks is powerful and hard to avoid. This is especially relevant for women in sororities because they work and live together.

The triple threat: Objectification by the media, men, and women. The triple threat of being objectified by the media, men, and other women is extremely damaging, in large part because the "ideal" female body is drastically unrealistic. High mental, emotional, and physical risks evolve from valuing women based on a set of superficial criteria - body, hair, clothes, jewelry - and therefore, women often resort to patterns of self-destruction as a result. Not surprisingly, these risks become more intense in groups of women due to the power of groupthink and group identity. Groupthink is defined as "a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action" (Janis, 1972). Group identity is the process of categorizing oneself in terms of other people (Changing Minds, 2002). Society expects women to be fit, fashionable, beautiful, and feminine. When a group of women socialize together there is often a higher level of objectification because they strive to operate as a cohesive group with a unified identity defined by society. The pressure to fit this mold is prevalent in sororities.

Effects of low power and learned submissiveness. Women are disempowered and

delegitimized as a result of their low power status and learned submissiveness. Treating

women solely "as bodies" (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 175) caries the implication

that women are one-dimensional, unequal, less capable, and less powerful as a gender. In

their work on women and conflict and the nature of conflict for low power groups, Susan

Opotow and Angela Khaminwa (2000) claim that,

> understanding conflict from the perspective of women requires an understanding
> of conflict as experienced by low power groups. People can be defined as low
> power on any dimension of oppression and privilege including class, ethnicity,
> age sexual orientation, disability, and religion. (p. 3)

Characteristics of low power groups include submissiveness and voicelessness of group

members. Opotow and Khaminwa assert that,

> low power groups lack such resources as access to information, goods, and
> powerful social networks that buttress the legitimacy and credibility of their
> claims in conflict…Also, those in power tend to minimize conflicts experienced
> by those with less power as less important than their own. Once conflict surfaces,
> however, it can render members of low power more subject to scrutiny and, at the
> same time, more vulnerable. (p. 5)

Whether or not women are cognizant of their low status, they often respond to conflict

with avoidance. In her research on young adult women and the ways they resolve

interpersonal conflicts, Particia Weitzman (2001) points out, "college educated young

adults may feel inept at handling interpersonal conflicts, especially those encountered at

work. Young adult women may feel particularly ineffective at handling interpersonal

conflicts because of socialization, which encourages females to be submissive

interpersonally" (p. 61).

Consequently, low power characteristics influence women and their sorority life.

One might be tempted to predict that issues of voicelessness, submissiveness, silencing,

and avoiding would be unlikely in women's organizations due to the belief that women are all of equal power and status. However, in reality, when men (high power group) are excluded from the context, women compensate by allowing commanding women, often in leadership positions, to be the high power group with more voice, control, and power within the organization. It is as if women (and perhaps men) depend on, and thus create, status divisions in their lives.

A related example is recounted in Elliot Leibow's book (1993) *Tell Them Who I Am: The Lives of Homeless Women*. He describes the varying levels of power and status that exist within homeless shelters and communities of homeless women. Elliot explains that homeless women seek solidarity by forming groups within which issues of hierarchy, power, and status inevitably play a role. This power imbalance within all-women contexts can cause conflict, but this conflict is often mistakenly attributed to other factors due to the assumption that there cannot be "masculine" power conflicts in women's organizations.

As a disempowered party, women often find safety in their own passive silence. In her chapter *Social Conflicts and Collective Identities,* Celia Cook-Huffman (1998) discusses the framing of social identity and gender. She argues,

> gender as a social identity often operates as a "social handicap" for women. The terminology I use is "delegitimized" and "marginalized." Identification of females as *women* served to delegitimize women's voices in conflict. The issues they raised were not taken seriously and their viewpoints were marginalized. (Cook-Huffman, 1998, p. 127)

Similarly, in her study on young adult women resolving conflicts, Weitzman (2001) found that "often, the less powerful individual engages in ingratiating or submissive behavior in an attempt to resolve the conflict" (p. 65). Lack of legitimate voice coupled

with feelings of unequal empowerment may be inappropriately attributed to the

interaction between genders; however, they are both dominant, debilitating conflicts that

exist between women and within women's organizations.

   <u>Cultural stereotypes and essentialism</u>. Cultural stereotypes and essentialist

thinking are detrimental to women, particularly to sorority women. In her article,

"Description and Prescription: How Gender Stereotypes Prevent Women's Ascent up the

Organizational Ladder," Madeline Heilman (2001) discusses the danger of stereotypical

thinking. She says,

> men and women are thought to differ both in terms of achievement-oriented traits,
> often labeled as "agentic," and in terms of social- and service-oriented traits, often
> labeled as "communal." Thus men are characterized as aggressive, forceful,
> independent, and decisive, whereas women are characterized as kind, helpful,
> sympathetic, and concerned about others. (p. 658)

Heilman argues that gendered stereotypes are dangerously descriptive, producing

expectations of what women should be like, and prescriptive, producing expectations of

how women should act and behave. Stereotypical behavior in work and social

environments continues to be disturbingly common and anti-progressive. Heilman

identifies two important consequences of gender-stereotypic descriptions and

prescriptions in group settings: devaluation of performance and penalizing women for

being competent. In groups or organizations, women who act forcefully, powerfully,

competently, or decisively are often resented and disliked by the women who are

committed to acting more conservatively, sympathetically, or "communally."

