

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Sororities play an important role in the process by which sorority women become gendered by influencing members' ideas about what it means to be a woman. Women and men become gendered through regular social interaction with other women and men, and sororities have a particularly strong impact on their members because sorority women spend nearly all of their time with other Greeks. Gender is one of the major ways that we organize our lives and gender is the texture and foundation of our social, political, and economic worlds. This is why we must consider the consequences of gender negotiation in all arenas, including sororities.

For the most part, the sorority women who participated in this study negotiated traditional gender arrangements and constructed conservative identities. Sororities on this Pacific Northwestern university created and perpetuated conformity, dependence and political apathy in their members. These organizations developed an environment in which gender stereotyping and victimization was learned and then legitimized. Within these organizations, however, are pockets of resistance, non-compliance, empowerment, and what could be called "potentially feminist" gender negotiation.

From Sister to Sister to Woman: The Role of Sororities in the Social Transmission
of Gender

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
INTRODUCTION	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	8
Gender Theory	10
Peer Groups as a Socializing Agent	13
College as a Socializing Agent	15
Sororities as a Socializing Agent	18
“Doing” and Negotiating Gender	21
* Gender Negotiation within Sororities - Hazing as an Example	32
* General Greek Information	39
* Sororities and Fraternities: Conducive to the Goals of the Academy?	42
* Gender Negotiation within Sororities	50
Greek Organizations as Families	51
Separatism	56
Sexism and the Greek Community	63
The Rape Culture of Fraternities	67
Greeks and Heterosexism	75
Classism in the Greek Community	79
Racism and the Greek Community	81
* Genuine Friendships or Horizontal Hostility?	85

TABLE OF CONTENTS CONTINUED

	<u>Page</u>
METHODS	95
Feminist Research	96
A Recognition of Gender, Race and Class As Emergent Features of Social Life	101
A Focus on the Experiences and Lives of Women	103
Challenging the Tenets of Traditional Social Science	105
A Concern for the Ethical Implications of Research	109
Research as an Impetus for Social Change	112
The Challenges of Feminist Research	115
Responding to the Criticism	120
Qualitative vs. Quantitative Debate	121
The Diversity of Feminist Methods	124
“From Sister to Sister to Woman” – The Project	125
ANALYSIS	132
Reasons for Joining a Sorority	133
“Tolerance”	134
Exclusivity of Sororities	137
Sorority and Fraternity Differences	144
Image Focused	148

TABLE OF CONTENTS CONTINUED

	<u>Page</u>
Looksism	155
Sorority Hierarchy	159
Stereotypes	161
Competition between Sororities and Horizontal Hostility	164
Competition between Sisters	167
Heterosexism and Homophobia	169
Traditional Heterosexual Dating Patterns	172
Sexual Double Standard	175
Sexual Assault	177
Sisterhood	179
Gender Separatism	185
Hazing	189
Skill Development	192
Feminism and Sororities	197
Role Models	200
Celebration of Women and Women's Strengths	203
CONCLUSION	205
BIBLIOGRAPHY	213

From Sister to Sister to Woman: The Role of Sororities in the Social Transmission of Gender

INTRODUCTION

I noticed a sorority flyer in the spring of 2002. It was posted on a corkboard near the first floor women's bathroom in the University of Kentucky library. It read: "On the road of life there are friends and there are sisters...Sisters Wanted. Call for further details." The irony struck me and I laughed. It seemed so obvious: a sorority rush poster, a solicitation for recruits, for women interested in becoming part of a group committed to particular set of beliefs, principles and a lifestyle. The poster practically encapsulated this research project!

Sister is a common term used by members of a social sorority to refer to each other. It is a term of endearment, pride and loyalty. *Sisterhood* is defined as the bond or connection between sorority sisters. According to the University of Georgia website, "you cannot see sisterhood, neither can you hear it nor taste it. But you can feel it a hundred times a day. It is a pat on the back, a smile of encouragement. It's someone to share with, to celebrate your achievements" (<http://www.uga.edu>). Sororal sisterhood means having someone there for you at all times, no matter what. It is unique kind of family away from home. The bond of sisterhood is not confined by the walls of a sorority house; according to several of the women I interviewed sisterhood is forever! "A sorority alumnus never forgets her sisters – they are always a part of her life." Sisterhood is often

described as the most important part of a sorority and the essence of the organization.

The meaning of *sisterhood* for the members of a social, exclusive, nationally affiliated, housed sorority, on the campus of a major university, has not been thoroughly investigated. Many sororal organizations give lip-service to sisterhood in mottos and creeds, on their university's website, and in the pamphlets and leaflets handed out during rush week, but very few sorority women have been asked, in a research setting, what sisterhood means to them and what effect their experiences as members of a sorority have had on their lives. This study is an attempt to do just that.

“From Sister to Sister to Woman” examines some of the ways that gender is negotiated within sororities whose members are predominantly white, middle to upper class, and heterosexual. My belief is that sorority members become women through social interaction with other sorority members and fraternity men, and what follows is an analysis of the outcome of this interaction. I am interested in how womanhood is constructed by white, middle to upper class, heterosexual sorority women and what this may mean for the individual members of those organizations, past, present and future. This study provides a handful of women the chance to talk about the ways Greek membership, and specifically sorority membership, has affected their lives and their identity as [white, middle to upper class, heterosexual] women. It is important to point out that the interviewees were self-selected, so this study gives voice only to those who chose to share their experiences and perspective. Silent are the sorority women who did not participate in this project.

A secondary goal of this research project is to determine whether being in an exclusive sorority is an empowering or disempowering experience and to ascertain what contributions, if any, exclusive sororities make to the women's movement. I define “exclusive” as elite, restricted, private, and reserved for a

single group. The majority of sororities in the United States are exclusive, and the sororities represented in this study are no exception. In my view, an environment that is supportive of women, respectful towards women, celebratory of women's talents and contributions, and committed to protecting women from violence is empowering. An environment that facilitates the negotiation of traditional gender identities and relationships, on the other hand, is disempowering for women, on both personal and social/political levels. Sororities are one of the largest organizations of women in the United States. Hundreds of thousands of young women each year join these organizations on college and university campuses in every state. The potential of sororities for the feminist movement is enormous, and my hope is that this project helps to illuminate some of that potential.

“From Sister to Sister to Woman” is grounded in gender negotiation theory presented by Lorber 1994, West and Zimmerman 1987, Gerson and Peiss 1985, Risman 1987 and Handler 1995. These scholars argue that gender (like race, class and sexual orientation) is constructed within social interaction, created and re-created in social life, and at the same time, gender is a way of organizing social life. The gendered microstructure of everyday interaction and the gendered macrostructure of our institutions and our social system reproduce and reinforce each other. As individuals negotiate gender in face-to-face interaction, they are simultaneously reinforcing or challenging gendered systems of dominance and power. Gender is a set of socially constructed relationships between women and men, among women, and among men that are produced and reproduced through the actions of individuals. The focus of this project is the individual interactions of sorority women on a Pacific Northwestern university campus and the relationships these women create.

As I mentioned, published literature on this subject is lacking. Most of the academic research involving Greek organizations centers on fraternity men and most of it focuses on hazing or the differences between Greeks and non-Greeks in terms of scholastic achievement or alcohol and drug use. Sororities in general are

under-studied, and very few attempts have been made to investigate the ways that womanhood is constructed by exclusive sorority women. This project is needed for a richer understanding of the sorority experience and the engendering process in the exclusive Greek system.

My interest in this topic is also personal. As an undergraduate of Hope College, in Holland, Michigan I was a member of the Alpha Gamma Phi sorority. Although the Greek system at Hope is local, meaning the sororities and fraternities on campus are not affiliated with a national chapter, my experience mirrors in many ways the experiences described by the women in this study and I can relate to these women.

My four years as an “Alpha Phi” were extremely rewarding. I learned a lot about myself, formed life-long friendships, and had a lot of fun. After I entered graduate school, however, I began to think about sororities in broader terms and wondered about the influence and impact of my membership on my identity as a white, middle class, heterosexual woman and as a feminist. I still see my experience as positive, but, as a feminist, I am outraged by the numerous reports of racist acts, date rape by fraternity members and hazing within sororities.

I was motivated to do this project by a desire to understand how gender, or womanhood, is negotiated within exclusive sororities, and secondarily, to identify the contributions these organizations make to feminist struggle. These two questions are important to me not only because they are not often asked, but also because I have contemplated them for myself. This project granted each participant the opportunity to reflect upon her experiences and hopefully, gain some new insights, and I am pleased to say that this project granted me the same opportunity.

The chapter immediately following the introduction is the literature review. It starts with an overview of two common theories for explaining the engendering process: sex-role socialization and gender negotiation. The second section of chapter two includes a general description of Greek organizations and some of the problems facing contemporary Greeks. The third section is a combination of the

first two. It is a discussion of some of the gender issues I consider relevant to sororities and as such, it provides a context for an analysis of the data. The third section of the literature review is organized thematically: Greek Organizations as Families, Separatism, Sexism and the Greek Community, The Rape Culture of Fraternities, Greeks and Heterosexism, Classism in the Greek Community, Racism and the Greek Community, and Genuine Friendships or Horizontal Hostility?

Chapter three is the epistemology, methodology and methods section. That chapter includes an outline of some of the main principles of feminist research and its limitations. I also describe the method used in this study (semi-structured interviews), the participants, and the interview questions.

Chapter four analyzes the data from a feminist perspective. Like the literature review, it is organized thematically: Reasons for Joining a Sorority, “Tolerance,” Exclusivity of Sororities, Sorority and Fraternity Differences, Image Focused, Looksism, Sorority Hierarchy, Stereotypes, Competition between Sororities and Horizontal Hostility, Competition between Sisters, Heterosexism and Homophobia, Traditional Heterosexual Dating Patterns, Sexual Double Standard, Sexual Assault, Sisterhood, Gender Separatism, Hazing, Skill Development, Feminism and Sororities, Role Models, and Celebration of Women and Women’s Strengths.

The last chapter is chapter five, which is the conclusion. It provides the reader with a summary of my findings and further research possibilities.

Like nearly all other sub-cultures and communities, sororities and fraternities have their own language. I use terminology in this paper that is used almost exclusively by Greek members. For the reader’s convenience, many are defined below.

- The term *sorority* applies to woman-only Greek letter collegiate organization characterized by rituals, a strong bond of sisterhood, and a *lavalier*. A *lavalier* is a necklace with Greek letters attached to it. It is typically presented to a new member after she is formally initiated into a sorority

- *Fraternity* is used in one of two ways, 1) to refer to a man-only Greek letter collegiate organization or 2) in reference to any Greek letter organization, including one with all women members. Some women-only Greek letter collegiate organizations hold a fraternity title, including two in this study. However, there seems to be very little difference between sororities and women-only fraternities. So for simplicity, I call the women-only organizations, sororities, and the men-only organizations, fraternities.
- Throughout this paper, I refer to sorority and fraternity members simply as *Greeks*. The phrase *Greek system* represents the local organizations, their governing bodies, and the national chapters.
- The term *house* is popular at the institution where the data was gathered and refers to any Greek organization or one's own Greek organization. Instead of calling their organization by name, members often simply refer to the "house." Or when socializing with other Greeks, sorority and fraternity members often ask, "What house do you belong to?"
- *National* is used to refer to the central organization of nationally-affiliated fraternity or sorority.
- *Active* describes a woman or man who has been formally initiated by a sorority or fraternity. In other words, an active is an official member.
- *Independents* or *non-Greeks* are used to describe students who are not in any way affiliated with a fraternity or sorority. The nickname "G.D.I.s" (god damn independents) is also used.
- A *bid* is a formal invitation to join a sorority or fraternity, issued by the members of an organization to a rushee. The term *bid* is also used to describe an invitation to a party or some other Greek function. Typically in those cases, fraternities present bids to sororities, but sororities can give them as well.
- The term *legacy* is used to refer to a prospective member, or rushee, whose grandmother, mother, or sister is an alumna of an active member of a particular sorority. A sorority is not obligated to pledge its legacies.

- *Initiation* or *pledging* is a period of education that brings a *pledge* into full membership. A *pledge* is an undergraduate student who has been accepted as a probationary member of a sorority or fraternity.
- *Hazing* is a term used to describe the mistreatment or abuse of an individual for the purpose of initiation. Hazing is prohibited by most colleges and universities in the United States, by all national fraternities and sororities, and is illegal in most states.
- *Rush* is a series of parties and other events hosted by each sorority or fraternity for the purpose of membership recruitment. During rush, undergraduate women and men interested in a sorority or fraternity meet the active members, learn about the houses, and consider joining. A *rushee* refers to a student who participates in sorority or fraternity rush. (www.grady.uga.edu)

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is gender? How do we become gendered? Why are these questions significant? For most people, “talking about gender is the equivalent of fish talking about water” (Lorber 1994). Gender is so entrenched in our social interactions and is often expressed so subtly that “questioning its taken-for-granted assumptions and presuppositions is like thinking about whether the sun will come up” (Worell 1996; Lorber 1994). Gender is pervasive and well-established in familiar social relationships, so few of us stop to think about its meaning or its importance. In a sense, the engendering process is like a series of “hidden agendas” in our daily lives (Worell 1996). These hidden agendas “normalize unequal personal and institutional arrangements” and “seduce us into believing that what we observe, experience, and practice is natural and desirable” (Worell 1996).

Gender is a social construction, a system of social stratification, an institution, and one of the major ways that westerners organize our lives (Lorber 1994). It is embedded in the family, work, politics, the media, religion, art, entertainment as well as sexuality and language (Lorber 1994).

Human society depends on a predictable division of labor, a designated allocation of scarce goods, an assigned responsibility for children and others who cannot care for themselves, common values and their systemic transmission to new members, legitimate leadership, music, art, stories, games, and other symbolic productions. One way of choosing people for the different tasks of society is on the basis of their talents, motivations, and competence – their demonstrated achievements. The other way is on the basis of...ascribed membership in a category of people. (Lorber 1994)

There are many situations and social events that are not clearly categorized or organized by gender, race, class, age or sexual orientation yet any social encounter or event can be made to serve the interests of “doing” gender (race, class, age or sexual orientation). For example, Fishman (1978) noted an asymmetrical “division of labor” in the casual conversations of heterosexual couples. What

would likely be construed as harmless chitchat between a woman and a man is loaded with gender meaning. Women in Fishman's study asked more questions, filled in more silences, paid closer attention, and were forced to use attention-grabbing techniques just to be heard (1978). According to West and Zimmerman (1987), this "harmless chitchat" is the business of doing gender. Asking questions, breaking silences, being overly supportive and attentive, and struggling to find a voice constitutes womanhood in this context (West & Zimmerman 1987). The larger social system is comprised of an endless number of such interactions. Gender theory is relatively new. The division of the human race into gender categories and the implications of this division for work, family, politics, recreation, religion, etc. have only recently be considered, and we have quite a long way to go (Lips 1994). For uncovering the institutionalized hidden agendas is absolutely essential if we are to eradicate the unequal social system that governs and structures our lives (Worell 1996). Understanding the processes that produce and sustain inequalities is a necessary step toward changing the social, political and economic position of women, people of color, the alter-abled, and the poor (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983). Indeed, the long-term goal of feminism must be no less than the elimination of gender as an organizing principle of society (Lorber 1994).

To accomplish this goal we must understand the "nature" of gender and the processes by which we become gendered. We must recognize that every social interaction is a potential opportunity for gender negotiation, and we must never underestimate the impact of the gendering process. We must recognize patterns in our own behavior and in our interactions with others. We must identify opportunities for resistance and honor those who are courageous enough to resist, and we must call attention to the social interactions that perpetuate inequality. Thankfully, there is a lot we can learn about the general from the particular (Stivers 1993). To look critically at the experience of a sorority woman: hazing, sisterhood, fraternities parties, etc., to the arrangements and relations that put her there, is to

describe much of the organization of society including the institutions of family, education, heterosexuality, etc. (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983).

Gender Theory

The conventional approach for how we become gendered is commonly referred to as sex-role socialization/development or gender transmission. Socialization is the fundamental process by which individuals develop the attitudes, expectations, behaviors, values and skills that are associated with one gender. The events of our lives provide the context for socialization within which girls, boys and later, women and men, learn and re-learn what is expected of us as members of distinct gender groups (Lipman-Blumen 1984). Socialization uses the regular, day-to-day and the random experiences generated within society to train people to behave in specific ways – socialization is both explicit and implicit (Lipman-Blumen 1984). Some sex-role socialization theorists describe gender as a role, like other social roles: teenager, step-brother, ex-wife, senior citizen. Sarah Matthews (1982), for example, defines “role” as prescriptions for behavior or expectations about what is appropriate for a person in a particular position within a particular context. A gender role, then, is a set of expectations about what is acceptable for a woman or a man, and socialization is the processes by which we come to assume our woman or man role (Matthews 1982).

The theory of sex-role socialization or gender transmission is based upon a conceptual separation of “sex” and “gender.” What is meant by the terms gender, gender role, sex-role, masculinity/femininity and the ways in which sex is differentiated from gender varies considerably, even within disciplines (Stevenson 1994). But for those subscribing to the conventional theory of gender, “sex” typically refers to the biologically based categories of male and female, and the term “gender” refers to the non-physiological characteristics ascribed to and prescribed for the sexes. In this conception, sex implies femaleness, whereas gender implies femininity or womanhood (Stevenson 1994; Lips 1994). Sex is

biology, evidenced through anatomy, hormones, and physiology, and gender, on the other hand, is an achieved status, constructed through psychological, cultural, and social means (Acker 1992; West & Zimmerman 1987). Sex and gender are closely, closely linked in this view. *Gender* is the set of behaviors socially defined as appropriate for one's *sex* and gender encompasses all of the social expectations associated with being a girl or boy, woman or man that go beyond sex differences (Lips 1994; Lipman-Blumen 1984). Gender refers to the meanings that individuals and groups ascribe to the categories of female and male (Stevenson 1994).

The socialization of gender, as well as race, class, age, and sexual orientation, begins very early. For the individual, gender transmission starts with an assignment to a sex category. This determination is typically made while a fetus is in the womb or directly after birth, using either genitalia or chromosomal typing as the criteria (West & Zimmerman 1987). From the moment of assignment to a sex category, we receive different treatment based on that sex assignment, immediately setting girls and boys on two very different paths. Adult caregivers (parents, grandparents, legal guardians, older siblings, etc.) have expectations for children based on their own acceptance of cultural stereotypes about the differences between the sexes. Using these cultural definitions of sex differences, adults reinforce gender differentiation in girls and boys (Lipman-Blumen 1984). These complex gender expectations are active from the moment we are born (earlier if the sex assignment occurred while the fetus was still in the womb) – “pink and blue blankets are the symbolic tip of the socialization iceberg” (Lipman-Blumen 1984).

Indeed, the distinction between female and male is among the first children learn – gender markings and gender identity are created and maintained for children by adults' choice of names, clothing, toys and games, books, and by play (Lorber 1994). “Through the example, teaching, rewards and admonishments of parents, siblings, teachers, and other significant adults, the child learns, first, that there are two genders, second, which gender she or he belongs to (and how to refer to them), and finally, how to be (and not to be) a proper member of his or her gender”

(Lorber 1994). Once her/his gender is self evident, a child treats girls differently from boys, and other children respond to the different treatment by feeling different and behaving differently – as soon as kids can talk, they start to refer to themselves as members of their gender (Lorber 1994). Children learn how to discriminate and label themselves and others according to sex/gender, to recognize what attributes and behaviors are typical of or considered appropriate for each sex, and to do what is seen as appropriate and avoid what is not, recognize the importance of dividing the world along sex lines (Lorber 1994).

In recent years, critics of sex-role socialization have deemed this perspective insufficient for understanding the processes by which we become gendered and argue for a more complex and pluralistic approach (Thorne 1993). The problems with this theory are related to its emphasis on consensus, stability, and continuity and its ahistorical and depoliticizing focus (West & Zimmerman 1987). Sex-role socialization theorists conceptualize gender as a trait, an attribute or a role. Critics, on the other hand, argue that gender is something individuals do or accomplish within the contexts of social institutions and while “doing” gender, individuals maintain or disrupt social institutions and thus, social order. According to most subscribers to gender transmission theory, “sex” is based on natural, biological facts while gender is learned. Critics of this theory argue that sex, like gender, is socially constructed. Scholars who support gender development take a one-directional, top-down approach to the process through which we become gendered: children learn from adults, younger siblings learn from older siblings, students learn from teachers, etc. Those who subscribe to the theory of gender negotiation believe that individuals comply and resist; throughout our lives, depending upon the circumstances, we surrender to or challenge the engendering process. We do not passively receive our gender assignment and retain that assignment for life. Engendering is a never-ending process.

Despite the flaws in traditional gender theory, most research that examines how we become women and men is conducted from this perspective. The studies

exploring the contribution of peer groups and the college experience to this process are no exception. Though I agree that the theory of sex-role development is problematic, I will review some of the relevant research in effort to provide a thorough description of how sorority members grow from sisters to women. Later in this chapter I will describe an alternative approach for become gendered: gender negotiation.

Peer Groups as a Socializing Agent

Through our interactions with others, we learn to be who we are expected to be (Risman 1987). “Socialization” is used by sociologists to describe the fundamental processes by which individuals develop the attitudes, expectations, behaviors, values and skills associated with one gender (Lipman-Blumen 1984; Longino & Kart 1973). The essence of socialization is really very simple: individuals develop a gender identity through a learning process that involves mentoring, imitation and reinforcement (Lips 1994). Girls learn to be “girls” (or feminine) and boys learn to be “boys” (or masculine) when gender appropriate behavior is rewarded and gender inappropriate behavior is punished or ignored. Children learn which behaviors are gender appropriate through trial and error and by observing and imitating adult and peers (Lips 1994).

It is easy to see how our interactions with individuals with whom we are intimately involved can have a particularly strong effect on us. Colleagues, teachers, clergy and other religious leaders, neighbors and community members socialize us, but the interactions with members of our primary groups (i.e. family members, peers, etc.) are extremely influential – they literally define who we are (Boeringer, Shehan & Akers 1991). These groups teach us what to think, what to believe and, thus, what actions to take. Some scholars argue that a primary group not only has the power to influence behavior, it can prescribe and select behavior and may actually *force* members to act a certain way (Strange 1986).

Our family is a powerful influence throughout our lives, but as we mature, our peers become more and more significant to our development, eventually replacing the family as our main socializing agent (Eisenhart & Holland 1983). By the time a young woman or man graduates from high school and enters college, she/he is spending the bulk of her/his time with peers, and peer groups provide the training ground in which a young adult extensively practices a world of experience (Eisenhart & Holland 1983).

Certain kinds of peer groups tend to have more of an impact than others. Peer groups that are small, homogenous, isolated, and conformist exert considerably more influence on their members than larger groups comprised of people from all walks of life (Milem 1991; Smucker 1948). In order to build a niche, a place where we belong, individuals often form and join groups with persons with whom we share similar interests and values (Gerson 1969). After we have found that niche and have established close relationships with the other members of the group, we tend to spend the majority, if not all, of our social time with them. When this happens, we are segregated from others outside of the group and may interact exclusively with those individuals with whom we share a commonality. Segregated groups are the most influential kinds of peer groups because they are their members' only social outlet (Risman 1987).

The values, beliefs and prescriptions for behavior vary from peer group to peer group. However, studies show that young adult peer groups play an integral part in the transmission of gender. According to Holland and Eisenhart (1983), peer groups are a major, if not the principal, mediator of gender meanings and expectations for young adults, and like the culture at large, peer groups are overwhelmingly male dominated and male focused (Kalof & Cargill 1991). Most peer groups, steeped in socio-cultural ideas about what it is to be a girl/woman or a boy/man, perpetuate traditional ideas about gender to their members (Thorne 1993). As a result, peer group cultures often become environments in which

gender stereotyping and sexual aggression or victimization is learned and legitimized (Kalof & Cargill 1991).

College as a Socializing Agent

The college experience is also extremely influential. In fact, according to some scholars, the very purpose of academic institutions is to socialize students, to guide young men and women during their transition from childhood to adulthood (Milem 1991; Astin & Kent 1983). Most first year college students are quite vulnerable – they are away from home for the first time and the demands put upon them are great – they are forced to grow up quickly. “The college years are a period when young adults must deal with a number of critical tasks: breaking loose from their families and establishing independent identities; clarifying their values and convictions; evaluating their strengths and weaknesses; and making basic decisions about marriage, children, and work” (Astin & Kent 1983). First-year students are scared, excited, and anxious, making them extremely susceptible to influence.

College is a time of intense interaction, and again, according to sex-role socialization theorists, we learn who to be and how to behave from those around us. In college, students are constantly interacting with other students, faculty and staff. The university is much more than a complex of buildings and an athletic tradition; it is a place, via subgroups, where people get together (Longino & Kart 1973). Students meet and interact with other students in dormitories and classrooms, on sports fields and campus sidewalks, at parties and meetings.

Before we discuss what is taught and learned at colleges and universities in terms of gender, it is important to acknowledge the lack of a universal college experience. Although many students have common experiences while at school, they vary according to race, class, age, sexual orientation, etc. Black students who attend predominantly white colleges and universities, for example, report higher levels of dissatisfaction with the institution, feel a greater sense of alienation, and

have less satisfactory relationships with peers and faculty than their white counterparts (Nettles & Johnson 1987). Students' college experiences also depend on other factors, including the size and structure of the institution, the location of the institution, the frequency of her/his interaction with faculty, her/his place of residence while in college, and her/his marital status (Nettles & Johnson 1987; Pascarella 1985).

A great deal is learned in college with regards to gender; however, what precisely constitutes the “gender curricula” is debatable. Some argue that the educational system, like other institutions in our society, reproduces social categories (gender, race, class, sexual orientation, age) and their stereotypes. These scholars insist that education reaffirms traditional ideas taught by the family, the media, and our peers; therefore, schools in general and colleges and universities in particular are socialization agents for the larger—sexist, racist, classist, heterosexist—society (Milem 1991). Others claim that education has a “liberalizing” affect on students and challenges rather than perpetuates traditional beliefs about women and men.

Astin and Kent (1983) insist that institutions of higher education have an obligation to “liberalize” their women students, but they found that most academic institutions fail to meet their obligation. Colleges and universities should provide their women students with the skills and competencies needed for effective job performance and a sense of autonomy and self-worth to help them overcome any obstacles stemming from their earlier socialization for dependence and conformity (Astin & Kent 1983). Unfortunately however, Astin and Kent's study revealed that gender differences are not eliminated or even reduced by the college experience. Rather than diminish stereotypical differences between men and women, colleges and universities tend to preserve and in some cases, exacerbate them (Astin & Kent 1983).

Holland and Eisenhart (1988) found that schools reproduce the differentiation and hierarchy that structures the larger society by dividing and

ranking students according to social categories, particularly age. By organizing students around an age hierarchy (i.e. first grade, second grade, freshman, sophomore, junior, etc.) with higher status assigned to older students, in essence schools teach students they are not equal and that their differences should be emphasized over their commonalities (Eisenhart & Holland 1983).

The majority of the institutionalized dividing and ranking that occurs in educational settings is based upon age; however, age and gender hierarchies perpetuate each other. The bureaucratization that plays upon and uses age divisions and ranking also picks up on gender divisions and ranking (Eisenhart & Holland 1983). Indeed, researchers have shown that extensive separation between girls and boys, women and men occurs within contemporary co-educational schools (Thorne 1993). In many ways, students receive the message from their teachers, instructors, and professors that girls and boys are different, while, at the same time, hearing very little elaboration about the origin or accuracy of these “differences” (Eisenhart & Holland 1983). Those who argue that schools perpetuate race, class and gender stereotypes found their arguments on the racist, classist and sexist content of books and other materials and biased teaching practices (Eder & Parker 1987). “Although formal barriers to women’s entry into various academic disciplines are now illegal in the United States, informal barriers at all levels remain. Parents, classmates, teachers and guidance counselors discourage girls from pursuing subjects deemed ‘masculine,’ such as mathematics or the physical sciences” (Anderson 1995). There is a double standard in the classroom as well. “The classroom climate in mixed-gender schools favors boys. Teachers pay more attention and offer more encouragement to boys than to girls, solicit their participation more, and expect them to achieve more” (Anderson 1995).

Other scholars insist that education, especially higher education, has the opposite effect and improves students’ beliefs and attitudes about gender (Bernal 1989; Feldman & Newcomb 1973). These scholars see the system of higher education in the United States as one key means through which sexist ideologies

can be modified (Bayer 1975). “Throughout history, institutions of higher education have been at the forefront of, and the battleground for, some of our nation’s most progressive steps toward a higher social and moral citizenry” (Maisel 1990). Rather than perpetuating or reproducing traditional notions of gender, college contradicts them by exposing students to new ideas and introducing them to new people, many who are unlike themselves. College prepares students to be “tomorrow’s leaders” and thus teaches students to be self-reliant, independent, and assertive, characteristics that are traditionally associated with masculinity.

Since most colleges and universities in the United States are no longer reserved exclusively for men, women are also being taught these skills (though not all women are given equal opportunity). Lyons and Green, for example, found that college is typically the first time women assume financial responsibility for themselves and the first time they are unabashed in social situations. For many young women, this kind of autonomy and freedom is inconsistent with those previously believed to be appropriate, and these women are forced to reconsider what it means to be a woman. In order to meet the demands of college, many women find that they must re-learn gender (1988).

Sororities as a Socializing Agent

Since both peer groups and the college experience are strong socializing agents, it follows that college peer groups, like exclusive social sororities, constitute a potent source of social influence. Indeed, scholars have shown that peer groups play an important role in students’ transition from late adolescence to adulthood and are a critical mechanism for the formation of identity during the college years (Strange 1986). For most college students, transitioning from dependent to independent is difficult so they look to their peer group for help during the intermediate stage between family and the larger, post-college world (Milem 1991; Eisenhart & Holland 1983). Peers, especially close friends, provide college students with emotional support and an outlet for venting frustration that is

so desperately needed during this pivotal time in their lives (Eisenhart & Holland 1983; Finney 1979).

While the faculty may be the designated agents of socialization, the students are responsible for the bulk of the socialization that takes place on college campuses (Milem 1991; Pascarella 1985). Most of the gender socialization in the educational system occurs outside of the classroom while students engage in extracurricular and informal activities (Eder & Parker 1987). Since the late 18th Century, a campus peer system, rather than professors, coach, or advisors, has dominated most students' lives on campus (Eisenhart & Holland 1983; Smucker 1948). What students learn in college is taught by other students or more precisely, by the attitudes, values and behavior of the peer group to which they belong (Hunt & Rentz 1994). While in college, a young woman and man's most important teachers are her/his friends (Milem 1991).

I contend that sororities and fraternities, as college peer groups, impact the attitudes, values, and behavior of their members dramatically. Within the college context, exclusive social sororities and fraternities function as primary groups by combining elements of both friendship and family (Boeringer, Shehan & Akers 1991), and in this capacity, Greek organizations play an important role in the process by which white, middle to upper class, heterosexual sorority women (and fraternity men) become gendered (Risman 1987).