   Opotow and Khaminwa (2000) advance this discussion. They argue that,

> by labeling women as unidimensional deviants from a prevailing norm and
> reducing individuals or groups to a solitary stigmatizing 'essence' and dismissing
> women's needs, concerns, interests, and rights as relevant, essentialist thinking

provides the labels that foster moral exclusion – the removal of individuals or groups from the scope of justice. (p. 8)

Gender inequality and injustice surface as a result of stereotyping women as a group, and then isolating groups as individual disconnected identities. Trina Grillo (1995) discusses this traditional mindset in her article "Anti-essentialism and Intersectionality: Tools to Dismantle the Master's House." She argues that "sometimes governing paradigms which have structured all of our lives are so powerful that we can think we are doing progressive work…when in fact we are reinforcing the paradigms" (p. 16). Grillo is persistent in her claims, and brilliantly explains intersectionality and anti-essentialism as,

> each of us in the world sits at the intersection of many categories: She is Latina, woman, short, mother, lesbian, daughter, brown-eyed, long-haired, quick-witted, short-tempered, worker, stubborn. At any one moment in time and in space, some of these categories are central to her being and her ability to act in the world. Others matter not at all. Some categories, such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, are important most of the time. Others are rarely important. When something or someone highlights one of her categories and brings it to the fore, she may be oppressed herself. She may take lessons she has learned while in subordinated status and apply them for good or ill when her dominant categories are highlighted. For example, having been mistreated as a child, she may be either a carefully respectful or an abusive parent. (p. 19)

Here Grillo thoroughly describes the complex intersection of identities facing women, thus proving the notions of essentialism and gender stereotyping as problematic and conflict provoking.

The oversimplification of stereotypes placed on sorority women as objects of sexuality, lacking intelligence but maintaining physical beauty and desirability, is problematic and essentialist. Conflicts facing women cannot be resolved until the concepts of "intersectionality" and "anti-essentialism" are honored by men and women alike.

<u>Women and Conflict in Organizations</u>

A brief overview of the literature highlighting women's roles in organizations is relevant to this study. There is a significant amount of literature focusing on conflict within organizations, however, there is a limited amount focusing primarily on women.

In her article discussing informal peacemaking, Deborah Kolb (1992) provides a more accurate definition of how women respond to conflict within organizations. She says,

> peacemakers are insiders who generally have far greater knowledge of their colleagues than an outsider could possibly have. Their expertise comes from their insider status, the fact that they understand the psychology of the situation and the political realities of the systems within which they work. (p. 65)

Kolb argues that often women take on the role of informal peacemaker within organizations, and she attributes this action to women's innate ability to settle disputes in a peaceful manner and in a way that satisfies involved parties' interests.

In addition to Kolb's insights into women and conflict in organizations, Schein (1985) discusses the negative effects of ambiguity and lack of structure and communication in organizations. He says,

> given that humans can not stand too much ambiguity and uncertainty, all organizations develop some system of roles and statuses to permit tasks to be allocated in a clear manner and to permit the members to develop stable expectations of each other. Structure thus reduces anxiety and makes organizational life predictable and stable. (p. 122)

Similarly, an organizational structure that does not allow for open and honest communication among its workers runs the risk of having a high level of conflict and a low level of productivity.

<u>Communication and Voice Systems.</u> Communication and voice systems are a crucial element in organizations. Organizational conflict scholars would argue that the

key to a mature, well functioning organization lies in their ability to communicate openly and honestly. A poor communication process often causes a breakdown in the organization's level of productivity and credibility. For organizations to communicate effectively as a unit, each member must be able to recognize their own communication style and be allowed to convey messages this way. Organizations must offer an "employee voice system" (Sheppard, Lewicki, & Minton, 1992) that is customary and thorough. Communication within sororities is motivated by elements of hierarchy, seniority, and tradition, creating one-dimensional communication patterns. A voice system within any organization should create space for descriptive, multi-dimensional messages to be exchanged among its members. Poor communication and lack of a definitive voice system is conflict provoking and devaluates organizations as a whole.

This relevant literature offers insight into the roles and expectations placed on women throughout history and in modern day society. Additionally, the literature highlights common conflicts facing women on a daily basis, within organizations and otherwise. Conversely, the literature does not indicate what types of conflicts are specific to sororities or how conflicts are managed internally. Most scholarship on Greek systems, feminist literature included, focuses on abuse of alcohol and sexual experiences. Other studies concern in- and out-groups in sororities, and how sorority membership affects women's experiences and cognitive development in college.