For sorority women, the Greek system functions as a guide for the first few years they are free from direct parental control (Risman 1987). In an exclusive sorority, women engage, individually and collectively, in constructing womanhood (Handler 1995). Her interactions within a sorority, the Greek system as a whole, and the wider campus community teach a member about what it means to be a white, middle to upper class, heterosexual woman. Sorority members' ideas about womanhood are shaped by the sorority and the sorority's involvement in Greek life and the campus culture (Handler 1995). The exclusive sorority system affects a member's ideas about womanhood, gender, and therefore, herself (Risman 1987).

Exclusive sororities (and fraternities) have such a strong influence over their members because Greeks spend nearly all of their time with other Greek members and thereby provide sorority women with only one small group in which to interact and learn (Risman 1987). Sorority members do, of course, associate with non-Greek students, instructors, and parents, but almost all of their daily interactions are with other Greeks (Risman 1987). A sorority woman cannot find the time to maintain extensive contacts outside of the Greek system; consequently, the Greek community becomes one of her only frames of reference (Gerson 1969; Risman 1987). Because they have very little contact with non-Greeks, sorority members become, more or less, socially insulated or isolated from the rest of the larger community (Gerson 1969).

For women who live in the sorority house, the impact of the Greek experience is even greater (Gerson 1969). The Greek social system is a 24-hour phenomenon for “live-ins,” even though a good portion of their time is spent outside the physical confines of the building (Gerson 1969). When she is a “live in,” a member’s whole world becomes the sorority (Risman 1987; Gerson 1969); it is where she sleeps, eats, studies, watches television, hangs-out, showers, etc.

The exclusive Greek system is one of the most effective developmental environments on college campuses today and it is very successful at orientating its members towards its goals (Strange 1986). Consequently, the majority of the research on sororities and fraternities to date explores the effects of social Greek membership on the college women and men (Hunt & Rentz 1994; Pike & Askew 1990; Wilder, et al 1986; Wilder & Hoyt 1986; Jakobsen 1986; Marlowe & Auvenshine 1982; Wilder et al, 1978; Schmidt 1971; Elton & Smart 1971; Baird 1969). The exact nature of Greek influence has yet to be determined, however, because the data is inconsistent (Testerman et al 1994; Baier & Whipple 1990). Critics of sororities and fraternities, for example, claim that these organizations disrupt the academic process by sponsoring too many social activities (Ackerman 1990; Hirsch 1990). Pike & Askew (1990), on the other hand, examined the effects

of Greek affiliation on students' cognitive development and found that the learning outcomes of Greeks and independents do *not* differ. Inconsistencies like these have led some scholars to conclude that the differences between Greeks and independents exist prior to their enrollment in college (Boeringer, Shehan & Akers 1991; Kalof & Cargill 1991; Wilder, et al 1986; Wilder, et al 1978; Schmidt 1971; Jackson & Winkler 1964).

While I agree that it is likely that some students are more apt to join a sorority or fraternity than others and in a sense, may be predisposed to Greek membership, I argue that Greek affiliation has a significant impact. White, middle to upper class, heterosexual sorority and fraternity members are unique individuals who possess their own attitudes, values and beliefs prior to their entrance into exclusive Greek organizations, but as young college students, they are extremely susceptible to influence (Kalof & Cargill 1991; Jakobsen 1986). Indeed, Milem (1991) and Maisel (1990) have demonstrated that groups that are homogeneous in terms of age, gender, race, ethnic background, social class, and/or religious beliefs, like sororities and fraternities, have a significant impact on their members' gender "identity."

"Doing" and Negotiating Gender

Gender is constructed within social interaction and it is one of the major ways that we organize our lives. Gender is constantly created and re-created in social life, and gender is the texture and order of social life (Lorber 1994; Butler 1990; Gerson & Peiss 1985). It stands for the pervasive ordering of human activities, practices, and social structures that differentiate and stratify women and men (Acker 1992). It is embedded in the family, work, politics, the media, religion, art, entertainment as well as sexuality and language, and it shapes our opportunities or lack there of (Lorber 1994; Lorber & Farrell 1991). Gender is a set of socially constructed relationships between women and men, among women,

and among men that are produced and reproduced through people's actions (Gerson & Peiss 1985).

The familiar data about women and men in the economy, education, the media, law, medicine, and politics are the concrete manifestations of an underlying structure—the social institution of gender. The concept of gender as an institution explains work patterns (why do occupational gender segregation and stratification persist?), family patterns (why is housework mostly women's responsibility?), norms of sexuality (why is there violence against women?), the micropolitics of authority (why are there so few women leaders?), and symbolic cultural representations (why are women seen through men's eyes?). (Lorber 1994)

Gender is not something we are, nor is it something we have – it is something we “do” – it is something we create and something that shapes us (West and Fenstermaker 1995; West & Zimmerman 1987). Although the assignment of persons to a sex category (usually on the basis of chromosomes and/or genitalia) is often the first step in the process, gender is not merely an identity, the role one assumes, or a characteristic, for gender is a process (Acker 1992). Womanhood and manhood, or gender, is an accomplishment that is constituted through action (West & Zimmerman 1987). To quote Simone deBeauvoir (1974), “one is not born a woman, one becomes one.” Indeed, women and men *become* gendered through regular social interaction with other women and men (West & Zimmerman 1987).

Race, class, sexual orientation and other notions of “difference” are also accomplishments (West & Fenstermaker 1995). Though race, class and gender are often seen as different fragments of social structure, individual persons experience them simultaneously - no person can experience race without also experiencing gender at the same time (West & Fenstermaker 1995). Gender does not exist in a set of relations distinct from other relations, but rather as part of the processes that also constitute class and race, as well as other lines of demarcation and domination (Acker 1992). All social exchanges, regardless of the participants or the outcome are simultaneously “gendered,” “raced” and “classed” (West & Fenstermaker 1995). While gender, race and class will likely take on different import and carry

vastly different consequences in any given social situation, the construction and maintenance processes are comparable (West & Fenstermaker 1995).

It is necessary to go beyond the conceptualization of gender (and other social markers) as an attribute or role in order to understand how gender differentiation and women's disadvantage are produced and maintained (Acker 1992). Gender is constructed at all levels of social life, and to analyze the social construction of gender scholars need to move beyond gender as a characteristic of individuals (Thompson & Walker 1995). Gender is constantly in flux – today fathers are taking care of small children, girls and boys are wearing unisex clothing, playing with the same toys, and getting the same education, and women are working in construction (Lorber 1994). To explain the significance of gender, we have to look not only at the way individuals experience it but also the institutions it creates and maintains (Lorber 1994).

Gender is a human invention, like language, kinship, religion, and technology; like them, gender organizes human social life in culturally patterned ways. The gendered microstructure and the gendered macrostructure reproduce and reinforce each other. The social reproduction of gender in individuals reproduces the gendered societal structure; as individuals act out gender norms and expectations in face-to-face interaction, they are constructed gendered systems of dominance and power. (Lorber 1994)

As a dynamic feature of social situations, gender is “both an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society” (Lorber & Farrell 1991; West & Zimmerman 1987).

When gender (or race, class, sexual orientation, age, etc.) is seen as an accomplishment, as an emergent feature of social interaction, our attention shifts from the individual to the social and ultimately, to institutional arenas (West & Zimmerman 1987). Although individuals “do” gender, gender is not the property of individuals (West & Zimmerman 1987). It is true that without individual actions there would be no social institutions, since those institutions must be enacted every

day if they are to continue, but those social institutions almost always exist prior to any individual's birth, education and social patterning (Lorber 1994).

We begin, then, with the ordinary life of women, but neither stop there nor move into a search for individual psychological sources of feelings, actions and events. Although we view people as active agents in their own lives and as such constructors of their social worlds, we do not see that activity as isolated and subjective. Rather, we locate individual experience in society and history, embedded within a set of social relations which produce both the possibilities and limitations of that experience. (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983)

The doing of gender is contextual and ever changing. Gender is not universal or fixed. Gender is negotiated according to each situation and then modified, transformed, and re-negotiated as needed (West & Zimmerman 1987; West & Fenstermaker 1995). Because the purpose and design of each institution differs, how gender gets "done" within the contexts of those institutions also varies. As the *situated* accomplishment of social interaction, gender is constructed to fit – appropriate behavior for women and men are very different in the military than in religious or educational institutions, for example (Acker 1992; West & Zimmerman 1987). Doing gender consists of managing social situations so that we are accountable, whatever the particulars, and the outcome is seen in context as gender-appropriate or gender-inappropriate (West & Zimmerman 1987).

As each other's social managers, we describe, name, characterize, formulate, explain, excuse, condemn, or at the very least, take notice of one another's actions in relation to their circumstances (West & Zimmerman 1987). Individuals organize their various activities to express gender and perceive the behavior of others in a similar light (West & Zimmerman 1987). We are accountable to one another for what we do, subject to comment and judgment, and because these accounts can be serious and consequential, many of us "look before we leap" (West & Zimmerman 1987). We design and execute our actions with an eye to their accountability, that is, according to how they might be seen, described,

and characterized and whether or not they are in agreement with “culturally approved standards” (West & Fenstermaker 1995; West & Zimmerman 1987). Again, “while it is individuals who do gender, the enterprise is fundamentally interactional and institutional in character, for accountability is a feature of social relationships and its idiom is drawn from the institutional arena in which those relationships are enacted” (West & Zimmerman 1987).

When we “do” gender we often create differences between girls and boys, women and men that are not inherent, natural or biological, yet once these differences have been constructed, they are used to reinforce the “essentialness” of gender (West & Fenstermaker 1995; West & Zimmerman 1987). “Social situations do not so much allow for the expression of natural differences as for the production of those differences themselves” (West & Fenstermaker 1995). When a fraternity offers a bid (an invitation to a social event, usually a party) to a sorority for example, traditional dating practices are validated and our belief in the natural aggressive tendency of men and the passive tendency of women is authenticated. “The masculine stereotype is said to be characterized by expectations of instrumentality: an orientation toward action, accomplishment, leadership. The feminine stereotype, on the other hand, combines attributes that add up to expressiveness: an orientation to emotion and relationships” (Lips 1994).

Doing gender renders the social arrangements that are based on sex category as normal and natural, that is, legitimate ways of organizing social life. “Differences between women and men that are created in this process can then be portrayed as fundamental and enduring dispositions. In this light, the institutional arrangements of a society can be seen as responsive to the differences—the social order being merely an accommodation of the natural order” (West & Zimmerman 1987). Thus, the gendering process furnishes the interactional scaffolding of social structure as well as a built-in mechanism of social control (West & Zimmerman 1987). For instance, fraternity men are more likely to hold high positions on Greek councils than sorority women. These leadership positions may help

fraternity men develop leadership skills that may help to prepare them for internship opportunities and eventually, a position in management or politics.

When we fail to do gender appropriately, that is, when our actions are not in accordance with culturally approved standards, we as individuals—not the institutional arrangements—are called into question (West & Zimmerman 1987). The “doing” of gender is “undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society are hostage to its production” (West & Zimmerman 1987). Within the institution of the family, women (and occasionally men) do gender as they do housework and childcare. What gets simultaneously produced is household labor and gender, not merely the activity of domestic life, “but the material embodiment of wifely and husbandly roles, and derivatively, of womanly and manly conduct” (West & Zimmerman 1987). However, when the unruly behavior of children or teenagers becomes the focus of public concern, individual mothers/wives/women are expected to account for disobeying normative conceptions of “essential” femininity and motherhood, for being bad mothers, for doing gender inappropriately (West & Zimmerman 1995; West & Zimmerman 1987).

An understanding of gender as a product of and a justification for social order will lead to recognition of the presence of gender in all sectors of social life (Acker 1992). The institutional structures in this society, including the law, politics, religion, the academy, the state, and the economy are all organized along lines of gender (Acker 1992). These institutions are defined by the absence and exclusion of women, historically developed by men, currently dominated by men, and symbolically interpreted from the standpoint of men in positions of authority, both in the present and the past (Acker 1992). Seeing institutions and their practices as gendered (and raced and classed) provides a critical perspective for feminist scholars, changing their question from “why are women excluded from institutions?” to “to what extent have the overall institutional structures, and the character of particular institutional areas, been formed by and through gender?”

(Acker 1992). Would there be a military force or a capitalist economy if gender and other lines of difference were not organizing principles? How are men's interests and masculinity intertwined in the creation and maintenance of our nation's institutions? And how has the subordination and exclusion of women (and other minorities) been built into ordinary institutional functioning? (Acker 1992).

Unfortunately, for now, the "doing" of gender, race, class, etc. cannot be avoided. As long as we continue to be polarized by our "natural" differences and the placement in categories is both relevant and enforced, doing gender, as well as doing race and class, is unavoidable (West & Fenstermaker 1995; West & Zimmerman 1987). Doing gender is inescapable because of the social consequences of sex category membership, because power and privilege in the economic, political, social, and interpersonal institutions is allocated according to sex assignment (West & Zimmerman 1987). Responsibilities are assigned and resources are distributed based on ascribed membership to a category (i.e. sex), and the ongoing justification for the unfair assignment and unequal distribution is the business of *doing* gender. Thus, in almost every situation, one's sex category is significant, making one's performance as an incumbent of that category (i.e. gender) subject to interpretation and evaluation (West & Zimmerman 1987).

To better understand how we negotiate gender, let us now consider the concepts of boundaries, domination/negotiation, and consciousness. According to Gerson and Peiss (1985), gender relations or the "doing" of gender occurs along three dimensions that involve dynamic, reciprocal, and interdependent interactions between and among women and men (Gerson & Peiss 1985).

The concept of boundaries describes the complex structures – physical, social, ideological, and psychological – which establish differences and commonalities between women and men, among women, and among men. The reciprocal processes of negotiation and domination elucidate the ways in which women and men act to support and/or challenge the existing system. Consciousness assumes various forms ranging from gender awareness to feminist/anti-feminist consciousness, and is conceived as a process

which develops dialectically in the social relations [between males and females]. (Gerson & Peiss 1985)

Thinking about gender along these lines provides us with a set of sensitive and complex analytical tools that will help us to more clearly understand women's (and men's) individual experiences of engendering (Gerson & Peiss 1985).

Boundaries, according to Gerson and Peiss (1985), mark the territories of gender relations, signaling who ought to be admitted or excluded and under what conditions. Boundaries are an important place to observe how gender is done because they reveal the normal, acceptable behaviors and attitudes associated with each sex category as well as the deviant, inappropriate ones. At the same time, boundaries highlight the dynamic quality of gender, as it is influenced and shaped by social interactions (Gerson & Peiss 1985). The concept of boundaries allows us to see commonalities and discern differences in historical and current patterns of gender-based experiences, for there are many boundaries that structure people's lives. Boundaries also denote permeability, whereas the notion of spheres denies any possibility of it (Gerson & Peiss 1985). The exclusion of women from positions of authority in the Roman Catholic Church, or until very recently, from military academies, is a clear example of boundaries. They function to insure the formation of and justification for "essential" differences between women and men and a system of inequality.

Boundaries are constantly shifting, and when they do, gender and the ways women and men accomplish it changes (Gerson & Peiss 1985). Although boundary shifts do not necessarily alter the patriarchal system as a whole, they are significant and help to provide us with the tools to make systematic change. To explain how and why boundaries change, we need to understand the ways in which individuals make and reshape their worlds through social action (Gerson & Peiss 1985).

A major contribution to the discussion around gender has been the analysis of domination in explaining the subordinate status of women (Gerson & Peiss

1985). Feminist researchers have documented the ways in which men as a group have power over women as a group and the methods men use to maintain that power. Their work reveals the extent of male control over women through violence, reproductive policies, heterosexuality, economic exploitation, and stereotypes and ideology.

Often implied in this analysis is a depiction of women as passive victims of a system of inequality, which is regarded by Gerson and Peiss (1985) as a “conceptual shortcoming.” They argue that while women are *not* responsible for their own discrimination, exploitation, or oppression, they are not, at the same time, fully passive either (Gerson & Peiss 1985). Women are social actors, creators of their own destinies (within certain constraints), not passive victims or objects of social action. Women heartily participate in the setting up, maintaining, and altering of the system of gender relations, and the concept of “domination,” as it is defined by Gerson & Peiss (1985), refers to the ways women are oppressed and either accommodate or resist that oppression.

Negotiation, which operates interdependently and concurrently with domination, refers to the ways women and men bargain for privileges, resources, and power (Gerson & Peiss 1985). This concept suggests human agency, depicting both women and men as active participants who ask, invite, and demand that resources be shared or more equally distributed (Gerson & Peiss 1985). The process of negotiation is mutual and reciprocal in the sense that both parties must consent to the negotiation and participate in it in order for the negotiation to take effect (Gerson & Peiss 1985).

The negotiations that take place between women and men act either to maintain or change structural boundaries (Gerson & Peiss 1985). The entry of women into the office as clerical workers provides one example of gender negotiation. After the invention of the typewriter and its popular acceptance as a tool for low-paid, unskilled labor, thousands of women were “invited” into the

office as secretaries and were thereby allowed to finally cross a boundary they once could not trespass (Gerson & Peiss 1985).

Though women and men actively participate in negotiations, there is a fundamental asymmetry in this process that is integrally tied to the process of domination (Gerson & Peiss 1985). Both women and men have resources they initially control and bring those resources to the negotiating “table,” however women’s relative lack of structural power has furnished them with fewer resources with which to negotiate. Therefore women “experience fewer situations in which they can set up negotiations and derive fewer advantages from their negotiations” (Gerson & Peiss 1985).

The negotiations between and among women and men have varying effects on the system of gender relations. On one hand, these negotiations may permit the system to continue as usual, reifying structural boundaries. The traditional act of marriage between a woman and a man exemplifies this form of negotiation and is therefore gender appropriate. For the individuals involved, marriage is a “free” exchange of affection, devotion, obligation, and responsibility, yet as an institution, it reinforces heterosexuality, the sexual division of labor (Gerson & Peiss 1985), the inferiority of women and superiority of men.

On the other hand, gender negotiation may result in a boundary adjustment that is preceded, accompanied, or followed by an alteration in consciousness (Gerson & Peiss 1985). Changes in consciousness often have real and direct consequences in people’s lives and can in fact provide individuals with the tools necessary to impact the system of patriarchy (Gerson & Peiss 1985).

Gerson and Peiss (1985) distinguish among three types of consciousness – gender awareness, female or male consciousness, and feminist or anti-feminist/masculinist consciousness – which represent different points along a continuum. Gender awareness is the most basic type of consciousness and involves recognition of one’s self as a member of a sex category, either as female or male (Gerson & Peiss 1985). In western culture, gender awareness is virtually universal

for it permeates nearly all facets of everyday life in real or symbolic ways (Gerson & Peiss 1985). Gender awareness involves “a non-critical description of the existing system of gender relations, whereby people accept the current social definitions of gender as natural and inevitable.” Individuals at this level of consciousness associate certain characteristics and behaviors with each sex category but do not evaluate the ultimate significance or meaning of their associations (Gerson & Peiss 1985). Gender awareness is an understanding of the status quo, of “the ways things are” for males and females (Gerson & Peiss 1985).

The second form of gender consciousness is based on gender awareness but goes beyond it to recognition of the rights and privileges, obligations and responsibilities associated with being male or female (which of course, vary across culture and time) (Gerson & Peiss 1985). More than an understanding of the status quo, female or male consciousness is an *acceptance* of the gender system (Gerson & Peiss 1985). For women, female consciousness includes (but is not restricted to) an acceptance of the role of child bearer and child rearer and consequently an obligation to meet the survival needs of children and families (Gerson & Peiss 1985). A woman’s concern for the well being of her family takes numerous forms, however, and is not necessarily marked by passivity. Many women, for example, have organized and protested when state regulations have made it difficult or impossible for them to get access to sufficient or affordable food, shelter, clothing, and health care (Gerson & Peiss 1985). Male consciousness, on the other hand, is characterized in part by a belief in the “emotional toughness” or inexpressibility of men in positions of authority. To convince others of the rightness of his decisions and effectively wield power, a man with “male consciousness” must guard against his own emotional involvement in the consequences of those decisions, that is, show that they are reached rationally (Gerson & Peiss 1985).

Finally, feminist and anti-feminist (or masculinist) consciousness is marked by a highly articulated challenge to or defense of the system of gender relations (Gerson & Peiss 1985). This level of consciousness is typically manifested in the

form of ideology, a shared group identity, and a growing politicization that almost always results in a social movement (Gerson & Peiss 1985). Those with a feminist consciousness, for example, are in a place to make significant social change.

“Social movements such as feminism can provide the ideology and impetus to question existing arrangements and the social support for individuals to explore alternatives to them” (West & Zimmerman 1987). As previously mentioned, so long as sex category is necessary and relevant, doing gender is unavoidable.

Therefore, to stop gender construction, to halt the creation, perpetuation, and legitimization of the unequal social arrangements based on sex category, we must make sex categories irrelevant. Making legislative changes, like those proposed by the Equal Rights Amendment, can help to do just that, so say liberal feminists, for such changes weaken the accountability of conduct to sex category and provide the possibility of more widespread loosening of accountability in general. Although the ERA would not guarantee equality in all institutional arenas, it would push us to begin to consider (if we wish to treat women and men as equals and distribute power equally) whether two genders are necessary (West & Zimmerman 1987).

Gender Negotiation within Sororities – Hazing as an Example

In *every* social interaction there is potential for gender negotiation, yet there are certain events that tend have a greater impact than others on those participating. Hazing within social sororities is one such event. Sorority hazing typically occurs during the pledging process, though not solely. **The purpose of pledging is to teach the norms, values and beliefs of the organization to its newest members** (Gerson 1969), and hazing is a tool used by sorority members to insure that pledges learn and embrace these norms, values and beliefs, making it a concentrated source and a good example of the gendering process within the sororal context. During rush, new members are recruited and during pledging, they are initiated. In groups that haze, pledges must be submissive, obedient without question, willing to refrain from rebellious behavior, and accepting of a group identity (Nuwer 1999). Hazing

is an extreme tactic taken by sorority women to secure the integration and assimilation of the “new” with the “old.”

Hazing is defined as any activity intentionally created to produce mental or physical discomfort, embarrassment, harassment or ridicule for the purposes of becoming a member of a group (Nuwer 1999). Hazing occurs when a group or a group leader does or requires an individual to do in any of the following:

- serve meals, run errands, or perform other, so-called, favors
- participate in intimidation; use derogatory terms to refer to pledges; terrorize; use verbal abuse or create a hostile environment
- participate in acts of degradation such as required nudity, partial stripping, rules forbidding bathing, and games played while someone is in a state of undress
- participate in rough rituals involving physical force, paddling, electric shocks, beatings, and calisthenics
- sing explicit songs and perform sexist, racist or anti-Semitic acts, including denying someone membership in an organization on the basis of religion, skin color, or ancestry
- employ deception and deceptive psychological “mind games”
- suffer from sleep deprivation (six or fewer hours of sleep a night)
- coerce or be coerced by others to consume any substance, concoction, drug, or alcoholic beverage, regardless of whether the person being coerced is of legal drinking age or appears to be participating willingly
- participate in road trips and in the so-called “kidnapping” of pledges or in their abandonment
- require pledges to sleep in a closet, bathroom, or other unsatisfactory quarters
- require initiates to wear silly or unusual clothing or objects; require initiates to ask members or alumni to sign articles of clothing or flesh; force initiates to carry objects such as spears, paddles, oars, bricks, concrete blocks, stuffed animals, live animals and so forth (Nuwer 1999)

Pledges, seeking entrance to a sorority or fraternity, have endured cult-like abuse, and some have sacrificed their lives while trying to belong. At least one college student has died per year in a pledging-related activity since 1970! (Nuwer 1999). Pledges are killed during ritualistic kidnappings, baptism-like water immersions, alcohol-chugging contests, overexerting calisthenics, and other accidents. Some have died or suffered permanent injuries as a result of brutal beatings, paddlings, and burnings (Nuwer 1999). Sorority and fraternity pledges

have been forbidden to bathe, ordered to eat only certain foods or food laced with salt, told to talk to no old friends outside the group, made to consume unpleasant substances, forced to wear unusual clothing and to wear their hair a certain way, and in general, to give up their independent lives as they submit to the control and influence of the group they hope to belong. (Nuwer 1999)

Many parents and administrators vehemently oppose hazing; politicians in most states have outlawed it, and some experts consider hazing a human-rights violation. It is not uncommon for hazing victims to feel deprived of their dignity and/or traumatized to the point that the quality of their lives is permanently affected (Nuwer 1999).

Though the bulk of the research on hazing focuses on fraternities, and hazing in sororities is typically less violent than fraternity hazing, hazing in sororities is a serious problem on our college campuses. In 1990, Shaw and Morgan revealed that over half of the sororities in the United States regularly participate in at least one of the aforementioned activities. The level of participation differs from one initiated member to another yet, if she is not working to eliminate it from her organization and her school, an active sorority member is, at least, enabling it (Nuwer 1999).

In hazing sororities and fraternities, a pledge educator or “hell captain” becomes an ultimate authority to the pledges – they dictate when pledges can come and go, study, sleep, eat, drink, smoke and shower/bathe (Nuwer 1999). Some hazing sororities and fraternities try to isolate their pledges, keeping them away

from the distracting influence of their family, non-Greek friends, other student organizations, jobs and boyfriends or girlfriends (Nuwer 1999). During pledging, Greek organizations

monopolize pledges' time, restrict their movements, strip them of power, introduce fear and a feeling of dependency, and symbolically or actually replace their belief system with new attitudes and values inculcated by members. Pledges find that they are not welcome to criticize or change the system. What was once the unthinkable becomes normal. For example, a white pledge who is not a racist may find himself putting on blackface to attend a racist party. A pledge who has never stolen before may pilfer a Christmas tree and bring it to the house for a party decoration. (Nuwer 1999)

Hazing demonstrates the power and status of a sorority (or any other organization that hazes). The end result is the subjugation of the individual to the group (Nuwer 1999). Sorority women (and fraternity men) who are hazed are told that they cannot gain admission to the group or get their letters until all pledges prove their unity, loyalty and respect (Nuwer 1999). Hazing sororities and fraternities use mind games, verbal abuse, and peer pressure to make pledges bend to their will. "The peer pressure referred to here is usually manifested in taunting or disrespectful remarks, although physical pressure caused by pushing, shoving, and beatings do occur" (Nuwer 1999). Greek members rely on the stronger, more assertive and vocal members of the pledge class to help them force the other pledges to conform. A pledge class captain is elected to serve as liaison between the pledge class and the active members to report problems, relay information, and tattletale if necessary and thus, ensure assimilation. Rebels exist in every pledge class, but active members control them by beating them down or punishing their fellow pledges until the rebellion stops. Inevitably, initiates give up or lose their individual identities and assume a collective identity that almost always resurfaces when they are "on the other side," practically guaranteeing that the next round of new recruits will also be hazed (Nuwer 1999).

“Greekthink” is a term coined by Hank Nuwer, author of Wrongs of Passage: Fraternities, Sororities, Hazing and Binge Drinking (1999), to explain what happens in Greek organizations that engage in cruel and dangerous behavior, value group practices above individual human rights, and deny that there is anything wrong with the rituals and activities in which they participate. Most sorority and fraternity members believe their organization is special, that the bond the members share is unique and sacred – members are willing to do whatever it takes to protect the organization and pledges are willing to do whatever it takes to be a part of it. Greeks regard all non-members as non-believers or *outsiders*. Those who drop out or fall out of pledging are ostracized, and would-be members who are hurt (or worse) during hazing, are viewed by the chapter as weak. “Had they been equal to those in the group, they would have survived all the ordeals the members survived when they pledged” (Nuwer 1999).

Like the members of some cults, many Greek members insist that pledges are not sisters or brothers until they have endured the ordeal of pledging and have successfully made it through the whole initiation ceremony (Nuwer 1999). Only when an individual surrenders to the wishes of the group does she or he solidify a connection to the group – membership therefore requires conformity (Nuwer 1999). At the end of pledging exhausted initiates are finally welcomed into the group with hugs, libations and often a special meal. A formal ritual with candles and song also signifies the final night of pledging and there may be an awarding of certificates, clothing with Greek letters on it, and/or a symbolic paddle with the names of the pledge class. Such rituals have traditionally helped to resolve tensions between the new and old members (Nuwer 1999).

While the importance of the organization to its members is clear, it is difficult for outsiders looking in to understand why someone would voluntarily participate (Nuwer 1999). The willingness to endure pain and humiliation seems desperate and absurd to those who have no desire to pledge a sorority or fraternity. Outsiders assume that there must be something wrong with someone who

succumbs to the influence of a cult or who joins an organization that hazes, manipulates, and deceives its members. According to Hank Nuwer, author of Wrongs of Passage (1999), that assumption is unfair. “All of us, at various times, can fall into vulnerable states during which another person can wield more influence over us than at other times. We are all more vulnerable to flattery, deception, lures and enticements when we are lonely, sad and feeling needy” (Nuwer 1999). First year college students, hungry for friendship, a support network, and a place to call “home,” may condone attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs they would ordinarily find objectionable (Nuwer 1999).

Critics of hazing can find no justification for it – it does not serve any constructive purpose. The goal of a sorority or fraternity is “the encouragement of the growth and development of the individual student. Hazing is detrimental to their growth and possibly harmful to health” (Nuwer 1999). Yet hazing is difficult to stop. Negligence, ignorance, and a failure to recognize the severity and seriousness of a hazing situation are all characteristic of hazing accidents and deaths (Nuwer 1999). Anti-hazing policies exist on nearly all college campuses in the United States and hazing is illegal in most states. National sororities and fraternities also have strict rules against hazing. Yet rarely is strong action taken when a group has been found guilty of violating anti-hazing policy. Nearly all colleges and universities can suspend or expel hazing students, but the disciplinary panels are typically made up of faculty, staff, and students and they are often reluctant to call an act hazing. Campus officials are also guilty of not reporting crime statistics, of minimizing hazing incidents, and of claiming that beatings and other crimes committed by students need not be reported if they occur off campus (Nuwer 1999). Students rarely report hazing to authorities (though this has started to change). Without a complaint, police officers and campus officials are unlikely to intervene until someone is killed, injured, or seeks counseling. The exception is those rare instances in which the authorities come upon a hazing activity in progress or receive a tip from a parent or friend that hazing is to take place (Nuwer

1999). When the authorities are called and a report is filed, hazing is hard to prosecute because members of sororities and fraternities are uncooperative – they refuse to be disloyal and break their code of secrecy/silence. Members are also taught to keep quiet - insurance carriers instruct these organizations never to admit fault when faced with a potential claim (Nuwer 1999). Enforcing the rules that currently exist is a necessary step, but to completely eliminate hazing, student leaders of sororities and fraternities need to be convinced to change their behavior. Unless they accept that hazing is dangerous, destructive, and not worth the risk, they will simply take hazing underground. It will become a secret part of their organization, even more than it is now, and we will not know about it until a pledge gets killed or some other tragedy occurs to expose it into view (Nuwer 1999).

Pledging is an intense time for sorority women, particularly for those who haze and are hazed. Sorority members who participate in hazing activities embrace deception, cruelty, manipulation, coercion, and intimidation - sorority pledges that are hazed negotiate passivity, obedience, and conformity as survival strategy. Gender negotiation within sororities is an ongoing process and pledging only serves as an initial phase in this process. Even if pledging and/or hazing were abolished, there are other social mechanisms in place to shape the values, attitudes and beliefs of the members of these organizations. Chapter meetings, fraternity parties, date-nights, secret ceremonies and rituals all contribute to the development of a member's womanhood personally and politically (Rhoads 1995).