In their article addressing first-year sorority members' estimations of in-group and out-group stereotypes, Ryan and Bogart (2001) found that the longer that women are members of a sorority, the more they become engaged in sorority life and less engaged in the rest of campus life. Pike (2000) studied the role of being a Greek – a fraternity or

sorority member -- in college and the influence this has on a student's experiences and cognitive development. He found that Greek students were more involved than non-Greek students on campus, and had higher gains in cognitive development that he attributes to their social involvement and membership in the Greek system. Both of these studies are relevant to conflict in sororities, but they only address first-year students. Also, neither of them specifically addresses the implications of their findings for sororities, or the role of tradition in sororities and its relationship to conflict. Lastly, the literature also fails to offer any insight on women's overall sorority functioning or the affect it has on individual members within the organization.

Having explored three strands of relevant literature on women and conflict and sororities, this paper now turns to my research on women and conflict in a collegiate women's organization.

METHODS

The participants, procedure, and design of both studies evolved from three research questions: 1) what types of conflict arise in sororities? 2) what factors play a role in these conflicts? and 3) how does conflict, and the ways in which it is handled, affect the women's overall sorority functioning as individuals within the organization?

After obtaining approval from the University of Massachusetts Boston Institutional Review Board, I proceeded with my data collection which consisted of two studies. The first set of data used a Q-sort technique to gather information about conflict in sororities from the perspective of recent college graduates who were sorority members. The second set of data were answers to an email questionnaire sent to sorority leadership consultants to gain a broader understanding of current conflicts in sororities across the United States.

Study One: Q-Sort

This study included four women who participated in a Q-sort exercise to categorize conflicts in sorority chapters. They then discussed their rationale for categorizing these conflicts in a focus group setting.

Participants. Four alumni members of a national sorority, who were no longer involved with any collegiate members, were invited to participate in a Q-sort. The women in this convenience sample had been out of college for fewer than five years and were between the ages of 22-26 years old.

Q-sort. The Q-Sort technique can be defined as

a process whereby a subject models his or her point of view by rank-ordering items into 'piles' along a continuum defined by a certain instruction…A Q-sample consists of a set of stimuli each printed on a separate card. The process of Q-sorting a set of stimuli amounts to having the subject model his or her

subjective point of view on the issue at hand by rank ordering the stimuli along a continuum defined by a condition of instruction. (http://www.1rz-muenchen.de/~schmolck/qmethod/webq/webqdoc.htm)

I chose this data analyzing technique to have a clearer understanding of the types of conflict emerging within sorority chapters from the perspective of former sorority members, and to gain a fresh perspective on the categorization of sorority conflicts.

Procedure. The Q-sort procedure involved six steps.

1) I invited four alumni members of a national sorority who were no longer involved with any collegiate members to participate in my study. We agreed to meet at a mutually convenient location for a two hour meeting.

2) Using my notes as a chapter leadership consultant I wrote down every conflict, large and small, that had come to my attention over a three-year period. I also included conflicts I had experienced as a sorority member when I was in college, and conflicts described in the literature on sororities (e.g., Pike, 2000; Robbins, 2004; and Turk, 2004).

3) I printed out the 52 conflicts, one on each index card. (See Appendix I for a listing of the conflicts.)

4) I made four identical sets of index cards.

5) I asked each participant to arrange the set of cards in piles that made conceptual sense to them.

6) Once all participants were finished, I facilitated a group dialogue. I asked the following two questions:

   a. Discuss your reasoning for organizing your piles the way you did throughout this task.
   b. Were there conflicts in this set that surprised you? Were there conflicts missing?

I audiotaped and kept notes throughout this meeting. It lasted for approximately two hours.

Once finished, I reviewed the data, and identified words that seemed to resurface throughout the discussion. Next, in an effort to become better acquainted with this data, I clustered the words into three categories: positive, negative, and both (Miles & Huberman, 1994) (see Appendix II). Positive words reflected concepts and actions that elicited positive communication and voice system (Sheppard, Lewicki, & Minton, 1992). Negative words reflected concepts and actions that elicited a poor communication process, closed voice system (Sheppard, Lewicki, & Minton, 1992), and prompted negative conflict management. Words that were more ambiguous and had the potential of eliciting positive or negative communication (Schein, 1985) were placed in the third category titled "both."

Study Two: Email Questionnaire.

This study involved five women who responded to an email questionnaire about conflict in sororities in order to acquire a broader understanding of the types of conflict that existed across multiple chapters of this sorority.

Participants. Seven traveling leadership consultants of the same national sorority that employed me were invited to respond to the questionnaire. Five of the seven women who were invited to participate responded[2]. Each woman represented a different national chapter, and each had traveled to 35-40 different chapters over the past academic year. The consultants were between 22-23 years old, and all had graduated from college the previous academic year. The women were of varying racial/ethnic backgrounds.

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[2] There are only seven traveling leadership consultants hired annually to represent this national sorority. This is why only seven women were invited to participate in the email questionnaire.

As sorority consultants it is their job to become aware of chapter issues that arise and to address them with the entire chapter. It is their job to question and get feedback on how each chapter is functioning, what works well, and how chapter productivity could be improved.

    <u>Email questionnaire.</u> I choose to email experts on chapter consultation to gain insight into the nature of conflict as it occurs within various chapters of the sorority and how it is handled. I asked each of the consultants to respond to the following three questions (see email in Appendix III):

    1. What kinds of conflict emerge in chapters of this sorority across the United States?
    2. How are these conflicts handled? By the members? By the organization?
    3. What effect do these conflicts have on the chapter's ability to function?