Before we consider the ways that gender may be negotiated within sororities and the significance of that negotiation for individual sorority women, let us first discuss the Greek system and Greek life in general. The next several pages include a basic definition of Greek organizations and an outline of some of the issues raised about exclusive sororities and fraternities.

General Greek Information

After a decline in popularity during the 1960s and 1970s, social Greek organizations are once again fashionable with students on campuses across the country (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992; Eddy 1990). In fact, sorority and fraternity interest and membership are at an all-time high, making these organizations among the most visible and cohesive sub-communities on today's college and university campuses (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992). Researchers estimate that more than 750,000 college students across the United States are members of national Greek organizations (Malaney 1990). Of the 2000 American and Canadian universities, about 920 or 46% have active Greek systems on their campuses (Maisel 1990), and the National Interfraternity Conference estimates that its membership almost doubled in the early 1990s (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992).

Several explanations have been given for Greek organizations' recent rise in popularity, including conservatism, careerism, the need for a sense of community, and a desire to get the most of college. Those who consider sororities and fraternities conservative organizations argue that the increase in membership is due to the rise in conservatism among college-aged adults (Handler 1995; Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992). Over half of the college students in the United States describe themselves as moderate and position themselves in the middle on most social issues. Today's college students are less conscientious and politically active than were students in earlier years, and fewer and fewer of them identify with the political left or consider themselves radical or liberal (Strange 1986; Astin & Kent 1983). The rise in popularity of exclusive social Greek organizations may also be the result of greater careerism among students who recognize the need to establish solid professional networks (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992). Those students see the Greek system as an opportunity to make contacts that could help them in a future career (Malaney 1990). Scholars have also speculated that the increase in sorority and fraternity membership is due to students' increasing desire for a closely-knit community that will shield them from an impersonal and sometimes alienating

college environment (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992). Others believe that students join social Greek organizations out of a desire to have fun and get the most out of their college years (Maisel 1990). Sororities and fraternities provide for their members extracurricular activities, leadership opportunities, and an active social life and these things are very appealing to college students.

Formal Greek organizations have existed on college campuses for over 200 years and have consequently developed a rich tradition (Malaney 1990). The first fraternity, Phi Beta Kappa, was formed in 1776 as a philosophy and literary group at the College of William and Mary (Malaney 1990). Fraternal-like organizations, called “nations,” date as far back as the Middle Ages. Nation members shared a living space, rivaled with other nations, participated in “riotous drunkenness and general unruliness” and sang songs (Johnson 1994). Alpha Delta Pi (formerly the Aldephian Society) is said to be the first sorority – it originated in 1851 on the campus of what is now known as Wesleyan College (Nuwer 1999). Pi Beta Phi, founded in 1867, and Kappa Alpha Theta, founded in 1870, also claim to have been first sororities since they were more like fraternities in terms of structure than the Aldephian Society (Nuwer 1999). Sororities were formed as organizations for elite young women. These early sororities were highly structured with specific rules governing the behavior and activity of their members – much like the active chapters today (Handler 1995; Mongell & Roth 1991; Gerson 1969). In the late 19th Century, well-to-do families believed that sororities provided a better moral atmosphere than the average boarding house. “Most female undergraduates were sexually inexperienced, and their professors, who also acted as chaperones, made sure that they would remain that way while they were in school” (Nuwer 1999).

According to the Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, a fraternity is “a group of people associated or formally organized for a common purpose, interest or pleasure” (<http://www.m-w.com/>). Fraternity is also defined as “a student organization for scholastic, professional or extracurricular activities,” “the quality or state of being brothers,” and “persons of the same class, profession, character or

tastes” (<http://www.m-w.com/>). The definition for sorority is less detailed. The word, sorority, was derived from the Latin word *soror*, meaning sister. Sorority is “a club of women, specifically, a women’s organization (as at a college) that is formed chiefly for social purposes and has a name consisting of Greek letters” (<http://www.m-w.com/>). In response to the “Animal House” reputation, Greek members tend to de-emphasize the social component of sororities and fraternities and state that “the purpose of sororities and fraternities is to bring together a group of women or men and teach them values, traditions, and honor, while building everlasting bonds of friendship” (<http://www.greekspot.com>).

Although sororities and fraternities are part of the same system, are similar in structure and share a common organizational front, there are many differences between the two. There is also great deal of variation amongst sororities and amongst fraternities. No two organizations are exactly alike – even those that share the same letters vary from university to university. Differences in missions, practices and traditions exist within Greek organizations both nationally and on any given campus (Testerman et al 1994; Kuh & Lyons 1990). The makeup of each organization depends upon the gender of its members, its racial composition and background, the social class of its members, whether it is social or academic in nature, its geographic location, and the size and type of school (Handler 1995).

What is true for one sorority or fraternity is not necessarily true for all. Some of the literature reviewed here is the result of quantitative research and may therefore be applied to all Greeks, but the bulk of what follows is the result of feminist theory, interview, case study or ethnography analysis, scholarly observations, and my individual experience. The following review is merely the context in which this project is framed. It is not meant to be generalized to all sorority women, in all sororities.

Sororities and Fraternities: Conducive to the Goals of the Academy?

While Greek organizations are experiencing a rebirth in interest and membership, they are simultaneously drawing greater criticism and scrutiny than ever before (Strange 1986). The media, community members living near sorority and fraternity houses, university administrators, trustees, faculty, and non-Greek students are among those who have voiced disapproval of the Greek system (Malaney 1990).

The negative publicity surrounding the exclusive Greek system has forced university officials and scholars to question its value and re-examine the role Greeks should play on college campuses (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992; Kuh & Lyons 1990; Maisel 1990; Baier & Whipple 1990; Malaney 1990; Pike & Askew 1986; Strange 1986; Wilder et al 1986). Many question whether sororities and fraternities encourage or detract from students' involvement in their education and campus community, whether or not Greek organizations make positive contributions to the social and intellectual life of colleges and universities, and if Greeks are conducive to the educational process and thus compatible with their institution's purpose, mission and philosophy (Kuh & Lyons 1990).

Not surprisingly, scholars disagree, and a debate over the value of exclusive social sororities and fraternities has ensued. Greek organizations are believed by some to be inconsistent with the goals of higher education; and by others, consistent. Scholars argue that the Greek system promotes values and attitudes that are antithetical and alien to those held by the academy (Baier & Whipple 1990; Wilder & Hoyt 1986; Longino & Kart 1973), while others insist that the Greek system, though imperfect, is a positive environment for students and is ultimately compatible with the university. Sororities and fraternities have been described as protagonist and antagonist of higher education, friend and foe (Winston & Saunders 1987).

A fraternity or sorority can provide a caring, supportive, and human scale sub-community in which students develop and practice

interpersonal and leadership skills, make friends, learn how an organization works, develop a common cause, have fun, recreate, together, and develop a balanced approach to college life. A sorority or fraternity is often a safe place to examine and experiment with various facets of one's identity. Members of Greek organizations can experience the joys and responsibilities of giving and receiving, and of belonging to a group that is greater than the sum of its parts. All of these things are considered positive outcomes of college. (Kuh & Lyons 1990)

On the other hand, however...

A close community can become closed, oppress as well as support, be consumed by warring factions, engender anarchy instead of interdependence, foster bad as well as good leadership skills, pursue goals devoid of merit, and encourage unbalanced behavior. And while it is appropriate for one's sub-community of choice to be a safe haven, the group may be too safe and, hence, insulate its members from having to deal with ideological and human differences that should be present in an institution of higher education. (Kuh & Lyons 1990)

Much of the criticism directed at Greek organizations has focused on their dangerous behavior, including excessive drinking and illegal drug use, hazing injuries and deaths, and violence against women (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992; Baier & Whipple 1990; Malaney 1990). Indeed, sororal and fraternal organizations set aside a large portion of their members' fees to cover the cost of liability insurance to compensate for their recklessness (Ackerman 1990; Kuh & Lyons 1990). In many situations, Greek organizations have literally put the lives of their members at risk.

Studies show that Greeks drink and use illegal drugs more often than other college students and are more likely to experience negative consequences related to excessive drinking, including poor test scores, missed classes, driving under the influence, blackouts, hang-overs, and fights (Cashin, et al 1998; Testerman et al 1994). Because sororities and fraternities are organized and run by the members themselves, these behaviors often go un-checked. One may assume that the leaders (President, Vice President, etc.) of these organizations would be sensitive to risk management and liability issues by virtue of their position and drink less often

often, but this does not seem to be the case (Cashin, et al 1998). Leaders of sororities and fraternities consume as much alcohol (sometimes more) as other active members and are setting the standard for heavy drinking, illegal drug use, and reckless behavior (Cashin, et al 1998).

Sororities and fraternities have also been criticized for no longer fulfilling their original goals (Ackerman 1990). "For too many of the current sorority and fraternity members the ideals, purposes, and traditions have no clear meaning beyond that of ceremony [and] for many alumni the ideals are somewhat linked to fading memories of seemingly better times. Between the generations there is little effective communication and no real agreement about what it is they, as brothers and sisters, believe in and stand for" (Ackerman 1990). Contemporary sororities and fraternities fall short of the ideals upon which they were founded; their members have forgotten their own history and lost sight of the reasons why Greek organizations were formed (Ackerman 1990). Created as secret societies to maintain a degree of autonomy from autocratic and overbearing administrators and/or faculty, fraternities in particular provided their members with outlets for debate, free discussion, and a safe space to test new ideas (Maisel 1990; Longino & Kart 1973). The founding members challenged the thinking of their day and were concerned with social issues that, at the time, were ignored by colleges and universities (Maisel 1990; Longino & Kart 1973). Unfortunately, it is now almost impossible to find evidence of those original goals. "Today these organizations are often the purveyors of the status quo, reacting to issues rather than acting on issues for change" (Maisel 1990). The secrecy that once protected these organizations is all that remains, and it too has become institutionalized (Longino & Kart 1973).

Others argue that sororities and fraternities are oppositional to the university because they are homogeneous and most institutions of higher learning strive to be heterogeneous. Sororities and fraternities have been met with a considerable amount of negative publicity for their systematic exclusion of individuals based on socio-economic class, race, religion and ethnicity (Baier & Whipple 1990; Malaney

1990; Kuh & Lyons 1990). **Much of what is appealing about Greek organizations—small-group loyalty, like-mindedness, affective associations—is at odds with the openness and pluralism endorsed by the college and university community** (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992; Milem 1991). Critics of Greek organizations argue that students need to be placed in environments that challenge them, where they can meet and associate with people who are socially and culturally different from themselves (Maisel 1990). Unfortunately, fraternities and sororities provide the opposite kind of environment by encouraging intolerance and exclusion (Milem 1991; Muir 1991; Maisel 1990).

Although colleges and universities claim to be concerned about the exclusivity of Greek organizations (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992), there is often a discrepancy between their policy and practice. The office of student affairs and other administrative departments at many colleges and universities spend precious staff, money, and time advancing and protecting fraternities and sororities while at the same time, criticizing them for being elitist and homogenous (Maisel 1990). Racism, for example, is on the rise on campuses across the United States despite the fact that many institutions of higher education state, as one of their goals, a commitment to develop an appreciation for diversity in students (Milem 1991). Colleges and universities work to recruit and retain students and faculty of color and develop programs and courses to educate students about racism, classism, sexism and other forms of oppression, yet they support students groups like fraternities and sororities that are repeatedly engage in racist practices (Maisel 1990). Wherever racist organizations operate on university property under official authority, racism is being supported, if not financially subsidized, by the parent institution (Muir 1991), regardless of an “inclusive” university mission or philosophy. Unfortunately because fraternities and sororities wield enormous power on college campus through student and alumni organizations, campus administrators often do not have the courage it takes to really address the problem, even their hatred and prejudice is overt (Muir 1991).

Other critics of sororities and fraternities claim that these organizations are anti-intellectual, disrupt the learning process, and therefore foster values that are in opposition to the university (Hirsch 1990). An over-emphasis on socializing and partying is said to be the main contributor. Sorority and fraternity members are so involved in “trivial social activities” that they fail to participate in the academic life of the university (Kuh & Lyons 1990; Pike & Askew 1990). Greek organizations seek persons of “marginal intellectual abilities” and sponsor activities that lessen academic involvement and thus lower the academic performance of their members (Ackerman 1990). Some critics even claim that Greeks are more academically dishonest than independents (Longino & Kart 1973).

Not all scholars agree, however. Others have found no significant difference in the academic grades of Greeks and independents after controlling for abilities and achievement levels (Malaney 1990). Pike & Askew (1990), for example, examined the effects of Greek affiliation on students’ cognitive development – they found that the learning outcomes of Greeks and independents do *not* differ. Additional research has shown that members of Greek organizations *are* actively involved in the academic life of their university, and their grade performance is often equal to (or in some cases better than) that of independents (Malaney 1990). When asked if they believed the opportunity for academic achievement was better in a residence hall than in a sorority or fraternity, both Greeks and independents agreed that their chances for success were the same, regardless where they lived (Malaney 1990).

There is some evidence that sororities and fraternities provide some students with a legitimate means of *improving* academic involvement that results in high levels of academic performance (Pike & Askew 1990). And many other Greek organizations encourage scholastic excellence (Packwood et al. 1972). Some sororities, for example, require their members maintain a certain grade point average to keep an active membership status – this likely accounts for their slightly *higher* cumulative grade point averages (Pike & Askew 1990; Malaney 1990).

Although this finding cannot be directly attributed to Greek membership, it contradicts the argument that Greek organizations seek and recruit individuals of marginal intelligence (Pike & Askew 1990), and it also challenges Eisenhart & Holland's (1983) conclusion that the all-women peer group culture distracts women from the learning process.

Some scholars argue that affiliation with a sorority or fraternity helps students prepare for life after college and therefore promotes the goals of the academy. Studies have shown that Greeks tend to be more ambitious about gaining employment after graduation than independents, and sorority and fraternity members are also more likely than non-Greeks to join student professional organizations that help them to develop the skills they need in the world of work (Pike & Askew 1990). Joining a Greek organization is also believed to be good places to make business connections, for sorority and fraternity alumni grant their "brothers" and "sisters" internship and/or employment opportunities (Johnson 1994).

Greek organizations may also help students to adapt to college life. When a student enters a large university, she/he faces the chore of fitting in and adjusting to a new place (Longino & Kart 1973) and Greek organizations may help students bond to the institution (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992). Many students experience feelings of isolation and loneliness when they go to college and these students, searching for security, find comfort in sororities or fraternities (Shaw & Morgan 1990). By providing a "home-away-from-home," Greek organizations compensate for impersonal institutional life (Kuh & Lyons 1990). Greeks also perform an important service by informally assisting with new student orientation (Testerman et al 1994; Packwood et al.1972). Older sorority and fraternity members help younger members find their way around the large, foreign campus. They also help first year students register for classes, learn to use the library, and settle into their residence hall, apartment, or off-campus house.

Baier and Whipple (1990) found that sorority and fraternity members tend to be friendlier, more congenial, and more sociable than independents. Fraternities and sororities promise their members and potential members "a good time" and usually deliver. Indeed, other studies demonstrate that students who are affiliated with a fraternity or sorority are more likely to be invited to parties and other social events (Malaney 1990). "Going Greek" ensures an active social life and a way to meet people (Risman 1987). Greek organizations also assist in the development of strong interpersonal relationships (Hunt & Rentz 1994) specifically same-gender friendships (Testerman et al 1994) by providing their members with an environment where those close friendships can develop quickly and easily (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992; Packwood, et al 1972).

Not surprisingly then, Greeks have been found to be significantly more involved in extracurricular activities than non-Greeks (Baier & Whipple 1990; Wilder & Hoyt 1986). Sororities and fraternities encourage their members to participate in extra-curricular activities outside of the Greek system (Malaney 1990) and require their members to perform community service (Testerman et al 1994; Malaney 1990; Packwood et al 1972). Such campus and community involvement is extremely valuable for it can stimulate the learning process and enhance growth and development (Hunt & Rentz 1994). It may also affect student's overall satisfaction with the educational experience, thereby reinforcing a desire to continue academic pursuits (Hunt & Rentz 1994).

Sororities and fraternities benefit their members by granting them leadership opportunities they may not otherwise have (Testerman et al 1994; Packwood et al. 1972). "All institutions, no matter what the size, can have only one president of the student body, one captain of the field hockey team, one first chair in the symphony orchestra, etc. The presence of fraternities and sororities provides additional leadership opportunities for students to embrace and be embraced by a sub-community of choice" (Kuh & Lyons 1990). Leadership

opportunities are better in a fraternity or sorority than they are in a resident hall, according to most students (Malaney 1990).

In many cases, sorority and fraternity members experience a greater sense of security and connection and express greater happiness with student life in general and their living situation in particular than other students (Spitzberg 1992; Baier & Whipple 1990). Exclusive social greek organizations can provide their members with a feeling of shared purpose that is lacking on many of our campuses (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992). Fraternity men and sorority women experience the joys and responsibilities of belonging to a group, to something that is greater than the sum of its parts (Kuh & Lyons 1990). Greek organizations give their members a place where they feel at home (Packwood, et al 1972), in which they can be nurtured and grow (Kuh & Lyons 1990).

While sorority and fraternity members admit their system is flawed, they argue that critics tend to dominate the discussion around Greek organizations and that the positive aspects of Greek life are too often overlooked (Malaney 1990). The lack of literature on the positive aspects of the Greek system supports this view. Academic institutions, including those faced with egregious fraternity behavior, acknowledge that there are indeed positive facets of Greek life, especially sororities when pressed (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992). Even at colleges and universities not heavily influenced by a Greek system (where membership is low), many students—independents as well as Greeks—recognize the advantages associated with exclusive sorority and fraternity membership (Malaney 1990). For most who participate, the Greek experience is overwhelmingly positive, and there seems to be no doubt Greek affiliation is central to their collegiate life (Hunt & Rentz 1994; Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992). Members want to remove the stigma surrounding the Greek system (Packwood et al. 1972) and encourage scholars, administrators, faculty, community members and others to look at the important contributions Greek organizations make to campus (Boeringer, Shehan & Akers 1991; Gerson 1969).

In response to the staggering amount of criticism directed towards Greek organizations, colleges and universities now monitor them more carefully (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992). Several have banned fraternities and sororities from their campuses altogether, others are reforming their Greek systems, and almost everyone recognizes the need for change (Ackerman 1990; Malaney 1990; Wilder, et al 1986). In effort to control the excessive alcohol abuse, regulations have been passed and are being enforced: some Greek organizations are required to have an advisor, a “dry” (alcohol free) rush, and sorority and fraternity officers must attend alcohol awareness retreats (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992).

What is important is that we—students, administrators, scholars, townspeople—continue to consider the role Greek organizations play on our college campuses and in our communities and never stop questioning the role of these organizations on our nation’s campuses and their impact on students.

Gender Negotiation within Sororities

Differences in tradition, the race of members, the age of members, size of membership, history of the organization, and relationship with the host college or university exist between sororities both nationally and locally, and therefore, the ways in which gender is negotiated within sororities varies. Some scholars have found that membership in gender-segregated organizations, like sororities, serves to exacerbate traditional gender stereotypes (Kalof & Cargill 1991). Other scholars have shown that women-only organizations provide college aged women with leadership opportunities they may not otherwise have, and there is a link between leadership and the development of liberal attitudes in women (Kamm & Rentz 1994; Astin & Kent 1983)

So for some members, Greek organizations can perpetuate conformity, dependence and social apathy, and for others, sororities may enhance self-confidence, independence and help to foster strong friendships. Woman-exclusive peer groups “may provide an environment in which gender stereotyping, sexual

aggression, and/or victimization are learned and legitimized” (Kalof & Cargill 1991), or they may help create a setting in which gender inequality is resisted, women’s creativity is encouraged, the accomplishments of women are celebrated, and women are empowered. Let us now consider these possibilities.

Greek Organizations as Families

Sorority and fraternity members regularly refer to their organizations as “families” (Baier & Whipple 1990; Jakobsen 1986) and demonstrate their identification with the family through the use of terms like “sister,” “brother,” “pledge mom,” “pledge dad,” and “fraternity little sister” (Nuwer 1999; Jakobsen 1986). The organizations themselves are often called “houses” as a “metonymy of the physical space for the imaginary one” (Johnson 1994) and are fondly regarded by their members as a “home away from home” (Kuh & Lyons 1990; Risman 1987; Packwood, et al 1972).

Few scholars have considered the implications of this. However, the role and status of women within the institution of family has always concerned feminists. Indeed, the white, middle to upper class, patriarchal ideal of the family that places men as the head of the household and women in a subservient position has been severely scrutinized and criticized by *many* feminists, past and present (Lugones & Rosezelle 1995; Joseph 1985). These critics insist that the values of the traditional family stand in opposition to those that underlie women’s emancipation. “Where the women’s movement has stood for equality, the family historically has denied or repudiated equality” (Conover & Gray 1983). The patriarchal family has been known not as a loving, supportive network, but rather a patriarchal institution that must be reformed or eliminated (Lugones & Rosezelle 1995).

Sex radicals like Frances Wright, Victoria Woodhull, Emma Goldman, Margaret Sanger, and the Greenwich Village radicals of the 1920s, for example, believed that the institutions of marriage and family trapped women economically

and sexually (Johnston 1992). Espousing free love and advocating for women's full sexual expression and reproductive control, the radicals demanded that women be liberated from marriage (Johnston 1992). According to Emma Goldman, the institutions of marriage and motherhood inhibit women's creative, intellectual and political expression and condemn women to a life of parasitism and dependency on men (Johnston 1992). She denounced marriage as legalized prostitution that promises women security and protection at the cost of bondage and sexual slavery (Johnston 1992).

Betty Friedan, author of The Feminine Mystique, also criticized the patriarchal family and its treatment of women and described the home as a "comfortable concentration camp" (Elshtain 1995). Unlike Emma Goldman however, Friedan did not demand that the family be abolished altogether. Instead, she insisted that it be modified through an equal division of household labor, communal and extended family living arrangements, and part-time employment for both partners (Conover & Gray 1983).

Ti-Grace Atkinson, co-founder of the Feminists, a radical feminist group active in the late 1960s and early 1970s, considered marriage "slavery" and "legalized rape," and denounced it and heterosexuality (Johnston 1992). She believed that "all married women are prostitutes" and that women will never be free until the traditional patriarchal family is completely abolished (Conover & Gray 1983). Radical feminists, like Ti-Grace Atkinson, believe that men dominate women in every area of life and that all relations between men and women are characterized by an imbalance of power and that marriage and all it entails (childrearing, housework, love, sexual intercourse) reinforce male power and must, therefore, be destroyed (Johnston 1992).

Kate Millet, in Sexual Politics, argues that the family is patriarchy's chief institution, and that its purpose in patriarchal society is to socialize children in traditional ways (Johnston 1992). She believed that the entire society is the oppressive, patriarchal family writ large, in which women are victimized (Elshtain

1995). She also insisted that the concept of romantic love and the image of the happy, harmonious family are myths. She demands that all sexual inhibitions be eliminated, marriage be abolished, collective professional childcare be provided, and complete independence for women be guaranteed (Johnston 1992).

By identifying with the family, Greeks may be aligning themselves with “an ideology of preservation” (Jakobsen 1986). Greek organizations are designed to operate like a family with its members loyal to the group and the group loyal to its members. Yet the welfare of the group is always more important than the welfare of the individual, which enforces conformity and negates personal power (Baird & Whipple 1990), particularly for women. If the familial concept embraced by Greeks is modeled after the patriarchal ideal of the family, which denies women their freedom by virtue of their subservience to and dependence upon men, then sorority members are being sent a very clear message about their place in the Greek system and society.

In addition to referring to their organization as a “home away from home,” sorority members present themselves through a language of sisterhood (Handler 1995). Sorority women use this term to describe their bond and call one another, “sisters.” Only a small number of scholars have attempted to define sororal sisterhood and discuss its significance for women and feminism (Handler 1995; Risman 1987), and I believe this issue deserves more attention.

“Sister” and “sisterhood” is used in sororities as a symbol of the mutual admiration, love and respect members have for one another. Sisterhood, for exclusive sorority members, is predominantly emotional – it is a feeling. The connection between sorority members is based upon shared understanding, a kinship, the experience of living together day-to-day under one roof, much like the connection between siblings. In contemporary society, the brother/sister relationship is a meaningful one for many young girls and boys and adult women and men (Thorne 1993). Brothers and sisters, who are raised by the same parent or

parents, and perhaps in the same household, have a unique relationship, based upon a similar point of view.

Unlike other familial relationships among women (mother/daughter, grandmother/granddaughter, and aunt/niece), sisterhood distinguishes itself by being an egalitarian relationship, which explains why western feminists have embraced the term (Lugones & Rosezelle 1995). Contemporary white American and European feminists define “sisterhood” as a belief in the unity of all women, regardless of age, race, class, ethnic background, sexual orientation, ability, or religious/spiritual tradition (Ashe 1996). To those for whom “sisterhood is global,” this strong and intimate connection is marked by a similar social, political and economic position, enlightenment, concern, rage, hope, empowerment, sorrow, and a desire to eradicate sexism (Ashe 1996).

According to Pat Rosezelle (1995), the use of “sister” by white western feminists has very little to do with actual sibling relations within the white patriarchal American family. Rather, it is modeled after the black community (Lugones & Rosezelle 1995). White western feminists were not aware of the term’s significance and had not considered its political usefulness until the 1960s when it (and “brother”) was embraced by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other important leaders of the Civil Rights Movement (Lugones & Rosezelle 1995). Unfortunately, white western feminists appropriated the use of “sister” to describe relationships among all feminist women, without considering its meaning and importance for blacks, particularly black women (Lugones & Rosezelle 1995). “Sister,” “sister-love,” and “sister-friend” are terms of respect and endearment in the black community; these terms represent the love and trust felt by black women and men and when used, instantly establish a sense of community, status and affection among many blacks (Lugones & Rosezelle 1995). The terms “sister” and “brother” have a long political history, and were first used by slaves (Lugones & Rosezelle 1995). “When people are bastardized, raped, and fragmented from their families, they have to create family” (Lugones & Rosezelle 1995). At a time when

blacks were called “uncle” or “aunt,” “boy” or “girl” instead of “Mr.” or “Mrs./Miss/Ms.,” it was an act of resistance to refer to each other as “sister” or “brother” (Lugones & Rosezelle 1995). Many contemporary black women and men consider the use of “sister” or “brother” a political act, it serves as both a celebration of black power and a tribute to their ancestors (Lugones & Rosezelle 1995).

White western feminists have been severely criticized for claiming that women’s experiences are universal, for implying that western feminism can meet the needs of all women, for perpetuating racism, classism, and heterosexism within the movement, and for suggesting, through their use of “sisterhood,” that the relationships between white women, women of color, poor women, and lesbian women are egalitarian (Lugones & Rosezelle 1995; Zinn, Cannon, Higginbotham & Dill 1986; Moraga & Anzaldua 1981). Given the myriad of differences between women, some feminists argue that unity among women is impossible. Our lives and experiences are too diverse to find common ground. Women are divided by an unequal distribution of power, and the gaps cannot be bridged.

Others like bell hooks (1984) insist that a sisterhood among all women *is* possible and in fact, necessary. Without unity, without solidarity, there can be no mass-based feminist movement (Ashe 1996; hooks 1984). Solidarity helps to build resistance, for there is strength in numbers (hooks 1984). A sustained bond among all women can only occur, however, when the racist, classist and heterosexist beliefs and practices that plague white, western feminism are confronted (hooks 1984). Our differences need not be eliminated to create solidarity, but our prejudices do. “We can be sisters united by shared interests and beliefs, united in our appreciation for diversity, [and] united in our struggle” (hooks 1984).

The feminist notion of solidarity is hardly central to the average sorority member’s world view (Risman 1987), and the unity created amongst exclusive sorority members does not resemble that described by bell hooks (1984). The bulk of the sororal organizations on our nation’s campuses are reserved exclusively for

white, middle to upper class, heterosexual women, and very few, if any, social sororities are committed to eradicating the sexism, racism, classism and heterosexism that plagues the Greek system. Feminist sisterhood is meant to be a sustained bond between women, not a shackle that binds them to a patriarchal structure, like the Greek system.

None-the-less, sororities are constructed around what their members consider to be a powerful notion of sisterhood (Handler 1995), and its significance for those members cannot be denied. Sister is a common term of endearment, pride and loyalty in sororities, and sisterhood is defined as the emotional bond or connection between sorority sisters. A strong community of women under patriarchy is rare, so I am inclined to support it whenever, wherever, and in whatever context it is fostered; however, the use of the term “sisterhood” to describe the relationships amongst exclusive sorority members is problematic from a feminist perspective.

Separatism

Some scholars argue that sororities and fraternities are oppressive at their very core (Goettsch & Hayes 1990; Kuh & Lyon 1990). As separatist organizations, they are “exclusionary by practice, sexist in nature, and gender specific by design” (Maisel 1990). The gender-exclusivity of sororities and fraternities helps to re-establish the existing boundaries between women and men and perpetuate misconceptions about the opposite “sex”. Thus, one the most important ideas Greek organizations may be teaching their members is that women and men are inherently different and should not, therefore, be entitled to same rights, privileges, etc. Since they were founded, sororities have been reserved for women only and fraternities, for men only, and this could have negative repercussions. When women and men are kept apart, it is easier for each to objectify and stereotype the other (Thorne 1993) – ignorance breeds fear, misunderstanding and hatred. Gender exclusive peer organizations, like sororities

and fraternities, may set the foundation for such misunderstandings and later, adversarial relationships between men and women (Kalof & Cargill 1991; Copenhaver & Grauerholz 1991). I will expand on this issue in the next section.

Not all scholars agree that woman-only groups are necessarily problematic, however. On the contrary, woman-exclusive space is often extremely supportive and empowering for women. For example, it is argued that women's colleges are more conducive to academic achievement for women than coeducational colleges and thus more likely to foster liberal attitudes about gender in their students (Miller-Bernal 1989). According to the "favorable climate" hypothesis, women's colleges are more successful in fostering women's achievement because there is a greater proportion of women faculty in women's colleges who can serve as role models for students and more freedom for women students to pursue nontraditional subjects when there are no men present who might discourage women from pursuing such subjects (Miller-Bernal 1989; Astin & Kent 1983). Scholars suspect that women achieve less in coeducational institutions because men tend to dominate the classroom and women are reluctant to assert themselves for fear of being perceived as un-feminine (Miller-Bernal 1989). Women students at women's colleges are also thought to have relations with peers that are more encouraging of scholastic work and the pursuit of non-traditional careers than women students attending coeducational colleges (Anderson 1995; Miller-Bernal 1989). Indeed, Miller-Bernal (1989) found that women students are more likely to graduate from women's colleges than coeducational schools, and graduates of women's colleges are more likely to receive their doctorates, to go into careers that are non-traditional for women, and to be mentioned in lists of notable women, such as Who's Who of American Women.