The questions were open ended and ranged from asking for general descriptions of conflict to describing specific protocol. The participants replied in the format that was most comfortable to them. Responses ranged from bullet point lists to long essays. Upon receiving responses, I compiled the data and searched for emergent themes.

RESULTS

Study One: Q-Sort

The four participants took one hour to carefully categorize the Q-set of sorority conflicts into categorizes/groupings that made sense to them (see Appendix II). The subsequent group discussion lasted an hour and fifteen minutes, at which point participants individually described their categories and elaborated on their thought processes. The following are the common themes and individual participants' category lists.

Common themes. Within each participant's list of categories, one or two main themes emerged. Similarities among these themes surfaced across participants. The similarities focused on three levels of conflicts: organizational, social, and individual. An example of an organizational level category was "conflict over sorority guidelines." An example of a group level category was "conflict over social events." An example of an individual level category was "reasons to participate in the sorority." There were also significant differences across participants. For example, Participant Three was the only one to have a category for external influences: "conflict because of outside factors/influences - individual and/or other organizations."

Participant One. Participant One created several categories related to organizational structure and mandate. She labeled these categories: behavior in relation to standards, sorority guidelines, recruitment, voting/elections, and leadership. She also had multiple categories focused on the idea of social life and relationships in the sorority, including: how we socialize, friendships, what a peer group can lead you to do, and reasons to leave (see Table 1).

Table 1: Participant One categories

- how we socialize

- behavior in relation to standards

- sorority guidelines

- during recruitment

- voting/elections

- leadership

- friendships

- what a peer group can lead you to do

- why to leave the sorority

Participant Two. Participant Two's categories were significantly different than those of the other three. She created fewer categories and grouped conflicts together in larger, more general categories. Additionally, the conflicts that fit into her categories were not consistent with those of other participants. For example, she placed the "roommate" card in her "inherent structures trying to prevent conflicts" category, while the others placed it in a category dealing with socialization within the sorority.

Participant Two, unlike the others, seemed to think that the sorority had natural conflict resolution mechanisms. Relevant categories included: inherent structures trying to prevent conflicts – baseline, and conflict resolution. Two of her remaining groupings meshed because they were conflicts worsened by sororities: sorority specific conflicts and general conflict starters – worsened by sororities. The final two categories were focused on the individual: reasons to participate in sorority and underlying/individual issues causing conflict (see Table 2).

Table 2: Participant Two categories
• reasons to participate in a sorority
• sorority-specific conflicts
• inherent structures trying to prevent conflicts - baseline
• conflict resolution category
• general conflict starters – worsened by sororities
• underlying/individual issues causing conflict

Participant Three. Participant Three placed emphasis on the role of external influences on conflict within sororities. Her categories that related to this idea included: conflicts because a large group of college aged women live together and are forced together into a group with one identity, and conflict because of outside factors/influences – individual and/or other organizations. Furthermore, she created two groups related to conflict as a result of individual characters: 1) small conflicts – individual based and 2) emotional conflicts that result from being in sororities. Last, she included a category entitled "conflicts because of chapter set up" that refers to the structure of the organization (see Table 3).

Table 3: Participant Three categories
• conflicts because of chapter set up – structure of organization
• conflicts because a large group of college aged women live together and are forced together into a group with one identity
• conflict because of outside factors/influences - individual and/or other organizations
• small conflicts - individual based
• emotional conflicts that result from being in sororities

Participant Four. Participant Four paralleled Participant One. Like Participant One, she had structure and social life as overarching themes. Her categories that related to structure included: sorority structure causes conflict, recruitment causes conflict – threatens individuality/diversity, seniority conflict, pre-established rules cause conflict, and elections cause conflicts. Categories that related to social life included: lies as an umbrella over all categories – conflict provoking, conflict over social events, and lack of empathy – "don't care" attitudes cause conflict. Similar to Participants Two and Three, she also included "individual conflicts" as a category (see Table 4).

Table 4: Participant Four categories

- lies as an umbrella over all categories – conflict provoking
- conflict over social events
- sorority structure causes conflict
- recruitment causes conflict - threatens individuality/diversity
- individual conflicts
- seniority conflict
- pre-established rules cause conflict
- lack of empathy - "don't care" attitudes cause conflict
- elections cause conflicts

At the conclusion of Participant Four's report, before advancing the discussion, I asked the participants if there were any surprising or missing conflicts from this Q-set of conflicts. No one was surprised by any of the conflicts, but they reported that the following conflicts were missing:

Missing conflicts
- room selection process
- menu
- living in the sorority house
- theft/borrowing of individuals' possessions
- personal hygiene
- stereotypes
- conflicting lifestyles – morning vs. late night people, neat vs. messy, controlling TV in common room, etc.
- male visitation hours – boys in the house
- group projection
- sororities vs. fraternities and what each could and could not "get away" with

Study Two: Email Questionnaire

Of the seven leadership consultants who were invited to participate in this study, five responded. The responses varied in length, detail, and format. One participant responded with a one sentence answer to each of the three questions, two responded with bullet point lists (one more lengthy and specific than the other), and two responded in essay form (thus providing the most extensive, detailed data of this study).

Despite the diverse nature and format of the answers, dominant themes emerged across participant responses to each question.

Question 1: What kinds of conflict emerge in chapters of this sorority across the United States?

Two conflicts were mentioned by all five participants as common in sorority chapters. First, conflicts emerge as a result of sorority women working and living together. One participant said, "conflicts are caused because members are disrespectful of others' property: people eating others food, parking in the wrong spot, leaving stuff out in common areas, borrowing clothes without permission, borrowing officer notebooks and reports without permission, etc." Second, conflicts evolve as a result of seniority and

older members feeling entitled to decision-making power within the chapter. One participant response read, "there are serious conflicts from the senior pledge class 'releasing' their authority and leadership positions and allowing the younger girls to make things happen." Along the same continuum, three of the participants claimed that the process of officer transitions is highly conflict prone.

Question 2: How are these conflicts handled? By the members? By the organization?

Two themes emerged clearly related to this set of questions. First, all five participants said that the Standards committee handles the conflicts that impact the sorority on any level. Two participants answered this question in three short words, "The Standards Committee." Second, three of the five participants added a sublevel in their response to this question, and they said that if the conflict was interpersonal, and not specifically related to the sorority, then the women tended to handle or resolve the conflict on their own. In reference to this trend a participant wrote, "There really is no protocol because the situations are so different I don't think there could be one."

Question 3: What effect do these conflicts have on the chapter's ability to function?

Similar to question two, there was a strong uniformity among the participants' responses to this question. All five participants said that sorority conflicts have serious effects on any chapter's ability to function productively. Three of the participants said that the effects were serious regardless of the type, longevity, and/or details of the conflict. One participant reported that the effects of a conflict on the chapter's ability to function became more severe when multiple members are involved.

Methodological Problems/Limitations

While the data collected were useful and informative, I see six limitations to them. First were simply my own biases. As an invested member of this sorority I realize that despite my best efforts to remain neutral, my personal biases are woven throughout this study. However, I sought to reduce my biases influence on the data by acquiring others' opinions of sorority conflicts and using research methods that invited first hand responses. Second, all participants from both studies were members of "housed" chapters. There are two types of sorority chapters: "housed," where there is a house in which members live and conduct business; and "unhoused," where no official house is owned or inhabited by the chapter, and therefore they conduct business in a neutral meeting room on or around campus. Housed chapters are significantly more common than unhoused chapters, however, had my convenience sample included participants from both types of chapters, the collected data might have been richer. Third, in preparing for the Q-sort process, I used sorority jargon, for example the phrase "official family," that I later realized may have influenced participants' categories because this is a phrase that it known by leadership consultants, and not usually by collegians. Fourth, I conducted one Q-sort session. Had I conducted two sessions the data may have been more accurate and useful. Fifth, a larger sample for the email questions would have been useful. Sixth, for the email questionnaire, the open-ended questions were not open-ended enough. They prompted some very short responses from a few respondents, thus losing the opportunity for detailed data.

Having reported the results from both studies, and highlighted the emergent themes, the paper will now turn to a discussion on conflict in a collegiate women's organization.

DISCUSSION

This paper highlights the conflicts facing women today in a popular collegiate women's organization. The primary literature on sororities (e.g., Pike, 2000; Robbins, 2004; Turk, 2004) does not specifically address conflicts as they evolve within and among sorority women. A number of conflicts, including objectification by men, women, and society as a whole (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Kilbourne, 2000), the influence of groupthink (Janis, 1972), and the demands of intersectionality (Grillo, 1995) are all realities facing sorority women today. This paper also addresses the role that women have traditionally held in the work and educational spheres, and considered the impact of group process on an organization's overall functioning. This literature suggests that sororities need to recognize conflict and address the effects of conflict on a chapter's ability to function productively.

I argue that due to their strong Victorian roots, sororities do not allow their members to develop a tolerance for conflict or acquire skills to resolve conflicts. I also argue that members should be encouraged to develop a capacity for identifying and learning from conflict in their lives. Thus, this qualitative study was driven by three questions: 1) what types of conflict arise in sororities? 2) what factors play a role in these conflicts? and 3) how does conflict, and the ways in which it is handled, affect the women's overall sorority satisfaction as an individual within the organization?

What Types of Conflicts Arise in Sororities?

In order to analyze sorority conflict, how it is managed, and the affects it has on sorority functioning, conflicts must first be identified and categorized. In conjuncture with my personal experiences and observations of sorority conflict, two studies were

conducted to examine conflict in sororities. 1) the Q-sort technique allowed a sample of sorority women who are recent graduates to categorize a set of sorority conflicts and analyze there relevance to sorority life, and 2) the email questionnaire included three sets of questions related to conflict in sororities, and the participants were sorority women in their first year out of college, who have traveled as leadership consultants for their sorority.