The expectation is that the support of faculty and peers contributes to liberal gender attitudes (Miller-Bernal 1989). Women students at women's colleges are likely to develop more liberal attitudes in terms of gender than women students at a coeducational college because the very mission of a women's college promotes

women's rights and celebrates women's accomplishments (Miller-Bernal 1989; Kamm & Rentz 1994). Once again, however, the data is contradictory – more research needs to be conducted before we can say for sure if women who attend women's colleges are less conservative or more liberal than those who attend coeducational institutions. While some researchers have found women's colleges to have little effect on their students with regards to gender (Miller-Bernal 1989), while others have found that they do (Kamm & Rentz 1994).

Although the link between women's colleges and liberal gender attitudes remains in question, there is little doubt concerning the benefit of gender-exclusive space for women in terms of scholastic achievement. Academically speaking, women are better off with other women. Sororities, as women-only organizations, may provide the same achievement-conducive atmosphere for their members as women's colleges do for their students. Indeed, research has shown that sorority women tend to earn higher grade point averages than independent women (Malaney 1990).

Relatedly, affiliation with a women-exclusive space, like a women's college or a sorority, grants women with more opportunities for leadership (Kamm & Rentz 1994; Packwood et al. 1972). Most student organizations at coeducational colleges and universities are also co-ed, and men tend to hold the leadership positions, which leave women with very little chance to gain leadership experience (Kamm & Rentz 1994). Holding a leadership position gives women an opportunity to learn and practice new skills and competencies (Astin & Kent 1983), which will help to prepare them for leadership in later life (Miller-Bernal 1989). Extracurricular activities, like membership in a sorority, are extremely important for women (Astin & Kent 1983) because they provide women with chances that they probably would not otherwise have (Miller-Bernal 1989). "If women are to emerge from college feeling strong, independent, self-assured, and well prepared to take on whatever future roles they have chosen from themselves, they must be given more leadership experiences as undergraduates;" not only should they be encouraged to participate

in a wide range of activities, but they also need to assume leading positions in those activities (Astin & Kent 1983). Gender-exclusive organizations in coeducational settings, like sororities, may be the best, if not the only, forum educators can use to cultivate leadership in women (Kamm & Rentz 1994).

The leadership experience many women enjoy within exclusive sororities has a profound effect on them (Astin & Kent 1983). These experiences enhance the personal and social self-esteem of sorority women, which is often negative after adolescence (Astin & Kent 1983). Leadership experience, like that obtained in exclusive sororities, may also encourage the development of a feminist identity. Indeed, researchers have found a link between leadership and the development of liberal (or feminist) attitudes in women. In a study conducted by Kamm & Rentz (1994), sorority officers were found to be significantly more liberal in their attitudes toward women than other members of their organizations (Kamm & Rentz 1994). "Sorority officers possess different attitudes toward women than the group's members, most notably in the areas of sexual behaviors, marital relationships and responsibilities, and freedom and independence" (Kamm & Rentz 1994). As officers, they are expected to be assertive, independent, achievement-orientated, and strong, characteristics found to be typical of feminist women (Tipton, Bailey & Obenchain 1975; Cherniss 1972).

Although not always used for this purpose, segregation or separatism is a legitimate and highly effective moral and political strategy (Hoagland 1995; Freedman 1995). To withdraw or separate from a system or a social situation is to reject its rules (Hoagland 1995). To separate is to refuse to participate, and a social organization or institution can only function if there are participants (Hoagland 1995). When we remove ourselves, a system becomes meaningless, and to some extent, ceases to exist (Hoagland 1995).

Feminist separatism is practiced by most if not all feminists in one form or another. Feminist separatism is always initiated and/or maintained by women and involves separating "from men and from institutions, relationships, roles, and

activities which are male-defined, male-dominating and operating for the benefit of males and the maintenance of male privilege” in effort to fight sexist oppression (Frye 1983). “The theme of [feminist] separatism, in its multitude variations, is there in everything from divorce to exclusive lesbian separatist communities, from shelters for battered women to witch covens, from women’s [sic] studies programs to women’s bars, from expansion of day care to abortion on demand” (Frye 1983). When women separate from men, even when it is temporary or partial, we cease attending to the patriarchal system and focus our attention towards women (Hoagland 1995). To withdraw is to re-direct our energy, our talent, our strengths, our conviction, and our passion away from men to women. As the ultimate expression of woman-identification and woman-loving, feminist separatism is intimately connected with lesbianism (Frye 1983). When we participate in feminist separatism, we are choosing to be with women, to center around women, and to align ourselves with women.

At certain times in history, feminist separatism, in the form of a creation of a public female sphere, might have been the *only* viable political strategy for women (Freedman 1995). “The achievements of feminism at the turn of the century came less through gaining access to the male domains of politics and the professions than in the tangible form of building separate female institutions” (Freedman 1995). Women, who were fighting the good fight in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, recognized the need for a separate space to help sustain women’s participation in the struggle to win the right to vote and other social and political reforms (Freedman 1995).

Feminist separatism, at the time, was so essential to women’s social, political, and economic advancement that its demise is believed to have thwarted the women’s movement for decades (Freedman 1995). After the Suffrage Amendment was passed 1920, many of the separate women’s communities began to disintegrate as women attempted to assimilate into male dominated institutions

(Freedman 1995). Thinking the war was over and their access to these institutions was guaranteed, many women no longer saw they need for continued feminist organization and abandoned the women's sphere they had built. Unfortunately, however, they were not welcomed into the male dominated institutions. But by the time women realized that the 19th Amendment had not granted them equality with men, it was too late, for they had lost the momentum and the networks which had made the Suffrage Movement possible (Freedman 1995). Women's abandonment of their separatist organizations and culture prevented the emergence of a strong political force that might have protected and expanded the gains made by the earlier (1st wave) women's movement (Freedman 1995). Although times have changed, the establishment of women-only organizations and communities is still a valuable and necessary resource for women because they grant us personal and political power (Freedman 1995). "Glorifying womanliness consolidates female unity and strength" (Lorber 1994).

According to Marilyn Frye (1983), power differences are always manifested in asymmetrical access and that "the creation and manipulation of power is constituted in the manipulation and control of access" (Frye 1983). Those with absolute power have unconditional access to the powerless, and the powerless have absolutely no access to the powerful; therefore, to be totally powerless is to be unconditionally accessible (Frye 1983). In patriarchal societies, men must have access to women, it's the "patriarchal imperative," and men will use any means necessary, including violence or the threat of violence, to ensure their access to women (Frye 1983). Yet when women deny men access to them, when women say "no" to men, women take power from men and claim power for themselves (Frye 1983). The act of "no-saying" is an act of resistance against the patriarchal imperative and this empowers women (Frye 1983). "It is always the privilege of the master to enter the slave's hut, [and] the slave who decides to exclude the master from her hut is declaring herself not a slave" (Frye 1983). All-women's groups and organizations, including sororities, are, in essence, a challenge to the

patriarchal structure of power because they exclude men, because they deny men access to women (Frye 1983).

Even though Greek organizations are not generally considered political and are in fact, known for their political apathy (Baier & Whipple 1990; Jakobsen 1986; Wilder, et al. 1986; Wilder, et al. 1978; Longino & Kart 1973), we must recognize and appreciate all women-only spaces as potentially empowering for women because woman-only spaces create a context in which our focus can turn from men toward women, a context in which women can envision a world without patriarchy.

The gender exclusive space in sororities cannot be called feminist because sororities are not committed to fighting oppression against women and are often criticized for supporting that oppression. However, separatism need not be intentionally political to be valuable for those who participate. In fact, woman-centered separatism is usually brought about and maintained for the sake of something else: independence, safety, tradition, etc. (Frye 1983). Woman-centered separatism takes many forms and exists to varying degrees, including

breaking up or avoiding close relationships or working relationships; forbidding someone to enter your house; excluding someone from your company, or your meeting; withdrawal from participation in some activity or institution, or avoidance of participation; avoidance of communications and influence from certain quarters (not listening to music with sexist lyrics, not watching television); withholding commitment or support; rejection of rudeness towards obnoxious individuals. (Frye 1983)

Woman-centered separatism is created in women's restrooms and at beauty parlors, in sewing circles and at grocery stores, in dressing rooms and at bridal showers, in the waiting room at the pediatrician's office and certainly, in sororities. Women in the Greek system have successfully built a highly organized and well structured gender separatist community, perhaps without even realizing it, and this is a source of empowerment for those who are invited to be a part of it.

Unfortunately, the gender-exclusive space within sororities cannot be construed as feminist since this space is apolitical and reserved for only a select few.

Sexism and the Greek Community

As I previously mentioned, some researchers have found a connection between Greek affiliation and the belief in gender stereotypes in both men and women (Kalof & Cargill 1991; Finney 1979) and they have concluded that fraternities and sororities do indeed enforce traditional ideas about gender (Goettsch & Hayes 1990). These studies show that sorority and fraternity members are more likely to subscribe to views about male dominance and female submission than independents (Kalof & Cargill 1991). Fraternity men are the most likely to endorse this notion, and sorority women are more likely than independent women *and* men to agree (Kalof & Cargill 1991).

The differences in the way exclusive sororities and fraternities are structured, organized, and operate may contribute to differences in their members' belief gender stereotypes. Fraternities are coordinated by the National Interfraternity Conference (NIC) – it is responsible for setting most fraternity policies (Testerman et al 1994). However, NIC allows each fraternal organization make many of their own decisions and encourages individual fraternities to take initiative and control of their own leadership (Testerman et al 1994). Sororities, on the other hand, have always had an extremely active national council (Testerman et al 1994). The National Panhellenic Council (NPC) is described as a “mother” system and serves as the governing board for all sororal organizations (Testerman et al 1994). The NPC grants much less freedom to the individual organizations than the NIC and formulates binding policies know as unanimous agreements that guide the social conduct of sorority members, rush policies, and pledging procedures (Testerman et al 1994).

Sorority and fraternity *houses*, like the organizations operating within them, also differ. Fraternity houses are built with linoleum floors or wall-to-wall stain-

proof carpeting and sturdy furniture that can be easily removed for parties; “the props are arranged for young men who become wild, rowdy, and knock things over when drunk” (Risman 1987). Sorority houses are usually decorated very elegantly with a baby grand piano or chandelier in the main living room, plush, lightly colored carpets, and framed watercolors on the walls. The furniture, color scheme, and decor in a sorority house are designed for quiet, polite, well-behaved, well-bred, attractive, young ladies (Risman 1987). The different rules, regulations, and policies that govern sororities and fraternities (Testerman et al 1994) ensure that women and men leave college serving different, “complementary” roles (Risman 1987). The adjectives stereotypically associated with women/femininity and men/masculinity are well known: men are said to be more adventurous, logical, confident, rational, strong, and assertive. Women, on the other hand, are sensitive, dependent, emotional, weak, fickle, and softhearted (Lips 1994). These contrasting ideals send their sorority and fraternity members the message that women and men are not alike, that men are independent, rowdy, and adventurous while women are dependent, reserved, and in need of protection (Risman 1987).

In a society where a woman’s worth is determined by her husband and marriage is her only means for economic survival, traditional training is effective for women; however, in a world where women spend much of their lives in the paid labor force, such training is all but irrelevant (Risman 1987). Sorority women may come to find that the priorities they have set, “and the selves they have nurtured while in the Greek system, may prove quite inappropriate in the world they must enter when they grow up” (Risman 1987). By teaching women that they are passive, dependent on others, and incapable of successfully governing themselves, sororities do not seem to prepare women for real life that demands they be active, independent, and autonomous.

If it is an organizational goal to train women to be wives, mothers, and homemakers, and to train men to be breadwinners and heads of households, then Greek organizations are both relevant and effective (Risman 1987). However,

researchers have found that the majority of college women want careers (Novack & Novack 1996; Epstein & Bronzaft 1972). Most of these women continue to want marriage and children, yet more and more of them are anticipating a profession after graduation from college (Novack & Novack 1996; Epstein & Bronzaft 1972). In fact, almost half of the white, heterosexual, middle and upper class college women surveyed in a recent study conducted by Novack and Novack (1996) reported they would choose their profession over marriage if forced to make a choice (Novack & Novack 1996). Unfortunately, however, it seems unlikely that contemporary sorority women will emerge from college with the social, psychological, or professional skills necessary for active participation in the competitive labor force they are anticipating and for which they are presumably being trained while at the university (Risman 1987).

The traditional values embraced by the exclusive Greek culture are manifested in their sexist behavior which includes “beauty pageants,” the making and selling of pin-up calendars, “dating auctions,” sexual harassment, derogatory jokes, verbal abuse, dating/domestic violence, and date rape (Kuh & Lyon 1990; Goettsch & Hayes 1990). Although fraternities are more often accused of sexist behavior than sororities, researchers demonstrate that both fraternity and sorority members organize and participate in these events (Ackerman 1990).

Greeks try to justify their participation by arguing that these events are for a good cause, the money collected is donated to local and national charities, and respected charitable organizations routinely sponsor them (Goettsch & Hayes 1990). Sororities and fraternities also insist that the participants rarely complain, all students (Greeks and non-Greeks alike) are invited to join, and no one is forced to participate (Goettsch & Hayes 1990). Researchers have found, however, that not all Greek members *want* to participate in these events. Often, they *are* forced or coerced by other members. The peer pressure to conform, to not spoil everyone else’s “fun,” prevents many sorority and fraternity members from voicing their

discomfort with the nature of these events and refusing to participate (Goettsch & Hayes 1990).

Sorority hazing is also an expression of misogyny. As I mentioned early in this chapter, hazing in sororities is a serious problem on our college campuses, yet there is very little literature addressing hazing in sororities, most of the information from the media focuses on fraternities, and many educators who speak against hazing address only fraternity men (Shaw & Morgan 1990). Sorority hazing is trivialized and ignored because it is almost exclusively psychological rather than physical in nature and therefore deemed “less dangerous” or even “harmless” when compared to fraternity hazing (Shaw & Morgan 1990). Over half of the sororities on college campuses across the United States engage in activities that constitute hazing including signature lists, scavenger hunts, blindfolding, singing, and running errands. Pledges are also forced to live in fear of active members, required to drink alcohol, made to wear ridiculous clothing, interrogated, deprived of sleep, scolded and yelled at, hit or paddled, and sometimes branded (Shaw & Morgan 1990). Scholars speculate that women participate in hazing activities out of a strong desire for close relationships that sororities promise. To become a member, they have to go through initiation, and their need for friendship and desire to belong leads them to do things they would not do under normal circumstances (Shaw & Morgan 1990).

Once a member is initiated, there is a good chance that she will participate in the hazing of the next pledge class, no matter how much she may have disliked the activities herself (Shaw & Morgan 1990). Active members participate in the group humiliation of other women because they are pressured from older actives, they are angry about the way they were treated as pledges and are seeking revenge, or they believe the activities are harmless and find them entertaining and humorous (Shaw & Morgan 1990).

Sorority members engage in and subject others to activities that are dishonoring to women. Hazing, at best, denigrates the worth and dignity of

individuals, and at worst, threatens lives (Kuh & Lyon 1990). What is most disturbing about sorority hazing is that it degrades, humiliates, and emotionally scars women in the name of “sisterhood” (Shaw & Morgan 1990). After centuries of struggle, of fighting for liberation from oppression, of fighting to uphold human dignity and end harassment, exclusive social sorority women are seemingly turning back the clock on feminist progress by engaging in activities that humiliate, embarrass, and even mentally and physically endanger other women whom they proclaim are their “sisters” (Shaw & Morgan 1990).

The Rape Culture of Fraternities

Sexual assault is an epidemic on college campuses (Boswell & Spade 1996). One out of every eight college women have been victims of rape, and 52% of college women have experienced some form of sexual victimization (<http://www.usf.edu/counsel/self-hlp/daterape.htm>). One out of every twelve college men admits he has forced a woman to have “sexual intercourse” against her will (Boswell & Spade 1996).

Some scholars speculate that sorority women may be more likely than non-sorority women to be sexually assaulted (Kalof & Cargill 1991). Unfortunately, despite the seriousness of the issue, very little research has been conducted on college subgroups like sororities (Rivera & Regoli 1987), so it is impossible to state definitely that sorority women are at a greater risk (Copenhaver & Grauerholtz 1991). However, it is clear that they are not immune (Nurius, et al 1996; Copenhaver & Grauerholtz 1991). The majority of sorority women who were questioned in a study conducted by Copenhaver & Grauerholtz (1991) had experienced some form of sexual aggression since age fourteen. Of these women, 83% had experienced at least one act of sexual aggression while in college, and many had experienced more than one type of sexual victimization (Copenhaver & Grauerholtz 1991).

More often than not, fraternity men are to blame. Almost all (95%) of the sorority women who reported their victimization to Copenhaver & Grauerholtz (1991) knew their attackers, which comes as no surprise, since studies show that 60-80% of women who are sexually assaulted are victimized by dates or persons that they know (Boswell & Spade 1996; Nurius 1996). Since Greek members spend the majority of their time with other Greeks (Risman 1987; Gerson 1969), it is more than reasonable to assume that these acts were perpetrated by fraternity men. Indeed, nearly half the rapes [experienced by sorority women in the Copenhaver & Grauerholtz (1991) study] occurred in a fraternity house, and over half occurred either during a fraternity function or were perpetrated by fraternity members. This finding is supported by other researchers who indicate that one of the most likely places of attack is in a fraternity house (Hirsch 1990).

Sorority women seem to be at a higher risk for sexual assault because of the frequency with which they associate with fraternity men (Lottes & Kuriloff 1994; Copenhaver & Grauerholtz 1991). Social functions such as "TGs" (Friday morning/afternoon parties), "Chapter Chasers" (get-togethers held weekly after chapter meetings), formal dances, and annual theme parties regularly bring sorority and fraternity members together with alcohol and therefore may increase sorority women's likelihood of being raped (Copenhaver & Grauerholtz 1991).

One could argue that sorority women would be just as likely to be sexually assaulted by non-fraternity men if they interacted as much with non-fraternity men as they do with fraternity men (Copenhaver & Grauerholtz 1991); however, researchers have demonstrated that fraternity men are more likely than independent men to rape (Lottes & Kuriloff 1994; Kalof & Cargill 1991; Boeringer, Shehan & Akers 1991). Although fraternity members do not differ from independents in their use of physical force or in their self-perceived likelihood of doing so in the future, they have a greater tendency than non-fraternity men to use drugs or alcohol and other non-physical coercive strategies to gain "sexual" access to women (Lottes & Kuriloff 1994; Boeringer, Shehan & Akers 1991). Fraternity members' estimates

of the number of their friends (25%) who have gotten a woman drunk or high in order to have “sex” were significantly higher than non-members estimates of their friends’ (10%) use of alcohol or drugs as “sexual” strategy (Boeringer, Shehan & Akers 1991). In addition, fraternity members associate with a greater number of other men who also engage in coercive and/or violent “sexual” behavior and hence, are more likely than independents to receive positive reinforcement for engaging in sexually aggressive behavior. Fraternity members are more likely than independent men to believe that their friends would approve of their having sexual intercourse with many women during the school year, less likely to believe that their friends would disapprove, and less likely to believe that their friends would disapprove of their getting a woman drunk or high in order to have “sex” with her (Boeringer, Shehan & Akers 1991).

Scholars have found a strong relationship between alcohol use and rape, particularly date rape (Copenhaver & Grauerholtz 1991), which also helps to explain why sorority women may be more susceptible to attack (Martin & Hummer 1993). A woman’s chances of being raped are increased significantly when alcohol is a factor, and alcohol abuse is an integral part of most Greek functions (Copenhaver & Grauerholtz 1991). In 1998, the Harvard School of Public Health announced that four out of five fraternity and sorority members identify themselves as binge drinkers (Nuwer 1999). Alcohol and activities associated with the recreational consumption of alcohol are the cornerstones of Greek life, so much so that nondrinkers are viewed with skepticism and rarely selected or even considered for membership (Martin & Hummer 1993). Women who party/drink heavily are likely to be exposed to high-risk situations, thereby increasing their chances of being sexually victimized (Copenhaver & Grauerholtz 1991), and as previously mentioned, fraternity men often use alcohol “as a weapon against women’s sexual reluctance” and resistance (Martin & Hummer 1993; Boeringer, Shehan & Akers 1991).

The “house loyalty” so highly valued by sorority members may also increase their chances of being raped, for loyalty to the Greek system is insured through secrecy (Martin & Hummer 1993). Sorority women are believed to be “safe” victims because they do not often report rapes (Copenhaver & Grauerholtz 1991). Only about 1 in 10 women who are attacked report it (Hirsch 1990), but even fewer sorority women (7%) report their experiences to officials and a third tell no one (Copenhaver & Grauerholtz 1991). Women who are very active in their sorority (measured by the number of events or functions attended) are most susceptible to attack and least likely to report their victimization (Copenhaver & Grauerholtz 1991).

The more actively involved she is, the greater her likelihood of being sexually assaulted (Copenhaver & Grauerholtz 1991). However, most sorority women perceive their risk to be between moderately and extremely *unlikely* and insist they are at a *lower* risk by virtue of their identification with the Greek system (Nurius, et al 1996). They trust their “brothers,” regard them as members of a valued social network and potential boyfriends and husbands, and consider social events in the Greek system, not as potentially dangerous, but as sheltered opportunities for partying, having fun, meeting new people, and building relationships (Nurius, et al 1996). Unfortunately, the prevalence of sexual assault in the Greek system forces scholars to conclude that sorority women are never safe from sexual assault, *especially* from their “brothers” (Copenhaver & Grauerholtz 1991). The Greek system’s emphasis on the college experience as the last bash before responsible adulthood and on fraternities and sororities as safe networks seems to impede women’s abilities to recognize the realities of sexual assault (Nurius, et al 1996).

Some scholars argue that fraternities create a physical and socio-cultural context that facilitates the sexual coercion of women (Lottes & Kuriloff 1994; Martin & Hummer 1993; Copenhaver & Grauerholtz 1991; Boeringer, Shehan & Akers 1991). The sheer number of rapes that occur in fraternity houses, at

fraternity functions, and/or by fraternity members strongly suggests that fraternities foster a culture that tolerates, if not actually encourages, the sexual coercion of women, predominantly sorority women (Copenhaver & Grauerholtz 1991). Rape is highly probable in fraternities “because of the kinds of organizations they are, the kinds of members they have, and the practices they engage in” (Martin & Hummer 1993).

Not all men negotiate gender in the same way (Boeringer, Shehan & Akers 1991), not all fraternity men rape (Martin & Hummer 1993), and some fraternity houses and events are not as risky as others (Boswell & Spade 1996). Men differ on how strongly they are indoctrinated by rape myths and other attitudes conducive to sexual aggression, and he who holds more strongly to these beliefs is more likely to be sexually aggressive (Boeringer, Shehan & Akers 1991). Although fraternities are not the only context in which sexual coercion is learned and enforced, the social context of fraternities is one that supports those attitudes and provides a setting for acting on them (Boeringer, Shehan & Akers 1991). In other words, even though some fraternities are less dangerous, depending on how strongly the members adhere to rape myths, there is no such thing as a safe fraternity party for women (Boswell & Spade 1996).

Martin and Hummer’s (1993) analysis of college fraternities and rape provides insight into how social organizations like fraternities promote sexual violence against women through the establishment of a rape culture. A rape culture consists of shared values and beliefs that are conducive to rape (Boswell & Spade 1996), values and beliefs that are sexist and misogynist.

The belief in the dominance of men and the submissiveness of women, manifested in the sexual double standard, helps to explain why so many sexual assaults occur in the Greek system (Boswell & Spade 1996). In the context of fraternities, like society at large, rape is intertwined in traditional gender scripts that dictate to men the role of initiator while women are expected to passively receive or try to resist sexual advances (Boswell & Spade 1996). Studies show that fraternity

members are sexually promiscuous and are often believe they are entitled to frequent sex with multiple partners, which contributes to their tendency to use sexually coercive strategies with women (Lottes & Kuriloff 1994). Men's powerful libido is seen as natural and uncontrollable, and this belief compels many men (and women) to excuse acquaintance rape—after all, men cannot be expected to control their wild, “natural” urges (Boswell & Spade 1996). “The double standard has long dictated that women restrict and are restricted in their sexuality more than men. Women are more often watched and warned about sexuality than men and encouraged to play a ‘gatekeeper’ role. Men, on the other hand, are allowed more leeway in terms of masturbation, exposure to pornography and erotica and heterosexual activity, learn to view sex as a way to ‘prove’ their masculinity, the goal being to reach orgasm and/or to ‘score’” (Lips 1994). Men have been thought to have the stronger sex drive, and thus have been given more permission to engage in sexual activity. However, research on human sexual response indicates that physiologically, there are strong similarities between males and females in their response to sexual stimulation.

Group loyalty, another component of rape culture, is of the utmost importance to fraternity men and is marked by suspicion and resentment of those who do not belong, including women (Copenhaver & Grauerholtz 1991). Fraternity members are constantly reminded to be loyal to the fraternity and their brothers, and for the most part, fraternity members associate exclusively with fellow members (Martin & Hummer 1993). They are pressured to be “one of the guys” and to value the house above all other, and this pressure segregates fraternity men from everyone else and creates an “us/them” atmosphere (Boswell & Spade 1996; Martin & Hummer 1993; Boeringer, Shehan & Akers 1991). Within the fraternity culture, brothers are held in the highest regard and members of other fraternities, independent men, and women are viewed as outsiders. Women, as “foreigners,” are a threat to the unity of the group and cannot be trusted and are therefore treated with hostility (Boswell & Spade 1996; Martin & Hummer 1993).

Male bonding is also characteristic of a rape culture, for male bonding almost always involves the group degradation and humiliation of women (Hirsch 1990). Fraternal “brotherhood” is based upon shared spontaneous action, or “having fun,” but unfortunately, the fun is usually at the expense of women (Lyman 1987). The culture of fraternities instills in members a group ethos of misogyny through derogatory jokes, language, name calling, and often, physical and sexual aggression (Boswell & Spade 1996; Copenhaver & Grauerholtz 1991). In “Whales Tales, Dog Piles, and Beer Goggles: An Ethnographic Case Study of Fraternity Life,” Robert Rhoads (1995) describes the hostile treatment of women by fraternity men. “Women [are] frequently characterized in ways that depict them as something less than human beings – as objects worthy of manipulation or disdain” (Rhoads 1995). Terms like “hogger” are used to refer to women who are considered unattractive. When a fraternity member is drunk enough to pursue a woman whom his brothers classified as a hogger, his behavior is referred to as “beer goggling” or “wearing your beer goggles” (Rhoads 1995). The jokes fraternity men tell and the games they play are typically sexist; they objectify and sexualize women and are almost always aggressive in nature, ergo, fraternity men bond through sexism, through the communal objectification and dehumanization of women (Lyman 1987).

Gang rape is a key feature of male bonding within patriarchal society and as such, is pervasive in fraternities (Hirsch 1990). “At an age when their sexual identity is still fluid and a source of profound anxiety, fraternity men alleviate any insecurities about homoerotic attachments – and satisfy them – by having sex in front of each other, by abusing and humiliating women, in short, through gang rape” (Hirsch 1990). When committed behind closed fraternity doors, this heinous crime is considered a “boys’ prank” or a sanctioned rite of passage into the adult world of male dominance, privilege and power (Hirsch 1990). Fraternity gang rape is without a doubt the most spectacular manifestation of the fraternal network, of

men's allegiance to one another through pervasive hostility towards and dominance over women (Goettsch & Hayes 1990).

Fraternities' emphasis on brotherhood, competition, and superiority also helps to create an atmosphere conducive to rape (Martin & Hummer 1993; Copenhaver & Grauerholtz 1991). When examining peer influences on college men, researchers found that, compared to sexually non-aggressive men, date rapists tend to be disproportionately socialized within a hyper masculine and hyper erotic culture in which "winning" and "sexual success" was of paramount importance (Lottes & Kuriloff 1994). Fraternities work hard to build a macho persona and squash any sign of weakness, effeminacy, and homosexuality. When rushing potential members, they try to avoid "geeks," nerds, and men that may give the fraternity a "wimpy" or "gay" reputation (Martin & Hummer 1993). Their conception of the ideal male is the masculine stereotype: aggressive, competitive, athletic, wealthy, dominant, independent, strong, intelligent, and heterosexual, and fraternity men proudly display these characteristics (Lottes & Kuriloff 1994; Martin & Hummer 1993; Hirsch 1990; Street & Meek 1980). Fraternities encourage female subordination and the sexual victimization of women with their obsession with this masculine ideal (Martin & Hummer 1993; Kalof & Cargill 1991) and by helping their members construct a notion of "manhood" that depicts women as objects of conquest (Goettsch & Hayes 1990).

Like all forms of sexual violence, fraternity-sorority rape must be viewed within the larger context of male violence against women that serves to control and limit women's activities. Fraternity-sorority rape reinforces the inferior status of women within both the Greek system and society as a whole (Goettsch & Hayes 1990). Underlying violence against women within the Greek community is, of course, the system of patriarchy: social, political and economic conditions granting men higher status and privilege than women (Rhoads 1995). It is true that not all men oppress all women, and when women are in a privileged position in terms of race or class, some women oppress some men. Yet, it is also true that there is a

general oppression of women by men and this is the defining point of patriarchy. All women and all men act in conditions shaped by the structure of male supremacy and female inferiority (Rhoads 1995). Rape, including fraternity/sorority rape, has a social basis in patriarchy (Boswell 1996; Goettsch & Hayes 1990).

Greeks and Heterosexism

Historically, openly gay and lesbian members have not been welcomed into the exclusive Greek community (Bogues 1997), and although Greeks have begun to accept bisexual and homosexual members, sororities and fraternities are far from open and accepting of alternative lifestyles. Lambda Delta Lambda, the nation's single lesbian sorority, has only one chapter located on San Francisco State University's campus, and Delta Lambda Phi, the gay fraternity, recently celebrated its 10th anniversary (Bogues 1997).

Within the exclusive Greek community, heterosexuality is compulsory (Handler 1995), which helps to explain why sororities and fraternities have stayed *exclusive* in terms of sexual orientation for so long. Greek organizations in general and sororities in particular function, in part, to establish traditional heterosexual relationships for their members. Relatively free from parental observation and restriction, college students have many opportunities to build romantic relationships and form attachments with one another. College age women and men are typically very socially active and spend a lot of time exploring the qualities desired in a potential mate (Korman 1983).

Affiliation with a Greek organization significantly increases a college student's chances to meet other college students. In the Greek community, men and women come into frequent contact with each other; sorority/fraternity dances, parties, and other functions are a regular part of Greek life. Greeks, like other peer groups, are absorbed by romantic relationships (Eisenhart & Holland 1983), and researchers have found that Greek members spend even more time than non-Greeks

pursuing romantic interests (Korman 1983). Sorority and fraternity members sell rushees on the promise that sororities and fraternities offer their members increased opportunities to interact with *attractive* members of the opposite sex (Lottes & Kuriloff 1994).

The overall effect of the sorority is to find marriage partners for members (Schmidt 1971). Although *both* sorority and non-sorority women are more likely to be engaged or married after graduation than before, the chance is greater for sorority women (Schmidt 1971). Individually, the sorority helps to get women boyfriends and eventually husbands, and collectively, the sorority gains prestige by having sisters invited to a fraternity formal (Handler 1995). "Sisters notice how well they are represented at fraternity formals and whether they outnumber rival sororities" (Handler 1995).