Similar conflicts were identified across participants from both studies. The similarities focused on three levels of conflicts: organizational, social, and individual. An example of an organizational level category was identified by Participant One of the Q-sort. She said that conflict arises as a result of "conflict over sorority guidelines" (Table 1). Sorority documents expect each member to adhere to specific rules and standards that are outdated and reflective of women's perspectives from the Victorian era therefore prompting conflict among modern day sorority women. Members are conflicted in their efforts to hold fast to the sorority's governing documents while also trying to think progressively as a woman of the 21st century. This was demonstrated in my personal account of a sorority conflict as the two women had problem with the sorority's governing documents. They felt that they should be allowed to drink in their home because they were of age and in the confines of their own room.

Participant Four of the Q-sort mentioned, "conflict over social events" (Table 4) as a social (or group) level conflict. Many participants mentioned that seniority and hierarchy are leading causes of conflict within sororities. One leadership consultant reported, "there are serious conflicts from the senior pledge class 'releasing' their authority and leadership positions and allowing the younger girls to make things happen."

Sorority women are initiated in groups segregated by academic class. This division provokes conflict between classes. Participant Two of the Q-sort mentions, "underlying/individual issues causing conflict" (Table 2) as a reason for individual level conflicts. Participants from both studies identified conflicts that result from collegiate women living together and expressing their individuality to each other. Conflict within groups of women is inevitable and intensified within sororities due to the inherent pressure of living and working together cohesively.

What Factors Play a Role in Sorority Conflicts?

Identifying the primary conflicts in sororities allows for a customized understanding of the dominant factors causing such conflicts. Disclosure of such factors helps involved parties recognize the root of the conflict and decide how to proceed. Participants from both studies claimed that sorority standards and rules almost always factor into the evolving conflicts in sororities. As one leadership consultant responded, "I've found that conflict occurs more in chapters where rules are being strongly enforced without any explanation as to why they exist in the first place." Conflicts result from members being expected to uphold both Victorian characteristics such as femininity and domesticity and modern day characteristics such as individuality and empowerment without question.

Additionally, the expectation that sorority women can easily work and live together plays a significant role in the escalation of sorority conflicts. Participant Three from the Q-sort states, "conflict [occurs] because a large group of college aged women live together and are forced together into a group with one identity" (Table 3). Due to their attachment to history and tradition, sororities have a coercive overtone embedded in

their structure that consequentially promotes members to justify acts of hierarchy, conformity, and submissiveness; all of which factor into conflict among sorority women. Sororities are not set up to recognize or manage such factors and therefore conflict continues to recycle through generations of sorority members. In my opening conflict, the standards committee functioned coercively toward the two women being questioned and failed to acknowledge their situation individually. The assigned probation was routine and unoriginal creating animosity between the two women, the standards committee, and the larger chapter.

How Does Conflict Affect Women's Overall Sorority Satisfaction as Members?

Like many organizations, unidentified or unresolved conflict in sororities has severe ramifications on the chapter's level of productivity. However, unlike most organizations, there is no divider between work and personal life. Sorority women are required to associate with each other in various social settings multiple times each day. This provokes the longevity of conflict escalation. Participant One of the Q-sort study said that sorority conflicts are a result of, "how we socialize" (Table 1). Similarly, the leadership consultants believed that sorority conflicts are often connected to individual feelings of disrespect and lack of personal space. Transitioning between social contexts in a sorority is unstructured and complicated often causing women to feel over simulated and dissatisfied with their experience as sorority members. Participants from both studies reported that mishandled conflict has serious implications for membership satisfaction in sororities. One leadership consultant wrote, "Conflict hurts a chapter's ability to function and produce a positive experience for its members. I think our membership retention rates are lowest in chapters with constant conflict." Member dissatisfaction stems from a

lack of conflict management and resolution systems within sororities' organizational structures. Members need to have a voice and be acknowledged as a member to stay invested and active in the organization.

Both methods, Q-sort and the email questionnaire, provided useful data for answering each research question, and for identifying three main emergent themes: 1) conflict in sororities stems from the culture of living and working together; 2) the fight for hierarchy and seniority among the members in a chapter causes conflict; and 3) conflict results from the pre-established organizational standards to which sorority women are held accountable. These findings have serious implications for understanding more about conflict in sororities.

Together Around the Clock

The culture of sororities is prone to conflict. Members are expected to live and work together in the same space. Theoretically this arrangement seems fitting for promoting sisterhood and mutual support, but realistically, the complexities of associating with the same people around the clock are problematic. There is a culture of ambiguity and a lack of structural guidance and communication in terms of roles and status within sorority chapters. Overall, members are uncertain about what is expected of them in either context - work or social living. There is nothing separating work and social life for sorority women. Therefore conflicts that arise in one context are often carried into the other. One leadership consultant from study two wrote,

> when you're working and living with over 60 women and sharing a bathroom with 36 of them, conflict is unavoidable. Whether the conflict is about an officer making a mistake in the chapter, or someone playing their [sic] music too loud [sic] late at night, everyone hears about it, and everyone has an opinion about it.

Participants from both studies were very candid about the impossible task of separating the work aspect of a sorority from the general living and social aspect.

Women from both studies said that conflict was handled indirectly through acts of manipulation and deceit, and conflicts seemed to last a long time as a result. Conflict lingered in my sorority chapter after the standards committee put the new officers on probation. Their pre-partying and consequence became the topic of conversation day and night, during official meetings and otherwise. Both Study 1 and Study 2 agree, conflicts resurfaced in sororities, making it very difficult for the chapter to function productively and for its members to feel supported.