Sororities also encourage the development of a very specific kind of heterosexual relationship. Studies have shown that women and men are sexually socialized differently which results in the development of opposite roles, traits, and goals (Lottes & Kuriloff 1994; Lottes 1993). Compared to women, men receive significantly more permissive sexual socialization influences from both parents and peers (Lottes & Kuriloff 1994), which establishes a double standard: men are socialized to be sexually active, and women are socialized to be sexually passive. Women and men are also taught to emphasize different facets of sexuality; sex has been labeled a masculine pursuit while love has been deemed a feminine pursuit (Thorne 1993; Lottes 1993). "According to the stereotypes, men are mostly interested in sex and are cautious about becoming emotionally involved and making commitments; women, on the other hand, are socialized to value romance, affection, love, and commitment more than sex, and in fact, to make sexual activity contingent, to some degree on them" (Lottes 1993; Thorne 1993).

The practice of heterosexual dating has traditionally implied different norms for men and women that reflect the above-mentioned ideas about gender and the double standard of sexuality (Lottes 1993; Boeringer, Shehan & Akers 1991;

Risman 1987). Most important among these norms are the practices of male controlled date-initiation and date-paying (Korman 1983). Women and men alike are taught that it is the man's responsibility to ask a woman for a date and to pay for that date. The different rules are equally accepted by both women and men and are often believed to be natural and inevitable (Risman 1987).

One of the empowering outcomes of feminist research has been to uncover these institutionalized hidden agendas and to transform them into concrete and legitimate topics to be studied. The asymmetrical structure of traditional heterosexual relationships, for example, represents only one area in which we have begun to make visible the gendered threads that construct the fabric of the fabled patriarchal clothes. I am still intrigued by my observation that many young women today are reluctant to initiate or take responsibility for heterosexual dating, for the progression of such relationships, for planning to cohabit or to marry, and for deciding afterward whose name they will use and whose career takes priority. (Worell 1996)

Peer pressure and tradition are used to teach sorority members what is appropriate and inappropriate during interactions with men (Risman 1987). Generally, fraternity men are expected make the arrangements for social exchanges or "functions" with sororities because it is the man's place to invite the woman – he is the aggressor, she the pursued (Risman 1987). Sororities discourage their members from asking men out; they insist that women who initiate dates with men are desperate, and that doesn't "look good" for the sorority. Only women from low status houses would need to "resort" to calling fraternities (Risman 1987). Sororities teach their members that it makes sense that a woman would wait for a man to call since "the guy pay for everything after all" (Risman 1987).

Sorority women are also expected to refrain from sexual indiscretion. Older members will often encourage younger members to "be careful" and to think about their reputations and the reputation of the "house" before "hooking up" with a guy (Handler 1995). Consequently, sorority women tend to be very sensitive to accusations that they are "sluts" because being so named affects them individually and collectively (Handler 1995). The need to guard the collective reputation of the

sorority compels members to operate within the constraints of the sexual double standard (Handler 1995).

These traditional dating practices can have serious consequences for women, according to scholars who describe heterosexual dating as a system of exchange and reciprocity (Korman 1983). Viewed from this perspective, the traditional practices of male-dominated date-initiation and date-paying implies a power arrangement (based on class and gender) that requires women to reciprocate for “valued benefits.” In the traditional mode, women are often forced to reciprocate for benefits received through physical affection and sexual intimacies, and “the more money spent, the ‘further’ he is ‘entitled’ to go in terms of sexual intimacy” (Korman 1983). The majority of today’s heterosexual college women have in fact reported situations in which men misinterpreted the degree of sexual intimacy they desired and/or forced them to go much further than they intended (Boeringer, Shehan & Akers 1991). The culture of romance consisting of traditional dating practices and the sexual intimacy they imply, places women in situations where date-rape may be more likely to occur and perpetuates male privilege and the unequal relations between men and women (Thorne 1993).

Fortunately, times are changing. Strong adherence to the double standard of sexuality has declined, and today’s college women report more liberal beliefs about sex than their predecessors (Lottes 1993). Researchers also indicate that college women are having more casual sexual encounters and having sex at an earlier age than in the past (Lottes 1993). Although men continue to react more positively to their first sexual experience, masturbate more often, have orgasms more often, have sex at an earlier age, are more accepting of casual sex, and have more partners than women, women are reporting higher degrees of sexual experience and satisfaction than ever before (Lottes 1993). Having realized they are entitled to enjoy sex on their own terms, women are now more confident and have started to take charge of their bodies and their pleasure (Lottes 1993).

There is also some evidence that indicates that date-initiation and date-paying are no longer the sole responsibility of men (Korman 1983). Both women and men have become increasingly more egalitarian in past years in terms of their views about dating roles for women and men (Korman 1983). Now more than ever, women are initiating and paying for dates, which grants women more personal power and helps to create flexible, rewarding and mutually satisfying heterosexual relationships (Lottes 1993).

Time seems to be standing still in exclusive social sororities, however. Despite the progress western women have made in recent years, sororities seem to be continuing to sexually socialize their members in traditional ways. The double standard of sexuality and traditional dating practices promoted by the Greek system restricts and controls women's sexual expression and freedom and continues to place sorority women in potentially dangerous situations (Lottes 1993; Korman 1983). Women's role in the Greek system (certainly at fraternity/sorority functions) is that of sexual server to men (Martin & Hummer 1993; Copenhaver & Grauerholtz 1991). Sorority women function as dates, lovers, girlfriends, and eventually wives for fraternity men.

Classism in the Greek Community

College students are now more concerned with finding a job and making a lot of money than they were in the past (Strange 1986). Unlike previous generations, today's students care more about the occupational and financial outcomes of college than bettering themselves intellectually or using their knowledge as a tool for making social and political change (Strange 1986). 70% of college students cite "being well off" as their primary goal and most important reason for attending a college or university and earning a degree (Strange 1986).

Financial affluence or wealth is of particular importance in the exclusive Greek system (Martin & Hummer 1993). Sorority women and fraternity men proudly consider themselves members of special, prestigious organizations (Krain

et al 1977) and accentuate their class standing with expensive cars, clothing, and jewelry. Researchers have found that the majority of sorority and fraternity members come from a higher socio-economic class than independents; in fact, a Greek member's family's annual income is often as much as *twice* that of an independent student's family (Baier & Whipple 1990; Pike & Askew 1990; Longino & Kart 1973; Jackson & Winkler 1964). Not surprisingly then, Greeks have also been found to be significantly less likely than non-Greeks to receive need-based financial aid and work while in school (Baier & Whipple 1990).

Within the Greek system itself, there is a well established and highly visible class hierarchy (Krain et al 1977). Some sororities and fraternities are considered "better" than others, and this ranking is based in part on the socio-economic status of the groups' members. Members of the high-status houses are typically more attractive, more sociable, and wealthier than members of the low-status houses (Boynton-Arthur 1997). Both Greek and non-Greek students are acutely aware of the hierarchy and can easily rate each fraternity and sorority (Krain et al 1977).

Sororities and fraternities are regularly accused of being materialistic and consumer orientated (Kuh & Lyon 1990), and they have a long history of discrimination based on class (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992). As "way-stations" to country clubs, where business connections are made and maintained with alumni, it is clear that campus segregation vis-à-vis the sorority/fraternity system is a factor in perpetuating the differential class system of the larger society (Muir 1991).

Heterosexual romance in the Greek system, like membership, is virtually exclusive. Greek members predominantly date other Greeks, and independents tend to date other independents (Krain et al 1977). Sororities, in particular, encourage their members to get involved with fraternity men over independent men, and most sorority women agree it is easier that way (Handler 1995). Sorority members believe fraternity men understand the time and emotional energy Greek membership demands and will not feel threatened by the bond of sisterhood or the group's interactions with other fraternities (Handler 1995). Sorority women also

recognize how quickly and easily relationships develop with fraternity members due to their frequency of interaction.

Thus, heterosexual romance within the exclusive Greek system is another means through which the class system is perpetuated. The dating hierarchy in the Greek system reflects its class hierarchy, that of the larger community and society in general (Longino & Kart 1973). Greek members are very conscious of their and their organization's position on the dating hierarchy (Krain et al 1977), for women and men match up by attractiveness and prestige (Holland & Eisenhart 1988; Krain et al 1977). Heterosexual social life within the Greek system is structured in such a way that members of higher status fraternities have a tendency to date women in higher status sororities (Longino & Kart 1973). By participating in romantic relationships, a Greek member gains status as well as intimacy and companionship (Eisenhart & Holland 1983), for the attractiveness and prestige of one's suitor(s) validates one's own attractiveness and prestige (Eisenhart & Holland 1983). The class-based hierarchal Greek dating system then becomes a market, a market in which attractiveness is a commodity (Thorne 1993) exchanged for status.

Good looking and rich men date good looking and rich women for validation, yet women are more dependent upon romance for status than men (Stein, Newcomb & Bentler 1992; Eisenhart & Holland 1983; Krain et al 1977). Some scholars argue that sorority women use heterosexual romance as a strategy for improving their class status. Acutely aware that marriage is a means of upward mobility, sorority women "date-up" whenever they can both individually and collectively (Risman 1987).

Racism and the Greek Community

Many scholars insist that the Greek system is racist and may, in fact, function as one of the last national "havens" for racism (Muir 1991; Ackerman 1990). As I previously mentioned, sororities and fraternities are often criticized for their exclusionary practices, racist acts, and racist beliefs.

Although there are all black sororities and fraternities all over the country, most Greek organizations are racially segregated and are comprised almost exclusively of white students (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992). Historically, the majority of sorority and fraternity members have been white, and because Greek societies are often elitist and discriminatory, this continues to be the case (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992; Baier & Whipple 1990; Malaney 1990; Kuh & Lyons 1990). Even independent students recognize that the Greek system on most college campuses is segregated. In a study measuring their attitudes toward fraternities and sororities, Malaney (1990) found that most non-Greek students believe that Greek affiliation severely limits one's chances of meeting people of diverse races, religions, and ethnicities.

Exclusive white sororities and fraternities are also believed to be responsible for many of the racist acts perpetuated against individuals on college campuses (Muir 1991) and regularly sponsor racist events including the flying of the Confederate flag on southern campuses, theme parties such as "Arabian Nights" and minstrel shows, and slave auction "philanthropies" (Ackerman 1990; Kuh & Lyon 1990). Even though these events clearly trivialize the experience and cultures of marginalized peoples, violate human dignity, perpetuate stereotypes, and are offensive (Ackerman 1990; Kuh & Lyon 1990), sorority and fraternity members claim that their intentions are harmless, that these acts are motivated not by hate but by a desire to "have a good time."

Despite their "harmless intentions", studies have shown that members of Greek social fraternities and sororities are more likely to hold racist beliefs than white independents (Muir 1991). Exclusive Greeks are less willing to attend class with, sit next to, walk on campus with, eat at the same table with, room with, go on double dates with, or become romantically involved with people of color than white non-Greeks (Muir 1991). Fraternity and sorority members are also more likely to hold negative stereotypes of people of color than white independents (Muir 1991). Compared to white non-Greeks, exclusive fraternity and sorority members are more

opposed to civil rights regarding marriage, worship, socializing, and education (Muir 1991), tend to score lower on measures of social and religious liberalism and higher on measures of authoritarianism, ethnocentrism, and prejudice (Longino & Kart 1973). Affiliation with an exclusive Greek organization has also been found to be a negative predictor of the goal of promoting racial understanding (Milem 1991). Any situation or activity that prevents students from interacting with their environment is said to decrease racial tolerance and increase racial intolerance, and closed, isolated Greek organizations are one such situation (Milem 1991).

The identity-markers worn by Greek members symbolize their separation from the rest of the student body and exacerbate the distinctions among those students (Kuh & Lyons 1990). Sorority and fraternity members wear t-shirts, sweatshirts, hats, jewelry, etc. that display the Greek letters associated with the group to which they belong. They also live in separate houses, often occupying entire city blocks known as "Greek row"--all of which make a powerful statement about their "social distance and claimed superiority" (Boynton-Arthur 1997; Thorne 1993). The rituals and symbols of Greek life--hazing, secret handshakes, songs, pins, exclusive parties and other events--*mark* the participant (sometimes literally in the case of paddling or branding, which is still practiced by some organizations) as a member of a select group (Johnson 1994).

The homogeneity of sororities and fraternities is perpetuated by the organizations' self-selective membership recruitment process, referred to as "rush" (Longino & Kart 1973). The practice of "like choosing like" is at the heart of sorority/fraternity sisterhood/brotherhood selection (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992) and discrimination, for Greek organizations favor the right to restrict membership to women and men of their own choice according to any criteria they wish, including race (Longino & Kart 1973). Members recruit women and men who they presume will support the goals and fulfill the demands of the group (Longino & Kart 1973) and tend to favor the students they predict will get along well with the

rest of the group. New members cannot be deviant, too independent, or too different for fear they might upset “the herd” (Longino & Kart 1973).

Indeed, researchers have demonstrated that the exclusive Greek system perpetuates racism by attracting racist students (Muir 1991). Muir (1991) found that the exclusive Greek system maintains relative (but lessening) prejudice throughout the college years by recruiting from the most prejudiced of first year students whose racist beliefs are then reinforced by an in-house culture that approves of discrimination at levels significantly higher than the rest of the campus. Greek seniors tend to be more accepting of students of color than Greek freshman, indicating that some erasing of racism occurs even within the exclusive Greek system, however, *white non-Greek freshman are less racist than exclusive Greek seniors* (Muir 1991). Thus, relatively racist Greek members seek and recruit other racist students to join their racist organization, thereby serving to preserve the racism of both the members and the organization.

To some extent, exclusive Greek members believe homogeneity and discrimination are necessary for their survival. Although sorority and fraternity membership is at an all time high, many administrators and other school officials, frustrated with the overwhelming amount of criticism directed at Greek organizations, have threatened to put an end to them altogether (Ackerman 1990; Malaney 1990). When organizations are small and their members similar in background and interests, maintaining a commitment to the organization and its goals is less difficult; when students are heterogeneous in background and interests and the university is large, this kind of a commitment can be problematic as alienation stalks the campus (Longino & Kart 1973). To protect group identity, preserve traditions, and insure survival, fraternity and sorority members are urged by their respective organizations to shield themselves from “intruding cultures” and discouraged from seeking cultural diversity or understanding. There is a strong incentive to protect one and the group from new ideas and people with different likes, dislikes, ethnicities, economic status, sexual orientations, religious beliefs, or

cultural backgrounds (Baier & Whipple; Malaney 1990; Risman 1987). As both a literal and symbolic space, members are taught to guard the “house” against contamination or infiltration by people who might hinder its fluidity (Johnson 1994).

Organizational commitment and survival are not all that is protected when Greeks close their doors to anyone who is not white, middle or upper class, and heterosexual. Privilege is also maintained. Sororities’ exclusionary practices keep their members from interacting with others not like themselves and shield them from alternative perspectives (Risman 1987). Smaller peer groups, like fraternities and sororities, isolate their members from other views and attitudes and strengthens the belief that their views are right and others are wrong (Milem 1991).

Studies show that fraternity members tend to be more racist than sorority members (Muir 1991), which is consistent with the attitudes of non-Greek women and men; generally, men are more racist than women, and women are more likely than men to be committed to promoting racial awareness and tolerance (Milem 1991; Muir 1991). Compared to sorority women, fraternity men are more opposed to political and economic equality and less accepting of civil rights for people of color, particularly in the area of desegregation of higher education (Muir 1991).

Genuine Friendships or Horizontal Hostility?

To a sorority woman, the Greek system is virtually her whole world (Risman 1987). She primarily dates fraternity men and spends the rest of her time with other members of her organization; she sleeps, eats, studies, showers, attends classes with, and parties or socializes with her sorority sisters (Handler 1995; Risman 1987; Gerson 1969). Knowing sorority members are always together, many college women see sororities as an opportunity to meet people and purposely join sororities to make friends (Handler 1995). Sororities (and fraternities) are regarded as a place to make connections and to build and nurture relationships. Social sororities give young women the chance to get to know women they might

not otherwise meet – women from other years, other majors, other dormitories – and to foster friendships with them (Handler 1995). In this capacity, sororities structure bonds among women and formalize close and caring relationships between women (Handler 1995).

The bonds of friendship that form in sororities are strong, so strong in fact that members describe them as deeper and more rewarding than other friendships between women (Handler 1995). The expectations of sorority sisters exceed expectations of “girlfriends” – like a family, the sorority is expected to accept a sister regardless of her faults (Handler 1995). As sisters, women ask for, and often receive, love, loyalty and respect from each other (Handler 1995). Sorority women are expected to always be there for each other and provide support for one another (Handler 1995). The closeness sorority women feel and the perceived strength of the friendship bond is credited almost exclusively to the sorority; members insist that their connection is the result of their membership (Handler 1995).

Group activities and rituals are performed in sororities to help foster friendships among members (Risman 1987). Rush, for example, is heralded as an opportunity to “pull the house together” as well as the way to increase membership, and pledge classes are encouraged to attend weekend retreats to help build unity amongst the new members (Risman 1987). In fact, the pledging period is intended, in its shared stress, to create solid, everlasting bonds among sisters (Handler 1995). Sororities encourage their members to do things together, ever emphasizing “the group.” Several members will form a committee to organize a community service project or plan a “date-night,” and roommates will join forces to decorate a depressed sister’s door with balloons and streamers. “Big sister/little sister” pairs will go out to dinner together as a “family reunion” of sorts, and in most sororities houses, the members sleep in one large room, filled with bunk beds, which inevitably brings sorority women closer together (Risman 1987).

The friendship bond exclusive sorority women share is protected, and in some ways insured, through secrecy. The sorority’s rituals and traditions are

sacred; sorority women are expected to keep them hidden from anyone not affiliated with the group (Baird & Whipple 1990; Longino & Kart 1973). The secrets learned during initiation and as an active member are never to be revealed to anyone outside the social system (Gerson 1969). Song lyrics, history, creeds and mottos, rules and regulations, and ceremonies are to be known only by members and alumni. The sorority bond is created and maintained through this secret shared experience. The vow of secrecy unites the members and connects them to each other, the organization, and its past, present and future.

Hence in some ways, sororities are a celebration of women's friendships (Handler 1995). "Sororities provide college women with a social universe in which their friendships with each other are valorized" (Handler 1995). Rarely in patriarchal societies are women's relationships held in such high regard. Sororities are one of the few places in which friendships among college women are valued and appreciated to such an extent.

Some researchers question the *quality* of friendships that develop in sororities, however. While many sorority women report that they are extremely satisfied with their relationships with their sisters, others say they are very disappointed (Risman 1987). For some members, the exclusive sorority friendship bond is of little importance compared to their connections with men (Risman 1987). Although it seems that sororities provide the perfect setting in which strong relationships among women are formed and nurtured, Holland and Eisenhart found that genuine friendships between women are difficult to foster and maintain, because solidarity is weak among college women (1988).

Relationships between college-aged women, in almost every case, are subordinated to and considered less important than their romantic relationships with men (Holland & Eisenhart 1988; Risman 1987). Their emphasis is placed on establishing connections with men, thereby making relationships with women peripheral and secondary (Holland & Eisenhart 1988). Women tend to put less effort into maintaining their friendships with women, spend less time with their

women friends, and overall describe their connections with women as weak compared to those with men (Holland & Eisenhart 1988).

Friendships among women that do develop tend to be competitive, male-focused, centered on men, and formed in the shadow of relationships with men (Eisenhart & Holland 1983). When they socialize, women typically talk about men, their own and other women's physical appearance, and social activities involving men (Eisenhart & Holland 1983). Researchers have found that women support each other in their efforts to find desirable mates, but once a romantic partner is found, they spend less and less time with their girlfriends, getting together only when their boyfriends are unavailable (Thorne 1993; Holland & Eisenhart 1988; Risman 1987). For many women college students, heterosexual relationships are primary and it seems that the rituals and desires of heterosexual romance undermine any possibility of true or genuine friendships among women (Thorne 1993; Holland & Eisenhart 1988; Risman 1987). Unity among sorority women is desired and expected, as long as it does not interfere with getting a keeping a boyfriend, in which case each actor calculates her best interests (Risman 1987).

Accordingly, sororities may be promoting superficial relationships (Marlowe & Auvenshine 1982), based on "calculated solidarity" (Risman 1987). The rituals and traditions that are intended to bring members closer together may end up fostering shallow friendships. According to Risman (1987), the sororal bond does not develop naturally; it is institutionalized and develops because the members are forced to be together. Friendships within sororities are formalized and made obligatory by "sisterhood" (Handler 1995). Sorority women are brought together through a vowed allegiance to a collectivity, and their connection is dependent upon, and non-existent when separated from, that vowed allegiance (Handler 1995). Within the sorority system, time with sisters is not prioritized or intentional. Again, sorority women eat together, walk to class together, share the same sleeping quarters, study together, attend the same meetings, and go to Greek

functions together; however, rarely do they *choose* to be together, for most seem to prefer to be with men (Holland & Eisenhart 1988).

Eisenhart & Holland (1983) found that the majority of all-women college peer groups are so consumed with the task of establishing and maintaining romantic relationships with men that they distract women from the learning process. Although women's peer cultures, especially those that are gender exclusive, should stimulate the development or elaboration of career-related identities, they do not; instead they are more likely to foster traditional, family-orientated identities for women (Eisenhart & Holland 1983). In a context that encourages romantic involvement and discourages academic pursuits, individual women find that preserving or expanding a commitment to academic excellence and securing a career is extremely difficult (Eisenhart & Holland 1983). All-woman college peer group cultures' focus on men competes with schoolwork and grades; women find that they must choose one or the other because boyfriends and homework do not mix (Eisenhart & Holland 1983). Being intelligent or "brainy" is looked down upon in this culture because it denotes a lack of interest in social life and it challenges the superiority of male intelligence (Eisenhart & Holland 1983). So instead of studying, single college women concentrate on keeping boyfriends and finding husbands. The hopes and dreams women bring with them to college – good grades, graduating with honors, and a successful career – are unfortunately not compelling enough to keep women from being lured away by the pull of the masculinist peer culture (Eisenhart & Holland 1983).

The hierarchy that exists among them may thwart any chance for a genuine relationship between women living in different houses. As previously mentioned, sororities are divided and ranked and then positioned on a prestige hierarchy. Greeks and non-Greeks, sorority members and fraternity members are aware of the hierarchy and the location of each house on this hierarchy (Risman 1987; Krain et al 1977), for the status differences between sororities are obvious, and nationally consistent (Risman 1987). Certain houses and their members are considered better

than others, and these sororities, as elitist, closed organizations, often train their members to feel superior to members of other sororities (Gerson 1969). Sorority alumni, active members and “rushees” take the sorority hierarchy very seriously. The sorority a woman pledges will delineate, at the very least, her social opportunities, for “placement in the Greek status hierarchy effectively defines the significant others with whom each individual will interact while in college” (Risman 1987).

Researchers have found that forming friendships with members of the popular crowd can be an important avenue for peer status for girls and young women; however, members of the popular crowd are typically not interested in associating with those they consider to be inferior and tend to avoid interactions with students of lower status, which leads to strong feelings of resentment and hatred (Eder 1985). Inevitably, a cycle of popularity develops in which feelings toward popular girls/young women move from positive to negative, eventually making them some of the least liked girls/young women on campus (Eder 1985). “Popular” girls/young women are seen as “snobbish” or “stuck-up” when they fail to respond to friendly initiations from less popular students, and although they are considered popular, these girls/young women are not always well liked (Eder 1985).

This “cycle of popularity” operates in the exclusive social sorority system as well, resulting in feelings of animosity and resentment among the different sororities and individual members. Indeed, evidence shows that women in low-status houses often consider high-status sororities and their members “snobbish,” “stuck up” or even “bitchy” (Risman 1987). The hierarchy that exists among the various sororities and the anger and bitterness that ensues prevents sorority women from uniting with each other across house boundaries.

“Rush,” the membership recruitment process, may also undermine genuine friendships between women by granting some women power over others, which enforces the hierarchies among them. Sororities are selective organizations--

membership is by invitation only, and invitations are extended only during rush (Handler 1995). Need less to say, not every woman who rushes a sorority are chosen; some women are rejected, and not being asked to join a particular sorority is a painful experience for women (Risman 1987).

Many consider the time set aside for the recruitment of new members insufficient. Most “fall rush” programs last only a week and occurs before class even begins. The first round of sorority fall rush involves house visits that last only 20 minutes each (<http://www.uga.edu/sororities/rush/process/>). Critics argue that it is unrealistic to expect that after one week on campus and a few short parties, a traditional-age first-year student knows enough about her values or needs and enough about the differences in missions, traditions, and practices of the various sororities to make an enlightened choice (Kuh & Lyons 1990). It is also unrealistic to expect that the sorority members know enough about the “rushees” to make informed decisions about whom they would want as “sisters.” In addition, regulations typically limit the discussions during rush parties to small talk. Topics like politics, religion, or sexuality are usually forbidden (Risman 1987). Although many sorority women express discomfort with the selectivity of rush, being asked to judge the value of women they do not know, and agree that they need more time, most believe rush is a necessary part of the system and have done little to change its procedure (Handler 1995; Risman 1987).

Without time to get to know the “rushees” or the opportunity to really talk to them, sorority members are forced to rely on superficial appearance, such as grooming and a friendly demeanor, to make their decision (Boynton-Arthur 1997; Handler 1995), thereby making image projection the essence of rush (Risman 1987). The rush process teaches a woman that the important ingredients for her success and ultimately, women’s success in general, are physical attractiveness, social skills, and social class (Risman 1987).

The rush process assigns some women the right to pick and choose, the authority to deem women appropriate or inappropriate. Rush teaches women a

hard lesson by reminding them that there are real consequences when they do not “fit-in,” when they are not attractive, sociable, and rich. It teaches women that they keep one another in line, for it is women who pass judgment and penalize those who fail to meet the standards (Risman 1987).

Exclusive sororities, especially those at the top of the hierarchy, maintain their status by expending considerable time, effort, and money to stage a “successful” rush. A successful rush is one that attracts the prettiest, most sociable, and wealthiest members (Boynton-Arthur 1997; Risman 1987), for the ranking of each sorority depends to a large extent on its desirability to men. Studies show that for women, attractiveness is the main source and indicator of prestige in peer cultures like the exclusive Greek system (Eisenhart & Holland 1983). Through the Greek system, women learn that their value depends not upon personal achievement in school or sports, but upon how they look to men (Risman 1987), so much so that getting positive attention from men takes precedence over all else. In their analysis of college women’s peer groups, Eisenhart & Holland (1983) found that for many women, it is “more desirable to be a fraternity sweetheart or a little sister than a sorority sister and more fun to support men’s sports as cheerleaders, majorettes, flag girls, managers, and even spectators than to be involved in women’s sports” (Eisenhart & Holland 1983).

Because their status is based on their attractiveness to men, sorority women are taught to think of women in other sororities as the enemy, as competitors for the approval and attention of men, as rivals (Risman 1987). Women are so concerned with how men see them in comparison to other women that it is often extremely difficult for them to trust one another (Eisenhart & Holland 1983). Collectively and individually, sorority women compete with each other for the most desirable “rushees” and for bids from fraternities (Risman 1987), and this competition can be intense.

The stereotypes associated with each sorority also serves to keep the organizations and their members apart by emphasizing within house homogeneity

and between-house heterogeneity (Krain et al. 1977). All the members of one house are seen as the same, and all the members of that house are seen as different from the members of the other houses (Krain et al. 1977). Sororities are stereotyped as the “party house,” the “goody-goody house,” the “brainy house,” or the “easy/slutty house” (Longino & Kart 1973), and the individual members are labeled according to the sorority with which they associate (Risman 1987).

These stereotypes are an integral part of the Greek social fabric, accepted by almost everyone in the Greek community, and in time, by the individual members themselves (Risman 1987). Sorority women are treated as typecasts of their organizations and are assumed to possess the characteristics of the group to which they belong (Risman 1987). Eventually, members internalize these stereotypes and begin to see themselves as truly “fitting-in” (Risman 1987). Because a woman’s personal identity is so intricately tied to her sorority, the organization a woman joins may have serious consequences for her self-image (Risman 1987). A woman affiliated with a house believed to have “easy” or promiscuous members, for example, may feel pressured by fraternity members to have sex and eventually come to see herself as a “slut.”

The difficulty sorority women have fostering and maintaining genuine friendships with each other is the product of male supremacist ideology that encourages women to believe they are valueless and obtain value only by relating to or bonding with men (hooks 1984). In patriarchal societies, women are taught that “our relationships with one another diminish rather than enrich our experience” (hooks 1984), that true satisfaction and happiness can only be found in our relationships with men and that friendships with women is a waste of time because it distracts us from what’s really important. We are taught that women are our “natural” enemies, as competitors for the attention and companionship of men (hooks 1984). We are taught that true sisterhood will never exist between women because “we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another” (hooks 1984).

Women are discouraged from coming together because solidarity amongst women is a perceived as a threat to patriarchy.

METHODS

After selecting a topic for this project, I almost immediately began to think about data collection. I considered doing an ethnographic study and was excited about what I could learn by being “a fly on the wall” of a sorority house. I abandoned this idea, however, because I suspected I would have difficulty gaining that kind of access to an organization so protective of its secrets. I briefly entertained the possibility of going back to my alma mater and doing some participatory research with own my sorority sisters, but then I realized this was impossible for financial reasons. I also thought about distributing surveys to all members of all twenty-six sororities on campus and then doing a statistical analysis of their responses. I decided against this, however, because that method would not have captured the detail I wanted to capture. Eventually, I decided to use semi-structured, open-ended interviews.

Interviews are one of the most, if not *the* most, popular qualitative research strategy used in social science. I chose this data collection strategy, in part (I hesitate to admit), because I was familiar with it – I had seen hundreds of examples of its use. I also chose this method because it is both structured and flexible. I needed some organization since this is my first independent research project, but I also wanted to give the women who participated in the study the room to talk freely. I wanted to be sure to ask the same questions of each participant, but I did not want our discussion limited by those questions. My hope was that the interview questions would serve as a guide, and I think they did. I opted to use this technique in part because it maximizes discovery and description, or in other words, it encourages and allows participants to speak for themselves. Fewer filters are particularly important for the study of women because for centuries, men have spoken for us (Reinharz 1992). Though they have a prominent presence on our nation’s college and university campuses, sorority women have been relatively silent in social science research and I thought it time they are given their voice. I

also wanted the sorority women who participated in this project to have a good experience. Women often find the interview process cathartic and are pleased to have been able to reflect on and re-evaluate their life experiences (England 1994), and I hoped my participants would feel the same way.

What follows is an in-depth look at some of the main principles of feminist research and a description of the various methods used by feminist researchers. Later in the chapter I describe this project, the participants, and the interviews.