<u>Hierarchy and Seniority</u>

The purpose of a sorority is partly to afford collegiate women the opportunity to develop real life leadership skills such as teamwork, delegation, and event planning. This is to encourage and empower members to explore and develop their individual strengths while learning to function within a large group. Participants from both studies claimed that the organizational hierarchy of sororities causes conflict due to a lack of guidance on how to effectively transition from one set of officers (e.g., president, vice president, treasurer) to another. There is often a battle for power and recognition throughout this process, usually creating a division between high power members and low power members. Moreover, this is a problem among academic pledge classes, specifically seniors competing with the underclassmen.

Sororities are not currently structured in a way that promotes membership involvement through the end of senior year. Seniors tend to feel excluded when they turn over leadership positions to their underclass successors. A common response to feeling

devalued and unappreciated in this organization in which they have worked and lived in for years is to seek power and control within the group by lashing out. As soon as the seniors feel forgotten, they often attempt to re-claim their seniority (high power) and voice within the group, by actively disagreeing with chapter decisions and acting conceited and controlling whenever possible.

This trend is common among sorority chapters and causes a great deal of conflict. One leadership consultant reported, "the senior pledge classes still holding on to their previous leadership roles cause the most issues. I think most of the lack of functioning in chapters is due to more perceptions of what people think and feel versus actual fact." This ambiguity fosters a great divide between high and low power members. Members allow seniors and chapter officers to have a strong voice, power, and control within the sorority. Conversely, freshmen, sophomores, and juniors function as low power groups and operate in a more silent, conflict avoidant, and submissive manner. This plays out during chapter events and weekly work meetings. When underclassmen do have input, it tends to be ignored or marginalized unless they can informally gain support from high power sisters outside of formal meetings.

In sum, issues of hierarchy and seniority are plaguing women's overall experiences and satisfaction in sororities. Disputes between academic classes seem to stem from inaccurate perceptions about members' motives. Threads of faulty assumptions and a lack of communication within sorority chapters make avoiding conflict nearly impossible.

Institutionalized Policies

At the most basic level, sororities are designed to stimulate women's academic experiences and hold them to a high standard of behavior. To accomplish this, sororities have a very rigid, and outdated, set of standards to which they hold every member accountable. Also, because conflict was not believed to be positive or productive for women when sororities were established, founding members did not allow space for conflict management, and modern day sororities are suffering as a result.

Pre-established standards. In the past one hundred and fifty years, the challenges and demands facing women have changed. However, the founding ideals of sororities have not. Sororities value tradition and ritual, and therefore are committed to preserving the vision of their founding members. This vision, desiring every member to excel in the world of academia while maintaining her role as a Victorian woman, is embedded in sorority standards still today. Sorority women are expected to embody a set of ideals that do not translate to modern day. Members are held accountable to standards that promote femininity, domesticity, and concealment, yet they are encouraged to embrace the collegiate experience and pursue a life path that feels empowering. Sororities are self-contradicting this way, and sorority women are conflicted between proving their ability to be intellectual collegiate women who can handle leadership positions, and maintaining a feminine persona.

Sororities do not allow conflict. Sororities are apprehensive about change, particularly structural change. Conflict was not considered positive or feminine in the Victorian era, so the original structure of sororities did not include a policy for how and when conflicts should be managed. Furthermore, due to their private, pre-determined

living situation, sorority women share collective thoughts, ideas, and conflicts. However, because sorority chapters have no outlet for managing conflict, members often resort to patterns of self-destructive behavior to maintain approval from, and avoid conflict with, their sisters.

Neglecting to incorporate a forum for constructive conflict management is problematic. The women in my chapter were never allowed to speak openly and give their perspective uninterrupted. This caused conflict to escalate and reappear in an informal manner. Upon initiation, women are promised an experience of self-growth and mutual support as a sorority member including opportunities to develop skills that will be applicable to life after graduation. The ability to recognize conflict and explore its complexities is not presently, but should be made available by sororities. One Q-sort participant stated, "I would have loved to learn how to manage conflict and be able to identify why conflicts were happening, that would have helped my chapter so much." Members deserve the right to learn from conflict and become comfortable applying conflict management skills to their own experiences. Until sororities implement a structural change that provides a forum for conflict management, no real progress will be made, and sorority women will continue to experience conflict as they have since the beginning.

Participants from both studies noted the unmistakable influence of outside factors on sorority conflicts. Participant Three of the Q-sort argued that there is "conflict because of outside factors/influences – individual and/or other organizations" (Table 3). One leadership consultant reported that the effects of a conflict on the chapter's ability to function become more severe when multiple members are involved. From these results

we understand that conflicts facing all women are magnified within sororities. Issues of triple threat objectification by media, men, and women (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Kilbourne, 2000), low power status and learned submissiveness (Opotow & Khaminwa, 2000), cultural stereotypes and prescriptive identities for women (Heilman, 2001), disempowerment, and essentialization of women as one-dimensional (Grillo, 1995) are intensified and more noticeable in sororities. The unique socialization process and structure of this organization highlights conflicts that are universal to women while also recognizing sorority specific conflicts rooted in elements of ritual, tradition, and continual group interaction.