Feminist Research

Feminist research was developed in response to the invisibility of women and girls within academia in general and the social sciences in particular (Gorelick 1996; Westkott 1979). Prior to the 1970s, the majority of social scientists were men – very few women were university or college professors of psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, political science and even fewer conducted and published scholarly work (Westkott 1979). Not surprisingly, women and girls were all but ignored as subjects of research - the small number of social scientists who studied women, distorted women's experiences (DeVault 1996; Worell 1996; Westkott 1979). Men and boys were typically the only subjects; conclusions about male behavior were presented and accepted as facts about human behavior. "Researchers and the populations they studied were disproportionately male; many of the topics they studied were related to stereotyped male concerns...and the results obtained with male samples were typically generalized to women as well" (Worell 1996). Not surprisingly, this reinforced a number of stereotypes about women (and men), legitimized by "science" (DeVault 1996; Dresser 1992; Westkott 1979).

To correct this bias and fill the enormous gaps within social science research, feminist academics of the 1970s embarked on what Barbara DuBois (1983) calls "an archaeological endeavor." Scholars of all disciplines worked to

recover what had been ignored and misrepresented by traditional social science (DuBois 1983). This was a time of “excavation” (DeVault 1996), of reclaiming that which had been previously disregarded and distorted (Gilbert 1994). What resulted was an extraordinary amount of work on the lives and experiences of women and girls (Stacey & Thorne 1985). Thousands of books, journals and articles were written (Worell & Etaugh 1994; Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983).

Eventually, however, feminist scholars realized that women and girls had been left out for a reason (Stacey & Thorne 1985). The inaccuracies that characterized most social science research were consequences of more than a mere preference for men. Feminists realized that the paradigms surrounding traditional social science are androcentric and therefore, fundamentally flawed for gathering information about women (or men) (Eichler 1997; Worell 1996; Gilbert 1994; Stacey & Thorne 1985; DuBois 1983). The theories framing the traditional approach for measuring and interpreting human behavior were developed by men, with only men in mind, and when early feminist scholars attempted to use this approach to understand women’s experiences, they ran into problems (Grant, Ward & Rong 1987). Scholars quickly learned that women’s “round lives” do not fit in the “square holes” of a male-defined and male-centered social science (Edwards 1990).

Elizabeth Anderson (1995) defines androcentrism as the taking of males, men’s lives, boys, and masculinity to be the standard for all people. Females, women’s lives, girls, and femininity through such a lens are seen as deviant (Anderson 1995). When the concept of human as a universal category is actually a generalization of the [white, upper-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, Western] male experience applied to the other members of the human population, “woman” becomes “an abstract deviation of this essential humanity” – androcentrism denies the wholeness of women - instead she is a “partial man” or the “negative image of man” (Westkott 1979). Simply put, if men are the norm and women are the opposite of men, women are not normal.

Replacing men with women as the subject of social science research, though revolutionary during the 1970s, was not enough - the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of social science required restructuring and rebuilding (Stacey & Thorne 1985). Supplementing the existing body of work by addressing what had been left out and overlooked and turning women's issues from socially irrelevant to relevant was just the beginning.

By choosing the 'adding-on' approach we assume that our environment emits the same signals for women and men, has the same bearing on women's and men's lives and that the answers it elicits in women are comparable to the answers it elicits in men. Such thinking represents an 'equal-rights-philosophy' which completely ignores the fact that not only was our past man-made, but that our present still is...(Duelli Klein & Bowles 1983).

The aim of some contemporary research continues to be "to bring women in" (DeVault 1996), however, feminist scholars now differentiate research *about* or *on* women from research *for* women (Smith 1974). Research for women, or what is commonly referred to as feminist research, is designed to do more than make women's social science an addendum (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983; Smith 1974). Research for women, as a relative of the feminist movement, describes *and* challenges the oppression of women (Gorelick 1996).

What precisely constitutes feminist research is debated (Worell 1996; Small 1995; Gilbert 1994), even though feminists in academia have now been doing feminist research for a few decades. Some argue that the difficulty in formulating a closed concept of feminist research is related to a discrepancy in how it is theorized and how it is practiced (Gilbert 1994; Cook & Fonow 1986). Feminist research is often presented as a number of assertions about social reality and the purpose of social science, yet many struggle to incorporate all of these concepts into their research projects (Cook & Fonow 1986).

What I have come to realize is feminist research is not just a set of data collection strategies, nor is it the process by which we "know" and understand the

experiences of women and girls. It is not merely an appreciation of and reliance upon the power of knowledge. It is not just a means to an end. It is all of this, yet the ways these concepts and strategies are combined varies by discipline, by feminist, and by project. I do not consider the variability of feminist research a limitation. On the contrary, its diversity is perhaps its greatest strength. Research for women is not fixed – there is no formula or model. Feminist scholars have intentionally avoided the mistake made by many of their academic brothers: absent from feminist epistemology and methodology is the insistence upon *one and only one* method of inquiry. At the core of research for women is a rejection of the belief that one “Truth,” one authority, and one path leads to the acquisition of “pure” knowledge (Stivers 1993; Reinharz 1992; Edwards 1990; Spender 1985). Instead of orthodoxy, feminist research embraces plurality (Reinharz 1992), for there are as many approaches to feminist research as there are feminists (Worell 1996; DeVault 1996; Worell & Etaugh 1994).

Before discussing what I consider to be some of the main principles of feminist research, it is necessary to define epistemology, methodology, method, and [feminist] research. According to Sandra Harding (1987), it is particularly important to differentiate between methods and methodology within the context of feminist research since there tends to be confusion along these lines. Much of the discussion about feminist methods is, in actuality, about methodology or epistemology (Harding 1987). This is notable because methodology and epistemology are what distinguish feminist from non-feminist research (Harding 1987). In the simplest of terms, epistemology is the study or a theory of knowledge, of what we can know and how we come to know (Eichler 1997; DeVault 1996). Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind is an analysis of what the authors call a women's epistemology, for example (Belenky et al 1997). According to the authors of Women's Way of Knowing, women think more intuitively and contextually than men, are more emotionally engaged in the learning process, and are more concerned with

particulars than abstractions (Belenky et al 1997). A methodology is an expectation of how research should proceed – it is a guide for researchers during every stage of the research process (Gilbert 1994). Methods are techniques for gathering evidence and/or the tools and procedures used within a discipline for conducting research and attaining knowledge, i.e., survey, questionnaire, observation, etc. (DeVault 1996; Gilbert 1994). Finally, I will use the term “research” to refer to all three of these concepts combined. Research is a broad category that includes both the framework for projects (epistemology and methodology) and the projects themselves (methods) (Gilbert 1994).

Feminist research does not impose a formula for conducting research (DeVault 1990) and feminists often disagree quite vehemently about the usefulness of one research strategy versus another, yet several epistemological and methodological assumptions within feminist research have been identified. Feminist scholars do not speak with one voice, but the majority agrees on a set of principles:

- 1) Recognition of gender, race, class, etc. as emergent features of social life
- 2) A focus on the experiences and lives of women
- 3) Challenging the tenets of traditional social science
- 4) A concern for the ethical implications of research
- 5) An emphasis on scholarly research as an impetus for social change (Worell & Etaugh 1994; Cook & Fonow 1986)

To compile this list, feminist psychologists Judith Worell and Claire Etaugh (1994) surveyed relevant literature from the fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, history, physics, and biology and looked for trends and themes. These principles tend to interconnect and overlap, but in the next several pages, I will elaborate on each of them one by one.

A Recognition of Gender, Race and Class as Emergent Features of Social Life

Central to feminism, Women Studies and feminist research is the belief in the significance of gender as a dynamic feature of social situations (Worell & Etaugh 1994). Gender is conceptualized “both an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society” (West & Zimmerman 1987; Stacey and Thorne 1985). Feminist researchers recognize that stereotypical female characteristics (e.g. passivity, nurturance, weakness, dependence)—what has been presented as a natural explanation for why it is a man’s world—are actually framed by (and used to support) the politics of power (Worell & Etaugh 1994). Gender is institutional and the status of women in our society is based upon the unequal distribution of power within our institutions, not on the assumed deficiencies of women (Worell & Etaugh 1994).

Attending to gender as a basic feature of all social life can take several forms within the context of research (Cook & Fonow 1986). One way is by identifying the participants of a social science research project as socially constructed beings and recognizing that the participants’ gender, race, class, age, sexual orientation, etc. shape their lives, the meanings they assign to their life experiences, and thus, the research project (Worell & Etaugh 1994; Cook & Fonow 1986). A woman’s “place” in society – her opportunities and her limitations and thus, her experiences – must be viewed in relation to the social placement of women, people of color, the poor, the alter-abled and other disadvantaged people (Zinn, Cannon, Higginbotham & Dill 1986; Stacey & Thorne 1985; Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983). As systems of oppression – racism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, and ageism –

intersect and implicate virtually everyone (at least in U.S. society), since everyone stands on one or the other side of these axes of oppression and privilege. Therefore, every piece of research must include an analysis of the specific social location of the women involved in the study with respect to these various systems of oppression. (Gorelick 1996)

Beliefs, attitudes, and behavior are conditional and contextual, and we need to acknowledge the social systems in which they are embedded (Small 1995; Stanley & Wise 1983). Although feminist researchers view women (and men) as active participants in their own “destiny” and more importantly, co-creators of the social worlds in which we live, that activity is not isolated (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983). Feminist social scientists believe that “the self” is a social self, “the individual” is a member of a society, and we are all social beings (Stanley & Wise 1983).

“Locating” the participants in the project also involves understanding that their feelings and opinions will affect the outcome. Participants are not simply warehouses of information waiting to be unloaded onto questionnaires, surveys, interview tapes, etc. (Stanley & Wise 1979) They too are emotionally involved in the project, at least to some extent.

[Participants] may like, dislike, sexually desire, or despise the researcher. They will most certainly construct their own theory about both the research topic and the theory held by the researcher and supply information accordingly. They may seek to preserve face or to present themselves differently to the researcher than to others. All these and other activities by the researched will affect, not only the presentation of self to the research, but also how the researcher feels about given events, situations and personalities, interprets what has and is occurring, and views the general social context in which the interaction between researched and researcher occurs. (Stanley & Wise 1979)

Similarly, a researcher must be honest about her “place” in our social world and be conscientious of its affect on the research. To the project she brings her social location, culture, motivations, limitations, ignorance, skills, education,

resources, familiarity with feminist theory and methodology, and an outside perspective that may be useful or counterproductive (Gorelick 1996). A researcher should make explicit her reasons for pursuing the topic at hand and how her social location, culture, motivations, limitations, etc. impact the methodology, the data collection strategy, the analysis, and the write-up (Edwards 1990).

Analyzing the influence of socially constructed concepts (like gender) on the production of knowledge is indeed one of the key principles of feminist research. Feminist researchers ponder how history, economics and medicine would be different if we viewed war and politics, economic trends, and sickness and health from the standpoint of women rather than men's lives (Anderson 1995). Feminists in academia reflect on the ways the feminist movement has changed science and presentation and interpretation of science (Anderson 1995). Feminist researchers also consider what impact the "injustices toward women students and researchers have had on the content, shape, and progress of theoretical knowledge" and what impact the equal representation and status of women researchers would make to theoretical inquiry (Anderson 1995).

A Focus on the Experiences and Lives of Women

Women and all that encompass our worlds are put on center in many feminist projects (Cook & Fonow 1986; Stacey & Thorne 1985). Issues that are particularly relevant to women are regularly explored – for Western women such issues include sexual assault, incest, sexual harassment, domestic violence, reproductive rights, childcare, body image, employment segregation and discrimination, racism, and sexuality (Worell & Etaugh 1994, 1996; Small 1995; Westkott 1979). That which has traditionally been considered "personal" or "private" is also examined. Since the bulk of feminist theory and practice either states or implies that the personal is political, it follows that the details of women's lives would interest feminist researchers (Stanley & Wise 1983).

Prior to the feminist revolution within social science, women exclusive space was trivialized or completely ignored, except when it posed or appeared to pose a threat to men or patriarchy. Yet, within feminist scholarship, women-exclusive space is highly regarded. Sewing circles, lesbian communities, Wiccan covens, women's professional cooperatives, feminist organizations, and sororities are examined. Women's individual space is also honored. Participants of feminist research projects are often studied within the contexts of their own lives - in their home, place of business, or place of worship - outside the confines and rigidity of laboratories and other research facilities (Worell & Etaugh 1994).

A woman-centered approach also includes a critical analysis of misogynistic attitudes and stereotypes about women of color, poor women, and lesbian women, and the hateful acts that are motivated by these stereotypes. Feminist researchers have measured and analyzed the rape myth, horizontal hostility, and the false notion of reverse racism (Worell & Etaugh 1994). This point touches on one of the main goals, if not *the* main goal, of feminist research: the liberation of women. Many feminists and other social activists entered the academic arena on a "special mission" (Zinn, Cannon, Higginbotham & Dill 1986). They believed and still believe, or at least hope, that once illuminated, the life truths of the under-privileged and oppressed will lead to social change (Zinn, Cannon, Higginbotham & Dill 1986). Scholars seeking to make change "use the tools of history and social science and the media of literature and the arts to improve our people's future and more accurately portray our past" (Zinn, Cannon, Higginbotham & Dill 1986). More later.

Some feminists argue that making the experiences of women and girls the exclusive focus of feminist research is dangerous and may limit what feminist research is able to accomplish (Gilbert 1994; Cook & Fonow 1986; Stanley & Wise 1979). According to Stanley and Wise (1979), feminist research should be concerned with all aspects of social reality and all participants in it. The oppression of women, after all, involves men. Though the subject of inquiry and analysis in

feminist research continues to be women, girls and their experiences, recently there has been an increase of feminist work involving men.

Challenging the Tenets of Traditional Social Science

A critique of traditional social science is the third component of research for women. A feminist scholar may not take the time in every research proposal or every article to explain why she has abandoned the traditional notion of objectivity, for example, yet she, like many other feminists in academia, is committed to making sure that participants are treated fairly. Feminists object to the belief in a universal body of knowledge that can be generalized across all settings, people and time (Small 1995). Unlike many traditional social scientists, feminist researchers use a wide range of methods including qualitative, ethnographic and action-oriented (Worell & Etaugh 1994). Feminist researchers extend the populations studied beyond white, middle class, young, heterosexual men and women and study populations that are relevant to the questions being asked (Worell & Etaugh 1994). Traditional social scientists also assume that our social world, like our physical world, can be divided, reduced and its parts studied independently of the others, and feminist researchers oppose this assumption (Small 1995). In this section I will expand on the issue of objectivity.

In the simplest of terms, objectivity is the separation of the knower from the known (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983) though feminists and other critics of traditional social science have equated objectivity with everything from patriarchal means of control to emotional detachment, decontextualization, and quantitative methods (Eichler 1997). A strict dichotomy between the subject and object is a prerequisite for objectivity, and the subject-object dichotomy refers to the separation of the person conducting research from the person or persons about whom the knowledge is being developed (England 1994; Stanley & Wise 1983; Westkott 1979; Smith 1974). To the objective social scientist, the topic of inquiry

is regarded as any other phenomena, i.e. volcanic eruptions, the migration patterns of Canadian geese, or the prolonged effects of second-hand smoke (Westcott 1979). The researcher is merely an observer and is always on guard not to let his feelings *infect* the research – to get a clear view, he must stand back from the object of study and look at it dispassionately and without prejudice (Stanley & Wise 1983; Westcott 1979). The idea is to remove the observer/researcher's particular point of view from the research process so that his subjectivity will not distort the results (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983).

Objectivity is supported by methods that grant the researcher complete control over the passive research subjects and the research process (England 1994; Smith 1974). Consequently, participants are robbed of their knowledge and their power and a hierarchy between the researcher and the participants is established. This hierarchy places the researcher in a position of power and privilege and often results in the oppression of women (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983; Cook & Fonow 1986). Implicit or explicit within traditional social science theory is the justification for the unequal power relationship between “researcher” and “researched.” The researcher is seen as more competent and better equipped to understand the nuances and details of people's lives than the people who live those lives, because he is more objective (Stanley & Wise 1983). Feminist social scientists reject the idea that researchers can become experts in the lives of other people (Stanley & Wise 1983). One of the goals of feminist research is to treat the participants as knowers in their own right rather than *objects* of scrutiny and manipulation (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983). Research participants should be treated like people and not “as mere mines of information to be exploited by the researcher as the neutral collector of ‘facts’” (Stanley & Wise 1983).

Feminists also reject the notion of objectivity because of the strong and historically pervasive associations between it and masculinity and science and masculinity. Scientific thought, characterized by a disassociation of the knower from what is known, is male thought (Fox Keller 1978). In “Gender and Science,”

Evelyn Fox Keller (1978) argues that the identification of science with masculinity is most obvious in the language and metaphors we use to describe science. The natural and physical sciences, for example, are considered “hard” and the social sciences and humanities are described as “soft” (Anderson 1995; Fox Keller 1978). When we nickname physics, mathematics and chemistry “hard” as opposed to “soft” meaning subjective, interpretative and less prestigious, we implicitly invoke a sexual metaphor, in which “hard” is, of course, masculine and “soft,” feminine (Fox Keller 1978). What simultaneously occur are the maintenance of the gender bias within science and the legitimizing of sexism by science.

Not only is objectivity problematic, it is *impossible*, according to many feminist scholars. The research act is molded by social, economic, and political forces (Nebraska Feminist Collective 1983) – it does not exist or proceed in a vacuum. No science, including social science, is value-free, for science is conducted by scientists and shaped by our society (Gilbert 1994; DuBois 1983; Fox Keller 1978). “There is no such thing as removing the observer from the knowledge acquisition process, since to do so would be like trying to see without eyes” (Stivers 1993). All research is “grounded,” because no researcher can separate herself from her personhood (Stanley & Wise 1979). “The only way of knowing a socially constructed world is knowing it from within. We can never stand outside it. Even to be a stranger is to enter a world constituted from within as strange. The strangeness itself is the mode in which it is experienced” (Smith 1974). Raw data cannot speak for itself as all data requires categorization and evaluation (Worell & Etaugh 1994). The social world enters into and shapes every facet of a researcher’s work, including the questions she poses, her approach to those questions, and the meaning she extrapolates from the findings (DuBois 1983).

Since abandoning objectivity, feminists have reconsidered the relationship between the researcher and the participants and sought new ways to involve the participants in the research process and validate their experience and knowledge (Stacey & Thorne 1985). As opposed to neutrality and inequality, feminist scholars

have tried to design research processes that facilitate egalitarian, reciprocal relationships between the researcher and those whose lives is the research – mutuality rather than dichotomy is the goal (Bloom 1997; Gilbert 1994; Mies 1983). Feminist researchers view their participants as active, self-reflexive individuals who are experts of their own lives and who should, therefore, play a critical role in every phase of the project (Small 1995; Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983). Work of this kind strives to be interactive, a dialogue between the researcher, the participants, and the research process (Duelli Klein & Bowles 1983).

Non-participatory feminist researchers also claim to have been successful in establishing reciprocal relationships within the research context. Janet Finch (1984) for example, describes the ease with which she earned the trust of her participants and later formed friendships with them. She attributes their connection to the fact that she and her participants are women. Finch does not seem to argue that only women should interview women and only men should interview men, but she does maintain that she and her participants' shared subordinate structural position as women is what set the stage for a mutual exchange (Finch 1984). Women are almost always willing to talk to a woman researcher, particularly if she is friendly, guarantees confidentiality, and takes the time to listen, according to Finch (1984). Many women lack the opportunity to engage collectively with other women, and they welcome the chance to reflect on their experiences with a woman interviewer who provides the empathy, support and understanding they need and want (Finch 1984).

In the setting of the interviewee's own home, an interview conducted in an informal way by another woman can easily take on the character of an intimate conversation. The interviewee feels quite comfortable with this precisely because the interviewer is acting as a friendly guest, not an official inquisitor; and the model is, in effect, an easy, intimate relationship between two women. (Finch 1984)

Other researchers, however, strongly disagree with Finch and insist that gender alone is insufficient – a shared identity as women does not guarantee a successful interview or an egalitarian relationship between researcher and participant. I will go into more detail on this point later in the chapter.

A Concern for the Ethical Implications of Research

Working to establish such a relationship is one way that feminist researchers express their deep concern with the ethical issues that inevitably arise when human beings participate in a project. This concern is the fourth component of feminist research. Historically, traditional social scientists have paid little or no attention to the patriarchal system underlying and influencing their work (Nebraska Feminist Collective 1983), but contemporary feminist scholars strongly believe we are obligated to be up-front about our motivations as researchers and be conscientious of the impact of the research process on the participants.

Feminists seek a science that minimizes harm and control in the research process. In response to the observation that researchers have often exploited or harmed women participants, and that scientific knowledge has sustained systematic oppressions of women, feminist methodologists have searched for practices that will minimize harm to women and limit negative consequences. (DeVault 1996)

Recognizing that the research participants are subjects in their own right demands that researchers take care not to make the research experience exploitative or harmful – “research that aims to be liberating should not in the process become only another mode of oppression” (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983). Participants must not be regarded as data-generators or “passive recorders of social reality” (Westcott 1979). “To presume that a researcher can ‘take the data and run’ is inappropriate. In particular, when the subject matter has been traumatic (as well may be the case, since a significant portion of feminist research deals with such

issues as abuse, incest, rape and other traumatic events), such an approach is generally identified as unacceptable” (Eichler 1997).

What constitutes a feminist ethic? How is this accomplished within a research setting? I use the term “ethic” to refer to the “general nature of the morals, rules and standards governing the conduct and choices of individuals as well as members of a profession” (The Nebraska Feminist Collective 1983). A feminist ethic, in addition, considers the consequences of scientific theory and research for women and girls. The Nebraska Feminist Collective (1983) insists that feminist researchers must:

- 1) Maintain a balance between the means and ends of social science research
- 2) Confront the racist, imperialist, classist, heterosexist, and sexist assumptions prevalent in the research agenda
- 3) Combat patriarchal and masculinist structures inside and outside the academy

In the next few paragraphs I will describe some of the “rules” that feminist scholars should follow while conducting research.

According to Eichler (1997), the most significant issue for feminists concerned with the ethical implications of the research act is whether certain topics should be studied at all, and if so, by whom? “There is a substantial feminist critique that argues that certain matters should not be researched, in particular, genetic engineering of humans. Other examples include mind control research, research that is oriented towards ‘better’ weapons systems development, towards suppressing dissent, etc.” (Eichler 1997).

The second aspect of a feminist ethic in social science research is the use of non-sexist language (Small 1995). Feminist scholars recognize the potential of language to distort and/or discount individual’s experiences, particularly the experiences of the disadvantaged or oppressed (Small 1995). Language both frames and symbolizes our thoughts, attitudes and beliefs (Worell & Etaugh 1994) and we must, therefore, choose our words carefully. The generic use of “man,”

“mankind” and “he” illustrate our culture’s tendency to glorify men and masculinity (Nebraska Feminist Collective 1983). The use of “mankind” in lieu of “humanity,” has helped to create and perpetuate an environment in which a segment of the population has spoken, literally and figuratively, for all of us. For many decades, social scientists and other academics have used masculine pronouns universally (Cook & Fonow 1986) – many continue to do so in fact, and feminists oppose this (Worell & Etaugh 1994).

To combat the damaging effects of sexist language, most feminist scholars choose gender-neutral language and alternative speaking/writing styles (Small 1995; Cook & Fonow 1986). Syntax is power-driven, and to demonstrate this many reverse the obligatory ordering of female/male, girl/boy, women/men, feminine/masculine, and she/he in lectures and published work (Worell & Etaugh 1994). Some have changed the spelling, and thus the meaning, of certain words in response to the *history* of sexism in the English language - for example, wimmin or womyn are common substitutes for “women” (The Nebraska Feminist Collective 1983).

Other feminist scholars confront the abuse of language by speaking and writing in ways that can be understood by a wider audience of women (The Nebraska Feminist Collective 1983). To empower women, feminist research must be accessible to women; thus, feminist scholars are accountable for the presentation of their research (Duelli Klein & Bowles 1983). They are obligated to write and speak in plain and comprehensible language and avoid excessive use of feminist esoteric jargon (Duelli Klein & Bowles 1983). Complicated theoretical concepts should to be de-mystified, clearly defined. Feminist scholars must also take into consideration whether their findings have practical value and are of interest to others outside of academia. If so, then they have a responsibility to translate and share their findings with those who might benefit (Small 1995). This may be accomplished through bilingualism in journal articles, abstracts, and course syllabi or sliding fees to the less financially fortunate wishing to attend Women Studies

conferences (The Nebraska Feminist Collective 1983). Unfortunately, however, logistical constraints, limited resources, etc. can make this difficult and consequently, most academic research is read by academics. Too often feminist scholars “preach to the choir” and fail to reach more than a very small number of women – those writing the grants and conducting the research are the same women attending the conferences and teaching the courses.

Feminist scholars concerned with the ethical implications of research are careful not to disrupt relationships that are personally satisfying to the participants or in some cases, materially necessary for survival, even when its believed to be in the participants’ “best interests” (Cook & Fonow 1986). Researchers must resist the temptation to intervene in the private lives of their participants – being an advocate for women does not grant researchers the right to force a woman to do something she does not want to do or is not ready to do (Cook & Fonow 1986). This is more likely to become an issue when participants are being physical, mentally, emotionally, and/or sexually abused (i.e. victims of domestic violence or women suffering from an eating disorder).

A feminist ethic also requires that gate-keeping practices be closely monitored, particularly those that hinder or prevent the publication and dissemination of feminist research through “mainstream” sociological channels (Cook & Fonow 1986). Journal publication policies, for example, operate under the rhetoric of a “standard of excellence” that is apolitical, objective and just (Nebraska Feminist Collective 1983); however, a closer look reveals that many of the editors and review boards of highly reputable social science journals are biased towards male researchers and/or research conducted in the traditional approach.

Research as an Impetus for Social Change

The final, and perhaps the most important, aspect of research for women is the recognition of the power of knowledge to transform individuals and society (Cook & Fonow 1986).

Feminist research is aimed at promoting the feminist agenda by challenging male dominance and advocating the social, political, and economic equality of men and women. It does this by using knowledge to create social change that will emancipate women and enhance their lives. (Small 1995)

The purpose of feminist research is to analyze and document the oppression of women and to support the struggle to eliminate the institutions that legitimize and perpetuate that oppression (Worell & Etaugh 1994; Gilbert 1994; Patai 1983; Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983). Women Studies and feminist research, as the academic thread of the feminist movement, were never intended to be purely academic endeavors, restricted to the ivory towers of universities and research institutes, uninvolved in political and social struggle (Mies 1983). What makes feminist research, feminist, is its contribution to the fight for women's liberation (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983).

Women (and members of other marginalized groups) are thought to inhabit the world with a "double consciousness" or "double vision of reality" which develops as a result of being *in* society but not *of* society (Cook & Fonow 1986; Stanley & Wise 1983; DuBois 1983). Women work, vote, purchase goods and services, attend church, pay taxes, etc. but our society is not ours – it is the domain of men, created and ruled by men (Westkott 1979). This unique vision or perspective puts women in an exceptional position for understanding social interactions, institutions and processes. Women in general and women scholars in particular, as both "insiders" and "outsiders," can see "the bigger picture" more clearly (Westkott 1979).

When women realize that we are simultaneously immersed in and estranged from both our own particular discipline and the Western intellectual tradition generally, a personal tension develops that informs the critical dialogue. This tension, rooted in the contradiction of women's belonging and not belonging, provides the basis for knowing deeply and personally that which we criticize. (Westkott 1979)

Through this double vision, women view the social system in a new and different way at the same time that we see it in the old way, “enabling us to understand the seemingly endless contradictions present within life” (Cook & Fonow 1986; Stanley & Wise 1985). The ability to penetrate the generally accepted interpretations of reality and comprehend contrary forces places women in a position to more accurately name, describe, and define our experiences, in essence to re-conceptualize social reality (Cook & Fonow 1986).

Some feminist scholars use consciousness-raising as a data collection strategy, and in this capacity, consciousness-raising serves as a direct link between academic feminism and activist feminism (Cook & Fonow 1986; Stanley & Wise 1985; Mies 1983; Reinharz 1983). Consciousness-raising is the heart of the women’s movement in the United States (DeVault 1996; Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983), and it is an important venue for women intellectually and socially. In various settings, small groups of women talk, analyze, and act. Consciousness-raising is fundamentally empirical, and it challenges traditional ways of knowing by allowing women to learn from one another (DeVault 1996).

Through various consciousness-raising techniques (i.e. role playing, “rap groups”, simulations, and psycho-drama) feminist researchers help participants find a collective consciousness (Cook & Fonow 1986). The realizations, breakthroughs, dialogue and interaction serve as the data source for the project and more importantly, affirms the participants’ experiences. This process can be quite rewarding because it offers validation (Reinharz 1983). The notion of consciousness is important in a framework like feminist epistemology that views individuals as actors who can affect their own situations. Systematic oppression limits our ability to participate in our own lives in part, by convincing us that we are powerless (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983). Consciousness-raising experiences are often eye-opening and life-changing for women. When “normal” lives are ruptured, the “naturalness” of patriarchy is de-mystified and women are empowered (Cook & Fonow 1986). The hope is that a feminist research project

will help women understand that other women have similar experiences and that those experiences have social origins (Cook & Fonow 1986; Mies 1983).

Researchers can be of assistance here by lending an analysis of how the personal is political and by pushing the focus of the research project beyond individual experience to an understanding of how the everyday worlds of women generate and are generated by the larger social structure (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983).

Although feminist research is the focus of this chapter and this project, I wish to point out that feminists are not the only social scientists committed to social change – there are other research approaches that are highly political in nature and that share a commitment to using knowledge for good. For a thorough description of the various types of action-oriented research, see “Action-Oriented Research: Models and Methods” by Stephen A. Small, 1995.

The Challenges of Feminist Research

Unfortunately, the goals of feminist research can be difficult to achieve (Bloom 1997; Gilbert 1994; Cook & Fonow 1986). Geographer Melissa Gilbert (1994) for example, describes her interview experience with low-income Latina, white, African American and Vietnamese women.

I had an explicitly feminist and anti-racist research agenda, I used a research method that saw the women I interviewed as collaborators, and I was attempting to ‘give back’ to the women through forwarding information, listening to and validating their life stories, and acting as a facilitator for a support group. Despite my attempts to use a feminist methodology, I still felt uneasy. I recognized the material inequality...and was uncomfortable with my relationship with the women I interviewed and with my rationalization that I was ‘giving back to them directly. (Gilbert 1994).

Those who have tried and failed to incorporate all of the feminist principles in the field point to various obstacles centering around three issues. Many reject the concept of “universal woman” upon which much of Western feminism is rooted. Feminist researchers also have difficulty establishing egalitarian relationships with

their participants. Others are not convinced that feminist research generates the social, political and economic changes needed to improve the lives of women (Gilbert 1994).

Scholars like Janet Finch (1984) and Ann Oakley (1991) insist that something very special happens when both the knower and the known are women. Because of their connection as women, women researchers have an “insider’s” view with women participants. Their shared identity turns the exchange of information between researcher and participant into a friendly, easy discussion between two women. In the past two decades, however, some feminists have become critical of this view and argue that gender is not enough to establish an egalitarian relationship between researcher and participant (Gorelick 1996; Reay 1995; Riessman 1987). The idea of a single female identity and the methodology built upon it is a fraud in a world divided by race, class, sexual orientation, etc. (Patai 1994). Our focus on gender gave many of us the mistaken impression that gender is the *only* category of analysis or the most important category of analysis.

Western feminism, feminist theory and feminist research falsely universalized the category of “woman.” An assumption of commonality was based on a label, but unfortunately, the label that helps to define women as women also masks the important differences *between* women (Hauser 1997). The experience of white, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, European and American women was equated with women’s experience – what was true of one small part of the population was generalized to all others (Gilbert 1994; Edwards 1990; Zinn, Cannon, Higginbotham & Dill 1986; Stacey & Thorne 1985). Until the late 1980s, women of color, poor women, lesbian and bisexual women, disabled women, elderly women, Cuban women, Lebanese women, Native American women, and other non-Western women were all but hidden in feminist scholarship, made invisible by the erroneous notion of “universal womanhood” (Zinn, Cannon, Higginbotham & Dill 1986). In effort to emphasize the shared experiences of

sexism and unify women in a common struggle, feminist activists and feminist scholars more-or-less ignored the diversity of women's experience (Eichler 1997).

Most contemporary white, middle-class, Western feminists now realize that speaking for others – even for other women – is arrogant, vain, unethical and dangerous (Alcoff 1994). Most recognize the terrible mistake we made in assuming that all the individuals in the world called “women” are exactly like us (Martin 1994). We must recognize and appreciate the multiplicity of women's experiences, and the differences between women need to be explored as seriously as we have treated the differences between women and men (Gilbert 1994; Edwards 1990). “Feminist discourse needs to be restructured around plural themes and voices that recognize differences among women based on their nationality, ethnicity, economic class, sexuality, etc., as well as the commonalities between given politically oppressed groups” (McCluskey 1994). We need an analysis of racism and sexism from the standpoint of women of color, classism and sexism from the standpoint of working-class women, and heterosexism and sexism from the standpoint of lesbians and bisexual women (Gorelick 1996). After all, the creation of Women Studies, African American Studies, Native American Studies and Gay and Lesbian Studies departments were founded on the belief that the study of and advocacy for the oppressed should be done by the oppressed themselves (Alcoff 1994).

The second component of research for women that many scholars find idealistic and unrealistic is the egalitarian relationship between investigator and participant. Unlike traditional researchers aiming for pure objectivity, feminists strive to establish a shared rapport with those whose lives are the focus of the research. However, many have come to realize that is easier said than done for embedded in the research act is an inequity (Bloom 1997; Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983).

Recognizing and deconstructing the power relationships that constrain women from full participation in our society has been

important part of the feminist agenda...When women take positions in relationship to other women, we define those relationships as reciprocal, collaborative, equitable. However, when we consider the context of the relationships, one participant is invariably positioned *above* the other. (Hauser 1997)

Forming a mutual, reciprocal, non-hierarchical relationship between the investigator and the participants is much easier said than done, and the goal to turn the research process into an ongoing dialogue, while worthy, is difficult (Gilbert 1994; Stacey 1994). The actual level of participation on the part of the participants varies a great deal in feminist research – some participants of some projects are involved from the beginning to the end and others, however, are much less involved, scarcely doing more than answering a few questions. Feminist researchers argue that we need to treat women as actors and knowers, not objects of research, yet many have found that objectification may be unavoidable, that some level of objectification is always present in the research process (Gilbert 1994; England 1994; Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983).

Minimizing the power differentials between the investigator and the research participants becomes more complicated during the analysis phase of the project. Feminist researchers, whether we want to or not, assume the power to define (Hauser 1997; Gorelick 1996; Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983). The act of summarizing another person's life, comparing and contrasting it with other people's lives, and organizing it within a pre-determined context is an act of objectification (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983). Objectification may be lessened and the emancipatory goal of feminist research furthered if both the researcher and researched participated in the analysis and interpretation of the data, but unfortunately, this is not always possible or practical (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983).

Research that strives to be liberating ought not in the process become another source of oppression, but "ultimately the researcher must objectify the experience of the researched, must translate that experience into more abstract and

general terms if an analysis that links the individual to processes outside her immediate social world is to be achieved” (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983). Power does not automatically lie with the researcher, but it *usually* does because the researcher, as the editor/publisher, has control over the story, not the storytellers (Hauser 1997). Although feminist scholars regularly take steps to avoid misrepresenting the research participants and may quote them at length, the researcher retains authority for it is she who ultimately chooses which participants to quote and therefore, whose “voices” are heard (England 1994).

Unfortunately, merely recognizing or being sensitive to these power relations is not enough to remove them (England 1994). Even for feminists, the project is almost always about the researcher’s agenda, rather than that of the participants (Reay 1995). “The research process positions participants not simply as partners in a research exchange, but also as means to research ends” (Reay 1995). Even when participants are encouraged to take the lead, researchers retain the power of redirection. Researchers ultimately decide which issues are worth exploring and thus, what way the project will go (Reay 1995). It is the researcher, rather than the researched, who owns the project (Reay 1995). At the end of the interview, for example, it is the researcher, not the participant, who walks away with what she wanted: at least an hour, maybe more, of interview data (Reay 1995).

Other scholars doubt that feminist research can eliminate the social, political and economic structures that put women at a disadvantage (Gilbert 1994). A common assumption is that the participants get something out of the research: the opportunity to tell their stories, an entry into history, a trip down memory lane, or perhaps the chance to exercise some editorial control over an academic project (Gilbert 1994). Although this may be true, these benefits do not challenge the inequalities on which the entire process rests (Patai 1994). “A sisterly posture of mutual learning and genuine dialogue,” does not challenge the imbalance of power, “for we continue to function in an over-determined universe in which our respective roles ensure that *other* people are always the subject of *our* research,

almost never the reverse” (Patai 1994). Critics like Daphne Patai (1994) argue that feminist research may improve the lives of the small number of women who participate in projects, but it does little to transform the system that made those women participants rather than researchers, waitresses rather than college professors.

Others question just how often research participants realize the source of their oppression and leave the interview prepared to change their individual situation. Sexism may be deeply internalized, buried beneath the conscious level, and this internalization can make it hard for participants to gain new insights and take action (Gorelick 1996). Consciousness raising techniques enable women to give voice to knowledge that they did not know they had, but their understanding and knowledge may be limited. Women know a great deal about their own pain, but the underlying causes of that pain may remain hidden from them despite the efforts of a feminist researcher (Gorelick 1996). Participants may also be unwilling or incapable of seeing their lives and experiences within a feminist framework, particularly when such an interpretation is potentially disruptive or threatening to their worldview (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983).

Responding to the Criticism

Certainly, “an emancipatory intent is no guarantee of an emancipatory outcome” (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983). So where does this leave us? How can we explain the lives of others without violating their reality? (Acker, Barry & Esseveld 1983). How can we conduct social science research without alienating and objectifying those who participate? (England 1994). How do we document sexism, racism, classism and heterosexism and use our knowledge to eliminate the institutions that legitimize and perpetuate all forms of oppression without speaking for and silencing the less privileged? (Alcoff 1994).

The first step is to accept responsibility for the research, including “the intrusions both in the informants’ lives and the representation of those lives”

(England 1994). Secondly, researchers must admit that the research relationship is inherently hierarchical. Afterward, we can begin to tackle the unequal power relations by exposing the partiality of the researcher's perspective, by admitting that we do not know it all (England 1994). And third, researchers must take ownership of our baggage. We need to locate ourselves in our work and reflect on how our "location" influences the questions we ask, how our research is conducted, and how the results are interpreted and presented (England 1994). The solution to correcting the problems of feminist research is not to abandon feminist research methodologies because they, like all other approaches, are imperfect (Gilbert 1994). Instead scholars must acknowledge and explore the shortcomings and revise feminist methodologies and/or our claims about them (Gilbert 1994). Feminist researchers must remain open to criticism and be willing to accept feminist research as an ongoing process, constantly changing and improving.

Qualitative vs. Quantitative Debate

Feminist research does not prescribe a specific method, but it has relied and continues to rely heavily on qualitative methods (Gilbert 1994; Cannon, Higginbotham & Leung 1988). Some feminist researchers equate quantitative methods with traditional social science and dismiss them. Others insist that quantitative methods, though the most common choice of traditional social scientists, are compatible with feminist research principles and in fact, serve an important function within research for women. What has resulted is sometimes referred to as a "qualitative/quantitative divide" (Grant, Ward & Rong 1987) -- in the next few paragraphs, I will outline some of the arguments made by both camps. However, before I do, I would like to point out that the debate between those who reject and those who prefer quantitative methods is complicated by the fact that quantitative and qualitative methods are differentially valued within social science (Grant, Ward & Rong 1987). Her choice of technique can affect whether or not a

researcher is published, receives grant money, gets tenure, etc. Quantitative methods continue to be used more often, in part, for this reason.

Despite the prestige of quantitative research techniques, many feminists believe they are inherently dehumanizing to women (Eichler 1997; Grant, Ward & Rong 1987; Cook & Fonow 1986). Opponents of quantitative methods see statistics as “part of patriarchal culture’s monolithic definition of ‘hard facts’” (Reinharz 1992). Statistical information is too often used to obscure social (and natural) phenomena, and many are concerned that erroneous statistics will underestimate the extent of a problem or issue and thus work against women (Reinharz 1992). Surveys, questionnaires, and other instruments used to collect data that is converted into statistical information tend to oversimplify complex issues by reducing them to the responses given to a limited number of questions - these instruments lack subtlety and cannot be used to capture the details of social life (Reinharz 1992).

There are others on the same side of the quantitative/qualitative divide who are less extreme. These feminist researchers do not reject quantitative methods altogether, yet they prefer qualitative approaches over quantitative because they think qualitative methodologies are more befitting the principles and goals of feminist research (Gilbert 1994). “Indeed, some feminist researchers who work with qualitative methods seem to claim that these methods are *more feminist* than others” (Eichler 1997; DeVault 1996; Gilbert 1994). Qualitative methods tend to be more personal, interactive, open, contextual, and phenomenological, and these qualities appeal to many feminist researchers seeking to involve their “subjects” in the research process, conduct ethical research, evaluate the effects of time and place on an event in women’s lives, and base research in women’s experiences (Small 1995; Grant, Ward & Rong 1987). In depth interviews, case histories, participant observations, and other qualitative techniques are also more likely to capture the depth and complexity of the particular situation under study (Small 1995), which is appropriate where gender and women’s issues are the topics of inquiry (Grant,

Ward & Rong 1987). The nuances of women's (and men's) lives are not easily captured by quantitative research.

Recently, however, there has been a tremendous effort on the part of some feminist scholars to reclaim quantitative methodologies (Small 1995). Toby Jayaratne, psychologist and author of "The Value of Quantitative Methodology for Feminist Research" insists that quantitative research is necessary "to counter the pervasive and influential quantitative sexist research which has and continues to be generated in the social sciences" (Reinharz 1992). Surveys, questionnaires and other quantitative techniques that gather large amounts of data have helped to foster interest in feminism and Women Studies by demonstrating the widespread significance of women's issues. This helps to dispel the myth that such issues are irrelevant to the majority of women and/or society as a whole (Reinharz 1992). In addition, survey research can help scholars identify differences among groups and changes over time in ways context-bound qualitative studies cannot (Reinharz 1992). Statistics are also useful to feminists for rhetorical purposes (Reinharz 1992); feminists rely on statistical data when speaking to large crowds about abortion and violence against women, for example. Surveys are used by feminist scholars to test theory, and demographic data are used to show that a problem is increasing, spreading into new sectors of the population, or distributed unequally within a population (Reinharz 1992). Statistics are also valuable because they are familiar – we see and hear statistics everyday on television, in newspapers, magazines, and on radio. Finally, statistical data are powerful because they are concise and widely accessible to several different audiences, especially when put into graph form. "Survey results can be presented in pictorial form to people who are illiterate or to those who have little understanding of numbers" (Reinharz 1992).

In addition, studies that are constituted by small, homogeneous samples, like many qualitative studies, have been found to reproduce race and class bias and lead to false conclusions (Cannon, Higginbotham & Leung 1988). Qualitative

research on women has generated a great deal of useful data in many different areas, but unfortunately, these studies too often exclude women of color and working-class women (Cannon, Higginbotham & Leung 1988; Zinn, Cannon, Higginbotham & Dill 1986). Many qualitative researchers use volunteer participants and white, middle-class women tend to be more willing to volunteer than poor women and women of color (Cannon, Higginbotham & Leung 1988). In-depth analysis is key to discovering the nuances of individuals' lives, but if this approach is used repeatedly on the same population, an understanding of the diversity of human experience is lost (Cannon, Higginbotham & Leung 1988).

The Diversity of Feminist Methods

Regardless of preference, feminists agree that there is danger in creating a “methodological ghetto” within woman-centered research (Stivers 1993; Ribbens 1989). When methods are chosen for their popularity rather than their compatibility with a research project, the participants and the project suffers. Research that is driven by its method, rather than by its subject matter, runs the risk of becoming trapped in a set of rigid rules like much of traditional social science research (Duelli Klein & Bowles 1983). “While there are distinct methodological practices that have become associated with feminist research, there is no one method that is solely owned by feminist researchers, nor is there a method that is in principle unusable by feminist researchers” (Eichler 1997).

A feminist researcher should feel free to combine aspects of any method deemed promising for the accomplishment of the research goals – various methods for gathering data may be useful for different purposes and may reveal unique information (Worell & Etaugh 1994; Duelli Klein & Bowles 1983). We are not bound by just one design or one strategy – the richness of the subject matter demands a full array of strategies and tools (Reinharz 1992). Because women have many voices (Reinharz 1992), feminist researchers need a number of methods. Indeed, any method can be feminist (Worell 1996; Small 1995; Thompson &

Walker 1995). “Regardless of whether qualitative or quantitative methods are used, what is most critical is that they be adapted in a manner consistent with the values, ethics, and epistemologies of a feminist approach” (Small 1995).

Scholars must be flexible and adapt their research techniques to the needs of every research situation if the project is going to benefit women (Duelli Klein & Bowles 1983). “Feminism is a perspective, not a research method...feminists use a multiplicity of research methods...feminist research involves ongoing criticism of non-feminist scholarship, is guided by feminist theory, may be transdisciplinary, aims to create social change, strives to represent human diversity, frequently includes the researcher as a person, attempts to develop special relations with the people studied, and frequently defines a special relation with the reader” (Reinharz 1992).

Flexible indeed! Over the last three decades, feminists have employed and/or modified every available research method and even developed a few new ones (DeVault 1996; Reinharz 1992). Researchers operating from a feminist perspective have implemented visual techniques, like photography and videotaping, linguistic techniques (i.e. personal narratives and conversational analysis), participatory observation, non-participatory observation, interviewing, content analysis, questionnaires, experimental research, ethno-methodological approaches, phenomenology, surveys, oral history, collaborative approaches, the “situation-at-hand” method, and triangulation (Eichler 1997; DeVault 1996; Reinharz 1992; Cook & Fonow 1986; Stanley & Wise 1979).

“From Sister to Sister to Woman” – The Project

My participant sample consists of seventeen women, from nine of the thirteen “housed” sororities affiliated with a large-sized university in the Pacific Northwest. My original intention was to interview two women from each of the sororities on campus, but unfortunately, I was unable to recruit 26 participants. I also planned to interview only seniors who pledged their first year of college

because I wanted the participants to have been involved with the Greek system for as long as possible, but not every woman I interviewed fit this description.

The names of the participants have been changed to protect their anonymity, and the participants themselves chose the pseudonyms. All of the women I spoke with were students of the university at the time of the interview, and most were born and raised in the same state. With the exception of one interview that was held outside of a coffee shop, all of the interviews were conducted on campus, about half in the participant's sorority house.

I did not choose to use a random representative sample, so I do not attempt to generalize my findings to any population. The women interviewed in this study do not speak for all sorority women, nor do they embody their sororities or their chapters. My intention was not to search for universal "Truths" or make broad claims about every sorority woman's experience. My goal was to come to understand some of the ways gender is negotiated within sororities and to consider the implications of this negotiation on the individual lives of the women in this study. I also wanted to call attention to the fact that all social situations, including those involving sorority women, are potentially significant in terms of gender. I wanted to provide these women the opportunity to talk about the ways Greek membership, and specifically sorority membership, has affected their lives and their beliefs about what it means to be a woman. The participants have characteristics in common including organizational affiliation, age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and class, but each of the participants is unique and regarded as such.

To recruit participants, I sent a letter in early February of 1997 to the presidents of all thirteen sorority houses on campus. In the letter I identified myself as a graduate student in Women Studies and Sociology. I explained that I was in the process of writing my master's thesis and asked to interview two members of her sorority. Since I am interested the impact of sorority membership on the lives of women, I explained that it would be more beneficial for me to interview women

who have been affiliated with the Greek system the longest, meaning seniors who pledged as first year students. I also explained that I would be recording the interviews but assured her that the participants' names, the name of the sorority and all other identifying information would remain confidential. I also promised I would not try to elicit any "secret" sorority information. I asked that she discuss my project with her sisters at their next chapter meeting, and I wrote that I would phone her in a week to get the names of the women who were interested. I included my email address and phone number in case she had questions. This recruitment strategy yielded five participants. One of my letters was returned as undeliverable.

My second recruitment attempt was via telephone. I called each of the thirteen sororities at least three times. At first, I asked to speak with the president of each of the organizations, so I could reference my letter, but few returned my call. Eventually I started asking whoever answered the phone if she would be willing to be interviewed. I got most of my participants this way. About half mentioned that they remember their chapter president reading my letter aloud to the group.

The other three participants were either students in or sorority sisters of students enrolled in WS 223 in the winter of 1997. A friend and colleague of mine was the graduate teaching assistant of this course at the time and knowing there were sorority women in her class, she offered to talk to her students about my project. I prepared handouts for her to distribute.

I started each interview by introducing myself and then I thanked the participant for agreeing to be interviewed. I told each interviewee that the interview would take about an hour and I explained that I would be tape-recording the interviews to protect the integrity of the data. I assured each of the participants that her anonymity would be maintained through the use of a pseudonym that she could choose. Her real name, the name of her sorority and all other identifying information would be excluded from the written text. I let her know that her

participation in this project was voluntary and that she had the right to stop the interview at any time and/or refuse to answer any question she was not comfortable answering. I then briefly described the project. I told each of the participants that I planned to ask about her experience and how she thinks that experience has affected her, if at all. I told each of them that being in a sorority taught me a lot and that my experience, in part, motivated this research project. I assured the participants that I knew what it is like to be in a sorority and that one of my main goals was to give sorority women the opportunity to talk about their experiences.

My introduction was important for establishing rapport. Many Greek members are suspicious of non-Greeks, sensitive about the ways in which Greeks are depicted in the media and stereotyped by non-Greek students, and very protective of their organization's reputation. I was clear that I was not looking to bash sororities, and I think the participants believed me. The fact that I was similar in age also helped. I was in my mid-twenties when I conducted the interviews. My life, like their lives, was spent going to class, studying, hanging out with friends, and going to bars and parties. They could relate to me, and they could also see I could relate to them. The flow of the interviews was generally easy and comfortable. I would not describe our relationship as intimate, but I would say it was friendly.

After the introduction, I requested that each of the participants sign an "Interview Consent Form." The form offered the participants the opportunity to review the written transcript of the interview and my analysis of it. I included this because I believe it is the right of the participant to request and/or recommend changes if they are not satisfied with the interpretation. Not a single participant asked to read the transcription or my analysis. To my knowledge, none of the participants tried contacting me after the interview, nor did I contact them.

When the interview was over, I asked them to complete a "Demographics Questionnaire." I wanted some basic information with regards to their age, race/ethnicity, academic year, grade point average, sexual orientation, and socio-

economic class. I explained that this information was needed to contextualize the data, but if they preferred not to complete this form, they were not required to do so – no one objected. The results are as follows:

- Five of the participants were 22 years old at the time of the interview. Six participants were 21, three were 20, and one participant was 19 years old.
- The bulk (11) of the women interviewed were seniors. One was a first year student, one was a sophomore and four were juniors.
- Most (fifteen) of the participants identified themselves as “white” or “Caucasian.” One participant was part Lebanese and another identified as American Indian.
- All seventeen of the women interviewed identified as heterosexual.
- Nearly all of the participants had a grade point average above 2.5. Eight of the participants had a G.P.A. between 3.0 and 3.5 and one was over 3.5.
- Most of the women I spoke with come from middle or upper class backgrounds. College-educated parents, five with a graduate and/or professional degree, raised fifteen of the women, in the study. Nine of the participants indicated that her parents make over \$76,000 a year, two between \$61,000 and \$75,000, one between \$46,000 and \$60,000, and four between \$31,000 and \$45,000. One participant did not disclose this information.

Each of the seventeen interviews that I conducted took approximately an hour and a half, which was a little longer than I originally expected. Six took place in conference rooms on campus. Three of the interviews were conducted in the Women Studies office, and eight were conducted in the participant’s sorority house. The location did not seem to affect the participants’ responses. In each case, we were alone and free from interruptions. I suspect that the women I interviewed were probably more comfortable in their own houses; however, and this may have made the experience more pleasant for them. On the other hand,

some or all of these eight women may have felt more guarded in their house and may have been more concerned with presenting their sorority in a positive light.

I asked approximately 36 questions of each of the women I interviewed. I used follow-up questions when a participant needed clarification or when I wanted more detail from them. The questions were organized into seven categories: sorority history, sororities and fraternities, relationships with men, relationships with women, sorority information, relationship between feminism and sororities, and future plans. Here are a few examples from each category:

Sorority history: Why did you join a sorority? What did you expect when you joined? Have those expectations been met?

Sororities and fraternities: How do sororities differ from fraternities? Compare sisterhood to brotherhood. Follow up: would you rather be a member of fraternity if you could?

Relationships with men: Who do you and your sisters date? Greeks, non-Greeks or both? Who organizes your sorority's social events with fraternities? Where are they held? Who pays? Do women in your sorority compete with each other for men? Follow up: what happens to the sisterhood bond when women compete with each other for men?

Relationships with women: How do your friendships with your sisters differ from your friendships with other women? Does your sorority encourage or discourage sexual experimentation? Are there same-sex sexual relationships between women in your sorority? How would your sorority respond to an openly gay member?

Sorority information: Define sisterhood. How has your sorority been stereotyped? Is there a certain way women in your sorority are expected to behave or look? Does your sorority socialize with other sororities? Is there a sorority hierarchy? What are your criteria for selecting new members? How important is diversity to your organization? Follow up: does your sorority recruit women of various ethnic, racial, class and religious backgrounds? Does your sorority engage in any activities that you consider dehumanizing or humiliating for women? Follow up: does your sorority haze?

Relationship between feminism and sororities: How would your sorority be different if it was co-ed? Follow up: what are the benefits of a woman-only organization? How has your sorority responded to the issue of date and acquaintance rape involving fraternity members? Describe one woman who best represents your sorority. Describe the “ideal” woman. How has being in a sorority influenced this “ideal”? Have your political views become more liberal or conservative since your freshman year? Do you consider your sorority a feminist organization? If not, what are the differences between a sorority and feminist organization? Would you describe your sorority experience as empowering?

Future plans: Would you want your daughter to be in a sorority? How as being in a sorority prepared you for the rest of your life?

Designing interview questions that solicited the information I needed to accomplish my goals for this project was one of the most difficult parts of the project. The questions that asked the participants to compare their organization with fraternities, those near the end of the interview that encouraged the interviewees to think and talk about the impact of their experiences on their lives and identities, and the discussions around feminism and sororities were the most productive and successful, from a research point of view. They provided the basis for my analysis.

ANALYSIS

This chapter is the heart and soul of my project. It includes the answers to the interview questions, in the words of the participants, and my analysis of those interviews. I transcribed the audiotapes word-for-word to preserve the richness and integrity of the interviews, and I quoted the participants extensively. Although the lengthy and literal transcription makes the reading of this chapter somewhat difficult, I am glad I chose to report the research findings in this way. It allows the reader to hear the voices of the sorority women I spoke with and it prioritizes their interpretation of their experiences.

This chapter is organized around the following themes: Reasons for Joining a Sorority, “Tolerance,” Exclusivity of Sororities, Sorority and Fraternity Differences, Image Focused, Looksism, Sorority Hierarchy, Stereotypes, Competition between Sororities and Horizontal Hostility, Competition between Sisters, Heterosexism and Homophobia, Traditional Heterosexual Dating Patterns, Sexual Double Standard, Sexual Assault, Sisterhood, Gender Separatism, Hazing, Skill Development, Feminism and Sororities, Role Models, and Celebration of Women and Women’s Strengths. These themes were selected for one of two reasons 1) they emerged from the data as particularly relevant, and/or, 2) they were originally presented in the literature review. Many of the themes are related and intertwined, especially for the participants, but I have separated them as best I could, without disturbing the flow of the dialogue. The following is not to be read as hard facts, but as tools to help us understand the complexities of exclusive sorority life and gender negotiation within exclusive sororities.

Reasons for Joining a Sorority

Nearly all of the seventeen sorority women I talked to said they joined the sorority to meet people. Those with older siblings or friends in the Greek system knew before they got involved that “going Greek” guarantees an active social life. Hall, for example, said she joined to make new friends.

...I guess I looked more, um, at it in the social aspect...I mainly just um, was looking for uh, to getting, to get to know more people and um, acquiring more friendships, I guess more than anything else...and just being more active in the social scene and that type of thing. –Hall

This is common. Many college students join sororities and fraternities out of desire to have fun and get the most out of their college years (Maisel 1990). Greek organizations promise their members and potential members “a good time” and they usually deliver (Risman 1987). Nearly every week during the academic year sororities on this Northwestern campus have a function or event planned. There are “date-nights,” “movie-nights,” sorority-fraternity theme parties, dances, formals and “sister socials.”

Some of the women I spoke with had heard about the sisterhood bond and looked forward to the close connections they would make with other women. Janiene, for example, compares her relationship with her sisters to her relationships with her roommate.

[Before joining] um, I had the, the idea that, you know, I knew there were functions and parties. Um, but I also knew that there was a bond, um, that you had instantly with someone. Um, you know, it was different than the dorms and your roommate, you know. I’m good friends with my roommate, and I still, you know, am in contact, still in constant contact with her, but you know, it’s just different when you have the same people around you for four years. Um, and I knew that I was gonna get a lot of lasting friendships that way. –Janiene

The opportunity to share a living space with so many other women was also an incentive. All of the women I interviewed had lived with their parents prior to joining the sorority, and having between 40-80 roommates was exciting.

[What was appealing about sororities was] just the bond, I think, um, having a, a wonderful bond with all these, all these girls. And making new friends, and, and uh, just kind of having a bunch a fun, and...and living with a bunch of girls. I always thought that would be really fun. –Sara

“Tolerance”

It does not take long to realize, however, that having so many roommates, though fun, can be difficult. Because there is always someone in the house, finding solitude is almost impossible. “Live-ins” have next to no privacy.

...I think when you have 50 women living under one roof, it’s, it’s hard. Um, you really don’t have your own space. I mean, you have your own room, but you know, it’s...you’re pretty much around people all of the time. –Hall

All of the sorority women on this campus who reside in one of the thirteen sorority houses sleep military-style on a “sleeping porch.” The sleeping porch is a large room on the second or third floor – it is filled with several rows of bunk beds, and each member has her own twin mattress. Some sororities mandate that their members sleep on the sleeping porch – the “house mother” or on-site advisor ushers off to bed anyone found asleep on the first floor, second floor or in the basement. Sorority members are also assigned a dormitory sized room and one or two roommates – these rooms are on the second floor. Typically, only the members of the executive board (President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, etc.) are allowed their own rooms, none of which are equipped with locks. In the room is a closet, a couple of dressers and desks and small couch or futon. Needless to say, finding a quiet space to study, make a phone call, or spend time alone is not easy and tensions between members almost always ensue.

Resolving conflicts and for some, simply living in the house, requires that sorority women master the ability to compromise, learn to be patient and flexible, and according to Hall, accept one another's differences.

...Even though you have a lot of problems, and you're always going to have problems with someone living with that many people, you can overcome a lot. And that, the experience of living with 50 women, you're never going to have again...it's really promoted [sic] me to accept people as they are. --Hall

[After being in a sorority] I think you're more, uh, like, more understanding that everyone's different and everyone has their own way of doing things...and that you're more open to like, people being different than you, I think. You know, 'cause, like when you're living with that many people, you know, not everyone's going to do things the way you do them or even the way, you know, you would want them to do them or whatever. So you're more open to just like...maybe more laid...like laid back, kinda, to other people's way of doing things, 'cause you realize that everyone has, you know, their own way of doing whatever they do. --Ann

Patrice said that sharing a living space with so many other women helped her become more "tolerant and understanding." She considers herself to be quite opinionated, willful and unafraid to speak her mind. She talked about having to "bite her tongue more than once," just "to keep the peace." The challenge of living with so many other women was particularly difficult for her.

...I think if you learn nothing else living in a sorority, by the time you're out of there, you learn tolerance because there's so many--especially in our house, it's very diverse -- there's so many different types of people living under the same roof that even if you don't agree with something they say, you have, you have to live with them. So you have to learn tolerance. So I think that is going to be one of the most valuable things I take away from it... --Patrice

For Emily, the experience of living in a sorority house taught her respect, not just for her sisters, but for women in general.

...I feel like, like I have more respect for other women [after being in a sorority]. Um...I feel like, you know, a more positive view on

people, on people's differences. Instead of looking at things as being like, 'well, that's a bad difference,' you know, I might look at it and say, 'well, that's just different. But you know, that's what they choose to do. –Emily

Several of the participants, in fact, described themselves as open-minded and respectful of women, and they attributed those qualities to their membership in a sorority. Many of the women I interviewed mentioned that the sorority experience taught them the importance of considering both sides of an issue or dispute.

...No two people have the same views of something, and um, that's...that's okay that people have differing opinions, and that's good that people have differing opinions. 'Cause if you all, you're all, you know, little clones of each other, that wouldn't be any fun (laughs)...I have to learn to be able to live with people, to work with people, and if I'm going to sit there and say, 'what you're doing is wrong, and I don't agree with it,' and 'you're wrong, and your beliefs are wrong,' um, I'm not going to get anything accomplished. And that person is isn't going to be there when I need help or when I need a shoulder to cry on because I wasn't there when they needed it. –Janiene

For about half of the participants, sorority membership has brought about an appreciation for what they called "the diversity of women." Many believed that their sorority's greatest strength lies, not in their commonalities, but in their "differences."

...Um, living with so many of them [women] makes me see how, I don't know, really diverse they can be...And like, like my friends at home, they're all kind of um, I would say kind of like the same, you know. We like the same things, we do the same things, you know, like in high school. But here its like, I like somebody that does some things really different that I would probably never be interested in, but I still can connect with them and you know, see how I can, we can have a friendship together and stuff. –Kayla

...We let our personalities show. And we don't rush for specific things, like we don't rush for grades, or we don't rush for good looks, or we don't rush for partiers. Um, we rush for girls that we

can relate to and um, in that aspect we get every single type of girl here. We have very rich girls; we have very poor girls who can barely afford to be here. We have girls that like to work-out, and we have girls that have never worked out a day in their life... We like girls, who, who um, who share different values than us, and we accept, we, we accept who they are because of those values. But we don't necessarily agree with them. Um...we're just a broad range of personalities that come together here, and we don't, we don't all get along. But um, when we don't get along, it's...the few that don't get along, um...just pull us stronger together. 'Cause we're recognizing those differences... –Jill

Tolerance, understanding, acceptance, and respect are admirable qualities, and Kelly recognized this. She said that being in a sorority taught her how to get along and work well with others.