The study of women and conflict is invaluable to the process of identifying disputes as they arise in sororities. Careful consideration of the issues and obstacles facing women everywhere allows for a more accurate view of this women's collegiate organization. Conflicts plague sororities to varying degrees. However, we must become acquainted with the past in order to make improvements for the future. Denise Tassier (2000) writes,

> above all, the history…is a story of sisterhood, a testament to the credo that in union there is strength…that where there is purpose and association "for the development of nobler qualities of the mind and finer feelings of the heart," accomplishment and success can follow…and those who respect intellectual development, seek positive ethical principles, and work toward individual and social excellence not only to create their own destiny, but help make the world a better place…and that in such an organization, deep friendships are forged that span generation and can last a lifetime. (p. 1)

With a new approach to identifying conflict in sororities, one untainted by essentialist opinions and inaccurate stereotypes, sororities have the potential to be strengthened and improved. This would allow them to serve their original purpose, which is to empower

women and provide them with a sense of acceptance and support within a very complex collegiate culture.

Next Steps

The purpose of this project is to raise awareness about sororities, and particularly conflict in sororities. There is a significant amount of important literature on women and conflict that focuses on managing conflicts facing women everywhere, but there is surprisingly little literature specific to this widespread collegiate organization. My study focuses on a commonly ignored and misunderstood women's organization. My intent was to produce a piece of literature that pays attention to sororities and the detailed living, working, and social contexts in which members are operating and conflicting. A great deal of what we know about women and conflict can be applied to the lives of sorority women, and furthermore, much can be learned about women and conflict in organizations through a deeper look at sororities. This paper is in no way an exhaustive study of conflict in sororities. However, my hope is that this it will serve as a starting point for understanding the implications and influences that sororities have on the lives of their collegiate members, and on the way that women can function effectively in society as equals.

APPENDIX I

Q-Sample

Conflicts in Sororities (in alphabetical order)

accept/reject diversity
appropriate conduct
"attendance is mandatory"
attendance policy
boyfriends
chapter council
chapter decision-making technique
cliques
committees/teamwork
delegation
drinking
drugs
eating disorders
fight for power/control
finance/pay dues
fraternities
greek week events
I-week/Initiation requirements
hazing
house board/advisory board involvement
house rules/visitation policy
jealousy
lack of communication
lack of efficiency
lies
manipulation/deceit

miscommunication
money
mutual respect
national visitors
nominations/elections
non-supportive
other sororities
peer pressure
pre- and post partying
recruitment
reports/paperwork
risk management
ritual/formal meetings
roommates
scholarships/GPA standard
school/classes
senior participation and senior week
seniority
sex/sexuality
sexual harassment/rape
sisterhood
social events
standards committee
threatens individuality
voting process
waste of time

APPENDIX II

Organizing the Data – Clustering

Positive
sisterhood, friendship, reinforcement, support, leadership, inclusive, development, groomed, unity, collaborative, shared, inviting, womanly, feminine, feminist

resolve, prevent, mediate, communicate

Negative
manipulation, pressure, force

refusal, blame, forced, intrusive, manipulate, destructive, threatening, stressful, confrontational, conflicting

avoid, excuse, resign, loss of membership

exclusive, cliques, seniority, hierarchy, singled out, betrayal, internalized stress

Both
structure, lifestyle, conform, socialize, assimilate, groom

enforcement, assessment, influence, legitimize, intensify

standards, expectations, selection, judgment, opinions

environment, culture, atmosphere, governing council, governing documents

APPENDIX III

Email to Leadership Consultants

Hello,

I hope that this email finds you doing well.

I am emailing to ask a favor. My Master's Project is focusing on analyzing conflict in collegiate women's organizations, sororities in particular. I feel that my analysis would be significantly strengthened if I were to get some feedback from women who have traveled to chapters throughout the country...which leads me to you!

You are an extraordinary woman with incredible insight, and given your involvement and leadership in your chapter for four years, and now as leadership consultant, I am positive that your feedback and wisdom would be invaluable to my project. I know that you have a busy schedule, but if you are willing, and can find a few minutes to spare, I would be so grateful if you would answer three questions for me.

Here are the questions:

1. What kinds of conflict emerge in chapters of this sorority across the United States?
2. How are these conflicts handled? By the members? By the organization?
3. What effect do these conflicts have on the chapter's ability to function?

Your part in this research is confidential. The information gathered for this project will not be published or presented in a way that would allow anyone to identify you. Information will be gathered in raw form and no one will see my notes. All names will be changed and potential identifiers removed. Collected data will be destroyed at the conclusion of this project.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you wish to participate, please email your consent and your responses to the above questions. If you do not wish to take part in this project, simply do not respond to the above questions. If you do choose to take part in this study, and at any point decide that you do not wish to have your responses included, you can contact me to destroy your information before May 20th, 2006. Otherwise your data will be destroyed after May 20th.

Thanks and take care.

Courtney Sayther

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