I think it prepares people for life, um, outside of college because you learn how to deal with different personalities. Um, so if you don't get along with someone, you learn how to deal with it, 'cause when you're working, you're probably not going to get along with everyone, so you have to learn to deal with people. –Kelly

Exclusivity of Sororities

Unfortunately, however, there is a limit to a sorority woman's willingness and/or ability to be compassionate, keep an open mind, and be respectful. A sorority woman's conception of diversity, difference, and tolerance is quite limited because for the women I interviewed, these concepts are framed within an exclusive context. Lynn spoke to this point when she said that "diversity" is accepted and appreciated in her sorority only "to a certain extent."

It's kind of like to be, like it's important to be unique and to have your own individual character, however...if you go to a certain extent, and I don't know what that is...I don't know what that is, but I just felt like if you were *so* different, if you decided to completely change every single thing or rebel against every single thing that was considered to be "standard," that you would be an outcast.
–Lynn

Reasonable differences within a sorority include only those related to personality, temperament, habit, interest, and belief. Sorority women may be shy and quiet or talkative and outgoing. Some are biology majors, while others major in English or political science. A sorority member may play soccer or she may play the piano. Some like rock music and others prefer country – some are Catholic and others, Protestant. Differences in race, class, and sexual orientation, on the other hand, are not celebrated in the sororal environment.

Though an acceptance of personality differences could make possible the acceptance of other kinds of difference that does not seem likely; most of the interview participants indicated that their houses are rather *intolerant* of racial differences. White women dominate the sororities on this campus, like those on most other college and university campuses across the United States. Although there are all black sororities and fraternities all over the country, most Greek organizations are racially segregated and comprised almost exclusively of white students (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992).

As far as personality diversity, I would say ‘yes’ [the sorority is diverse], as far as ethnic diversity, I would say, ‘no.’ Just because if you look up there [participant points to a composite on the wall], you will see, no, they’re all, they’re white females, you know. And I don’t, our sorority, I don’t think, it’s not that there’s a policy that says they wouldn’t...I just don’t think that um, especially on this campus, that there’s really, you know, um, any ethnic people that usually go through rush. I mean, I’m, I’m a minority myself...but also, it’s one of those things where they’re like, ‘oh, you’re *Indian*.’ Yeah, I’m Indian, you know. But they don’t really consider that, like an ethnic minority ‘cause I’m not black, I’m not Asian... –Sally

Several of the women I spoke with seemed embarrassed by the lack of racial diversity in their organizations. Yet they took virtually no responsibility for exclusivity of their organizations and were quick to rationalize it. Several of the participants claimed this problem was the result of the lack of a racially diverse pool from which to choose members. Only a few women of color go through rush

each year and many of them drop out of the Greek system before they are even offered a bid to join a sorority.

It's very rare that we get women of different ethnic backgrounds to come through rush. They don't...I guess they don't feel like they should or they can 'cause it's been so stereotypically a Caucasian dominated society. But I think it would be great if we could get a little more ethnic background...You know, we're all from different backgrounds, but it's, it's really difficult to find, you know, those maybe...the African American women who are going through or Asian American or whatever. But they just, they're just very rare. It's hard to find. –Becki

Mary Anne suspected that women of color are intimidated by the white Greek system on campus.

...Maybe minority people might be discouraged from rushing because they only see, you know, just a white...you know, same thing...[same] old people, you know, everyday. So maybe they would feel intimidated to do it. I mean, I might if I was at an all black school or something like that, trying to rush, you know.
–Mary Anne

Sara assumed that the black women on campus have their own sororities [a false assumption] and if they chose to join a predominantly white organization, their black friends would accuse them of “selling out.” Nearly all of the women I interviewed blame the lack of diversity in the Greek system on the lack of diversity in the university. They argued that there is virtually no women and men of color in sororities and fraternities because there are so few on campus. Their perception of the student body is accurate. According to the enrollment statistics on the university's website, 87.4% of the undergraduate students of this Pacific Northwestern university are white. 6.8% are Asian or Pacific Islander, 3.1% are Hispanic, 1.3% of the undergraduates are African American, and 1.3% is Native American ([http://oregonstate.edu/admin/President/Diversity enrollment.html](http://oregonstate.edu/admin/President/Diversity%20enrollment.html)).

None of the participants had given any thought to how the Greek system on this campus could be made more appealing to the students of color who *do* attend

this university, even though most of participants felt that having women of color as members would be an asset to their organizations. The organizations are encouraged by the Pan Hellenic council to seek and recruit women of color during rush, but few actually do this. So it seems fair to say that the majority of the sorority members on this campus do little or nothing to alleviate the racial imbalance. Sara did not think action on her part was necessary, since “all rushees are given the same opportunities.” She did not understand why African American, Asian, Hispanic or Native American undergraduate women would not want to join her sorority – her house was not prejudice: neither she nor her sisters “see in black and white.”

...We don't have to have um...women of color and we don't have to have it just women...um, but we don't not have to have, um, you know. If, if, um, we...if we see a girl and we like a girl and she happens to be black, then, you know, color doesn't matter to us. I has no um...it really has no meaning. We, we don't see in black and white. --Sara

Ironically, many of the women I interviewed were more frustrated and angered by the way *they* are stereotyped and otherwise misunderstood and mistreated by non-Greeks. It did not take long for our conversations about racial discrimination to become a conversation about the “discrimination” against sorority and fraternity members by G.D.I.s (god damn independents).

I think people who say sororities are a bad thing have no information, have not ever seen...it's not that they have to ever be in a sorority, just that, you know, they need to take a look at it and really see what it's about. Because all they ever see is like the bad things which every living group has...problems. And I...[their problems] aren't as voiced as heavily as like the ones within the Greek system. But it, it'd be nice if like everybody was forced to look at it and broaden their own views... --Emily

...We would love to disprove the [Greek] stereotype at every single place...I mean when we do a philanthropy, you want everyone to know that you're doing this because you're actually, you're doing

something. And I mean, it's fun. And you're raising money, and you never get credit for any of that stuff. But as soon as there is a car wreck or anything, they're beating down your door to figure out what went wrong. And it's so frustrating when you've put a lot of time and effort and heart into something to have people want to shoot it down at every step! So I feel like the campus image...I mean, people...you are who you are. And I don't wear my letters a lot because I feel like people might pre-judge me, and I'd rather have them get to know me and then find out later that I'm Greek. Just because I don't want to have to defend that before I know someone. –Mary Anne

According to most of the sorority women I talked to, non-Greeks do not understand the Greek system and are too quick to pass judgment. They feel sororities and fraternities and their members are too often given a “bad rap,” unfairly labeled and prematurely dismissed.

The social interaction of sorority women on this campus, like so many across the nation, is all but confined to the Greek system (Handler 1995; Risman 1987; Krain et al 1977). Most sorority members date fraternity men, befriend only their sisters and thus, socialize with Greeks almost exclusively (Risman 1987). Some of the participants in this study suspected that this is primarily due to ease and convenience. The Greek system is set up to place freshman women in sororities, freshman men in fraternities, and sorority women with fraternity men.

Shila believed that Greek men are more outgoing, easier to get to know and “more accessible” than independent (non-Greek) men and this makes them more appealing than independent men. Others, like Janiene, asserted that sorority women and fraternity men become romantically involved because they are constantly thrown together. Sorority women meet fraternity men at social functions and other Greek events.

...It's easier for us to meet Greek men because that's who we're socializing with and that's who the functions are with. But um, by the same token, if you're involved in your, on campus in other groups, then you're going to meet other guys that aren't in fraternities, um, or in your classes. Obviously, that's pretty

hard to do, and it's a lot easier in a social function, in a social setting, to meet people... –Janiene

Sorority women and fraternity men also have a lot in common, which also helps to explain why they form attachments with each other more often than they do with independents. Most importantly, fraternity men know what it is like to be a member of a Greek organization and can relate to the demands of sorority life in a way that non-Greek men cannot. Fraternity members understand the time and emotional energy Greek membership takes and are therefore, more empathetic than a boyfriend outside of the Greek system, when an emergency chapter meeting is called at the last minute, for example (Handler 1995).

[Sorority women date Greeks more often] because you are interested, you're surrounded by the same things, you have a lot in common with them [fraternity men], they understand that sometimes you're going to be at the house, and how much it's affecting your life. –Shila

...There's, there's an understanding that goes on [when dating fraternity men]... When you're dating a non-Greek, there's a lot of questions, and well, you can't really explain things because it's, you know, you're not supposed to. Um, but if you're dating a Greek, then, you know, they know that you can't say anything about it, or they understand that you have a three-hour chapter meeting and can't go or you have to be at this activity, because they are in the same boat. –Janiene

Getting “pinned” by a fraternity member is important to some sorority women, and independent men do not generally participate in this kind of ritual. For those deeply committed to Greek life, membership is a status symbol. Wearing a fraternity member's letters is done with pride.

I think they'd [sorority sisters] prefer to date Greek guys...because of some of the things that go, you know, if, if it's a lasting relationship, then you get the whole pinning thing. And um, you, you know, there's just a...it, it's kind of neat to, in ten years, say, 'yeah, you know, I married...such and such fraternity guy'. –Janiene

Interestingly, a sorority woman's tendency to date fraternity men may lessen, as she grows older. A few of the women I interviewed said that their freshmen and sophomore sisters become romantically involved with fraternity men more often than independent men, but junior and senior women, having grown tired of the "same old thing," are a little more likely to look for relationships outside of the Greek system.

I think like as a freshman, you start out dating, you know, boys in fraternities, just because it's like...that's who you hang out with primarily. But I know like, some, a lot of the senior girls guys are dating now aren't in fraternities. Maybe it's just, you know, you get tired, they got tired of the same old thing, you know... -Emily

I would say the younger classes date Greeks more often because they meet them at the functions and stuff. Whereas, by the time you're older, you're meeting more people in classes and at the bars or whatever. -Sara

The friendships between sisters, on the other hand, do not change with age. In fact, friendships with women outside of the sorority are rare for most members. Hall said that she and her sisters are closer with each other than they are with other women because it is difficult to keep in contact with women outside of the sorority. There is just simply not enough time.

...It's harder to incorporate friends that are outside of the sorority, like harder to find the time because of all the activities within the sorority are always with the same people. And it's hard to make time outside of that to spend a lot of quality time with friends outside... --Hall

Sorority sisters call each other first when they are in need. A sister is always there to talk, to lend a hand or a shoulder to cry on.

...We live together and we eat together and we cry together and we, you know, we're with each other just about almost all of the time. Um, there's those late night talks, and everyone watches 90210 90210 or whatever, and it's just a big bonding thing all of the time I think. -Sara

...And they're, it's easier too, like to disclose information, because they're [your sisters] always right there. If you have a problem, they're right...they live with you, they're right there! And um, someone's always there to listen to, and to listen to you, and vice versa... --Hall

Almost all of the women I spoke with described their relationships with their sisters as stronger, more meaningful, and more rewarding than those with other women.

...With your sisters you have to work things out. You can't let things go. You're going to see them the next hour, the next two hours, the next morning, the next month to come. You can't let tensions build between you. And with other women, let's say you get in a little quarrel, they go their way, you go yours and in a week you call them, you know, however long. In a sorority you can't do that. You live here, you eat here, you breathe, you do everything here. Yeah you go to classes and yeah you go out for activities, but you always come back to this point. And so, your relationships with other women can always be separated by distance. Whereas your relationships here [in a sorority] can't. --Jill

Sorority and Fraternity Differences

The sheltered world of the Greek system helps to create a setting in which traditional beliefs about women and men are perpetuated (Kalof & Cargill 1991; Goettsch & Hayes 1990). The traditional notions of gender are negotiated, in part, by the different rules, policies, and procedures that govern sororities and fraternities and the lifestyle differences between sorority and fraternity members.

As mentioned previously, one of the most obvious differences between sororities and fraternities is the conditions of the houses. While sororities are tidy and beautifully decorated, fraternity houses are messy, dirty, "in bad shape," and according to one participant, "nasty."

Like the sorority you know, there's no alcohol allowed, you can't party there, they're really clean and well kept, and um, like have a, I don't know if all of them have like a maid service or whatever, but

they're really nice and clean, kept. As far as the fraternities, we party there, and they're not as clean I guess. –Ann

The state and style of the sorority houses on this campus create an image that their members are polite, well-behaved, well-mannered, and affluent young ladies. Fraternity men, however, are rough and wild and need a living space that can accommodate that lifestyle. According to Mary Anne, no sorority woman would ever put up with the mess that fraternity men put up with. She and her sisters cringed at the thought of living with the disgusting smell of stale beer and cigarette smoke, vomit stained carpeting, and posters of half-naked “girls.”

According to the participants of this study, sororities are bound by stricter rules than fraternities.

...It's more structured [in a sorority compared to a fraternity]. It's more strict. You have a lot more rules and guidelines that are, that are kind of more imperative to follow than, than guys, such as, you know, you can't have boys upstairs in your rooms. You can't drink, you can't do any of that stuff. So I think it's more strict...And boys, boys are a lot more free to do just whatever. –Hall

Sororities have membership quotas, for example, but fraternities are allowed to give as many bids as they wish.

...Pan Hellenic tries to keep things [numbers] as even as possible...so it, the bitterness is kept to a minimum. I know that with fraternities, especially on this campus, you know. There's a few fraternities that are, have lots of members and everyone wants to be in them, and IFC does not have a cap for the totals. Um, and so, you now, you could have a fraternity that has five guys that's struggling to stay open or ten guys, and you have another fraternity that has 120-125 and everyone wants to be in that house...I think that Pan Hellenic tries to keep it as even as possible to eliminate some of that, um, inner-sorority conflict that could arise... –Janiene

The lack of structure in fraternities compared to sororities teaches Greeks that women and men are different, that fraternity men are independent and capable of running their own show, while sorority women need protecting.

The nature of the sisterhood and brotherhood bonds also differ, as do the processes by which those bonds are formed. Many of the women I talked to believed that the sisterhood is more emotional than brotherhood. According to Hall, “women are always there for each other,” and it is this kind of support that usually characterizes the sorority bond. The fraternity bond, on the other hand, is based upon shared action. Fraternity men get to know each other and form attachments with one another while drinking alcohol, watching television, and playing sports. According to Patrice, fraternities are also more focused on their rituals and traditions to foster a connection among their members, and as a result, fraternities are more likely than sororities to haze their members.

With guys, it's more, you know...they go play golf together or they do things like that together. Whereas girls, they stay up nights talking...or they develop more of an emotional bond maybe. Um...and you share things like you know...about your boyfriend or about you know, your family or what not, so I think maybe the bond is different. –Kelly

Well, I think that sisterhood probably involved more emotional ties...But brotherhood, from the stories that I've heard and from the comments that people have made, brotherhood is...‘who can drink the most?’ or um...‘let's go out and bond and let's go out and get drunk and play football!...’ qualities that I think that they perceive as being very masculine to themselves... –Lynn

Many of the participants felt that the differences between the sisterhood and brotherhood bonds are natural, a manifestation of the inherent differences between women and men.

I just think, I think it's the nature of the, the differences between men and women. I think that they just, women are more, have more, or express their feelings better, or more often. So they, I think they get to know like, really get to know their sisters much better than the men do...You go to fraternities and these guys hang around all the time, but they don't really know each other. They don't know their feelings or anything like that. –Patrice

Well I think that, that girls um, in the sorority, they bond by um, things such as, you know, being there for one another in times of need. Like when you break up with a boyfriend...and this is all brought up in rush, you know, how 'we'll always be there for you,' but in actuality it's true. I mean it's really sappy during rush, when you're telling other girls this, but um, it is true. It...girls, girls find a place of security in a sorority and they like coming home to 50 other girls who have, can identify with their problems. Whereas guys bond by going out and doing activities together. And this is, this is totally reinforced by rush. When you look at rush, girls are coming to party after party after party talking to each other. When guys go through rush, they're off at the coast, they're having paint ball fights, you know, they're in [a ski resort]. They just get a bunch of guys together, and then they go out and have fun. Whereas we, it's like a process with us. We just get to know each other and we talk and we talk and we talk. And I mean, it's really not fun. It's, it's work. We work at it, and, and that's what girls do, we work at relationships. Whereas guys, by their experiences they get closer, like going fishing or doing whatever. –Jill

Emily believed that women are more sentimental and caring than men and that unlike men, women are not embarrassed to show emotion or express their feelings. This results in the formation of a close bond.

I think girls, just girls in general, tend to like make, have deeper bonds with other girls that they become friends with, you know, more than guys. Guys will...are more about going out and doing stuff together and you know, just hanging out, and doing things like that...Girls, yeah, do form stronger bonds than guys do... 'cause I think, I think...well, I know like, a lot of the girls I know rely a lot more on, like, their girlfriends than guys really on their guy friends, you know, for like the emotional support and things like that, you know. Guys are...not...they usually don't rely on each other for emotional support and stuff. They don't want to seem weak or something... –Emily

The differences between sororities and fraternities are not universal or all encompassing, however. Many of the participants were quick to point out the differences between the two organizations, but others talked about their similarities. Fraternities and sororities are organized in the same way; both have rush and

pledging; both wear Greek letters and have parties; both have a long history and are bound by vows of secrecy. Both encourage campus involvement and provide leadership opportunities. Both sororities and fraternities generate community, and both practice rituals.

I do see more similarities as far as just the structure of, you know, building, building relationships and being able to build your, your self esteem, being able to get you involved in things. And just interaction and how you treat other people and live day-to-day with, you know 50-80 people. I feel like we all [sororities and fraternities] have similar experience. –Mary Anne

Image Focused

The strict rules that govern sororities are intended to mold their members into young ladies, according to Hall. These rules control bad behavior and discourage members from acting “stupid,” from “flailing around,” and “losing control.” Several of the participants in the study said that “creating a scene,” acting “crazy” or “obnoxious” in public is frowned upon by their organizations. Members are expected to refrain from rude or crude behavior – they are told not to “act like jerks.”

Appropriate behavior is particularly important when members are wearing their letters. Sorority women are forbidden (by other members) to drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, or take drugs while they are wearing their letters. Sweatshirts, t-shirts, and hats with a group’s Greek symbols are not allowed at social functions.

...We’re told to, you know...if you’re wearing your letters or whatever, um, you know, remember that you’re wearing your letters. And, and uh, you know, you can’t wear letters to functions...because um...just so that if someone does something really stupid or gets in trouble, um, then...that’s not put on the whole entire house. Like if one girl had her letters on and was um, went to a function and got, you know, skunk drunk and, and was falling all over the place, then our house isn’t known for [having members who are drunk all the time]. –Sara

There's a reason why girls can't wear letters to parties. And there's a reason why, why when you're drinking you need to take off all your letters and that's because um, we don't want ourselves to be seen as, 'I'm, I'm in this sorority and I'm drinking a beer right now, so make the correlation...' Um, so we are expected to behave in a certain fashion. Um, when we go places as a group, we will uphold ourselves. We will not, you know, be, be be...dance around like baboons and stuff, um...or if we do, we go to a secluded place, like barn dances are infamous in the Greek system for being wild and crazy times. And those are times where we're off in some barn that nobody knows about and nobody can really see us or anything else. Because when we get wild and crazy, you know, we don't want other people to see us. And, and in that, we don't want to disturb other people. I mean there's, there's kind of a two-way street there. But we are expected to behave in a certain way. –Jill

...I think that they are expected to behave, um...and I think most sororities you want girls that behave decently and um, hold more, hold somewhat higher morals, and that type of thing. Um...there's usually like punishment that comes with being obnoxious at a party or being promiscuous or um...people that drink too much or when someone thinks that someone else drinks too much, or that type of thing. I think we're expected to behave like ladies in all situations and um...just abide by the rules and norms and morals of...that the sorority kind of imposes or expects. –Hall

...We're told to, you know, behave like...a...woman, you know, behave, um, nicely...I mean we're, we're encouraged to, just act like a lady, and, um, you know, just, if you're going to do something, then just remember that you're in a house. And whenever you pledge, if, whatever house you go to, I think you're encouraged to represent the house in a good manner and, and um, bring a positive attitude towards your house, that's encouraged. –Sara

Women are expected to uphold a certain image in sororities.

...In a sorority, sororities uphold the image that you don't drink in them, you don't party and...So they have more of a pristine image [than fraternities]...it's [the image], it's talked about in our ritual in the sense that...It's talked about and it's, it's stated to us. We repeat it and we say it, in a very um...ritualistic manner...For some people, I think it hits home, and for others, it doesn't. For others, it just is something that you say...[like] maybe when you go to church and

you don't really believe, but you go because your parents say it, and you just repeat the things that you're supposed to repeat in a ritual, and you don't really think about what the words *mean*. But for some people, like myself, I would think about what we were saying, and what the words meant. A generic example is: 'we strive to uphold the um...', I don't know if I can think of the words that represent it...but um... '[We strive to uphold] the good, the beautiful, the honorary, and...um...the utmost example for all.' I mean that's kind of a generic example of things that we would quote, that's what we would say. And so I just felt like this image was kind of, of imbedded in myself and in others that we had to act a certain way and be a certain person o uphold this image...to be, to be all...I think to be 'all that!' To strive to excel in every area. To be intelligent, to be very outgoing and social--to excel socially--to excel academically. To be very beautiful. To be a role model and an example. And, and uh...very put together. –Lynn

As Sara and Lynn mentioned, the image or reputation of a sorority is extremely important and should be protected and preserved, particularly given the recent decline in Greek members on this Northwestern campus. More than ever, sororities on this campus are image-focused – it is a survival strategy. Members are constantly reminded that their actions impact every member of the house and the house in general.

A great deal of pressure is put upon the members to live up to an image. Many of the women I interviewed were taught that perception is reality, and that every time they go out, they represent the house. Sorority members are expected to present themselves and their organization in a positive light to the rest of the Greek system, the university, and the community. They carry the burden of the reputation of the whole house with them, wherever they go. Even when they leave the physical confines of the house, it controls their behavior.

...I guess that my perspective just comes because I was on the standards board and um...the impression is, is that a woman's actions represent the whole house. So when, I mean this is really stretching it, but when she behaves in a way that the house views as inappropriate, it's like the whole house is acting that way. That's, that is the impression that they try to give us. So I think they lay

that responsibility on people so that they don't feel like...that a woman would, would feel almost guilt if she acted like that. Um, my pledge class, we got brought in, we were crazy and we got brought in, usually a couple of girls a couple of times a week to standards because um...we just...they didn't give us the guidelines right up front. So we would break the rules and they, they'd let us know. Then they'd make an example...I mean I'm talking anything from girls getting too drunk and taking their clothes off on the dance floor – that is absolutely inappropriate for the house...Most of the guidelines and the way that we are expected to behave um, deals with alcohol, drugs, and...men and how we [represent] the house.
–Lynn

Sororities on this campus enforce policy through penalty. Typically, members are fined if/when they disobey the rules or set a “bad example.” Members may also be put on social probation, which prohibits them from attending parties, date-nights, and other functions with their sisters. If the situation gets out of hand, if a member has pushed too far, membership could be revoked and she may be asked to move out of the house. As a student-run organization, sorority women are, in many ways, each other's guardians. Each member is responsible for keeping the other members in line.

Most of the participants defended the strict rules and policies. Sorority rules, like parents' rules, are established “for members' own good.”

I'm sure that there are, you know, there, there are times when it seems like there are a lot of rules, um, and a lot of policies, um, a lot of mission...or not mission statements, but policy statements that the, the headquarters will send down. But then, you know, you sit down and you read them and it makes sense, you know, they, they're there for a purpose. They're there to protect us...Sometimes it seems like the rules bog you down, but in the long run, it's for, it's for safety purposes, it's for risk management, or it's just to advance women...So there's, there's a reason behind the rules and the policies that we have. –Janiene

Jill also justified the sorority system. She insisted that the rules she and her sisters are supposed to follow are rules they already should be following, lessons they as women should have previously learned.

These [sorority policies] are ideals that, that are ideals that people should already have. These are, these are goals that people should already have. And that...they're very easy to follow, very easy--respect, trust--these are not um, outstanding feats that hardly anyone can accomplish. –Jill

According to Kelly and Hall, it was better to have a lot of rules because they prevent problems from starting. They help to keep order. Organizations and their members need structure and guidance, and strict policies provide that structure.

...If you're living with that many girls, you have to have some kind of structure and rules and things like that... –Kelly

...I would say if they [rules] weren't there, then I think there would be a lot of, there'd be a lot more problems. I think too much freedom can almost be bad. And so...it's kind of nice having rules and guidelines, even though you may not like to follow them.
–Hall

Not all of the women I spoke with agreed with Janiene, Jill, Kelly, Hall and the others. Some resented the sorority for trying to control them and said the rules were too strict. They described their sorority as traditional, conservative. Shila and Lynn, for example, wanted more independence and were often frustrated by the amount of control the sorority tried to exert over their lives. Both suspected that fewer and fewer college women feel that sororities can meet their needs or fit their lifestyles. Shila and Lynn believed that the average college woman today college wants more freedom than sororities grant. Times are changing, and sororities need to change with they will cease to exist.

That's one thing, I mean, I don't agree with is all of the rules and you know...it's so old fashioned I mean, it's so out of touch with, nationals is with your chapter and what's exactly going on in the universities and how, and if enrollment rates are dropping in the university... –Shila

...It's kind of like such a hypocritical decision [the no-alcohol policy in sororities] because we all would go get wasted at these fraternities

and just rip the hell out of them. I mean you're talking people jumping on the furniture and breaking things and busting the pipes and blowing out the toilets and throwing up everywhere...and then we prance home to our sorority where it's this pristine little castle where good girls don't drink, and they go to bed before 2:00 in the morning, and they all sleep on the sleeping porch, and they wake up and they study from 12:00 to 9:00 on Sundays, you know. And it's just really...I think it's a hypocritical image... –Lynn

To instigate change, the majority of members must agree that a rule or policy needs changing. On some issues, sororities on this Northwestern campus are run like a democracy; everyone gets one vote. According to many of the women I interviewed, sororities encourage their members to voice their opinions, especially during chapter meetings. Members are invited to speak up and speak out.

I think that's one thing sororities mainly encourage, at least in mine, my experience, is complete democracy where um, everyone's open to their opinions and any rule, not any rule, but if you want something changed, then you are encouraged to try to change it...Rules can be changed and you're encouraged to speak out and voice your opinion and um...As far as voting on different things, you know, everyone has a voice, everyone has a vote, that type of thing. –Hall

...If someone has an issue and they want it brought up or want to change something, um, we encourage her not to keep quiet. If something bothers you then, then bring it up, out in the open. And then we can have a discussion about it, and uh, see what can be done...to make it better or to change it. –Sara

Amending the sorority system is no easy task, however. The process is complicated and time consuming. Members must follow a certain protocol and be “in good standing.” A troublemaker, on the other hand, stands little chance of gaining the support of her sisters. Those who pay dues late, skip chapter meetings, fail to make good grades, or party too hard and embarrass their organization are much less likely to be able to make a difference. Ironically then, a sorority member must be willing to accept and follow the rules in order to abolish them.

...I think it [trying to make change within the sorority] has to be approached in a very specific way. If you're going to complain, I believe that...complain and yet, give a solution. That was always how I approached things like that...I don't think they certainly were going to listen to an individual who had been called into standards once after every Friday night function who hadn't made grades, who hadn't been initiated, all those kinds of things. I mean, I, uh, a valuable member in good standing um, who...You have to pick the right time and place to voice your opinions and then offer a solution...and I just feel like they were very willing to listen if I was willing to say, 'I wanna change, I think that we need to change this and I am willing to do the work.' I mean the next thing out of the president's mouth would be, 'well, would you be willing to head up a committee to do this?,' that type of thing. So...if I wasn't willing to do that, then I always kept my mouth shut. --Lynn

Even a member in good standing may not be able to convince her sisters that an amendment is needed. Those who take a great deal of pride in their organization's history, and believe firmly in its traditions, are resistant to change.

Some rules and policies cannot be changed or abolished even if all of the members of a chapter unanimously agree. (Inter)national rules, like the no-alcohol policy for example, are fixed. Members have no choice but to accept, drop out, or risk getting thrown out.

Some of them [rules] are set in stone, like our national policy things, like no alcohol in the house and no drugs in the house and types of things like that. --Kelly

Many of the participants seemed to think that trying to instigate change is not worth the effort. Those who vehemently disagree with a policy or rule are more likely to go "inactive" and leave the sorority than stay and fight a losing battle. According to Mary Anne, nonconformists are not typically initiated into membership anyway, so forcing members to obey is rarely an issue. Women who do not want to follow the rules do not seek membership and/or do not receive an invitation to join – for Mary Anne it is as simple as that. When a newly initiated

member moves in, she is required to sign a contract, obligating her to live by the rules of the house.

...Even if everyone doesn't agree with it [a rule], they, they choose to live by those rules by, by pledging, so...You sign a contract when you move into the house, so basically they're...not many rules are changed, unless there's a big huge consensus. –Patrice

[When someone disagrees with one of the sorority's policies] they aren't initiated into membership. And if they are initiated into membership, their pin is pulled. –Jill

Um...basically, if...you know what you're getting into when you join a sorority, you know that you're going to be under these rules, and if you don't like that, then you need to leave, and you don't need to join... –Kelly

Therefore, to be a member of a sorority is to be a conformist. To some extent, the sorority functions to control women's behavior and limit women's freedom.

Looksism

When asked directly, few of the participants in this study admitted that their organizations had expectations about members' appearance. Most of the women I spoke with insisted that they and their sisters could wear whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted. Yet nearly all did say that they are encouraged by their sisters to look "presentable," "nice," "put-together" and "neat," especially when wearing their letters.

Sometimes you know, every once in a while, we'll say, 'you know, heh, put on some makeup today, just, you know, just for fun,' and you know, 'just for something different.' And it's usually, taken in, in a good sense...The...time that it is supposed to happen is when you're wearing your letters. You're supposed to look nice...um, and when you're wearing your pin 'cause you're supposed to have a positive reflection on the house... –Becki

Sororities know how many of their members are invited to the prestigious fraternity formals and whether or not they outnumber the attendees of rival

sororities (Handler 1995). Sorority status is determined, to some extent, by the attractiveness of the members, and almost every Greek knows this. The expectations that sororities have for their members in terms of appearance puts additional pressure on sorority women to “look good”, which may make them more susceptible to eating disorders.

I guess when you're around someone like that it changes you, when you're around a group of girls that always look they're best maybe it does change the individual... --Shila

When you're living with girls, like I said, like 60 girls, that look that way, or that are like exercising all the time, that tend to be thin, you know, that, that kind of stuff, I think you feel like you need to keep up with that, and I think a lot of girls get caught up in that. 'Cause you're constantly, I mean, when you're sitting at the dinner table with all these girls and stuff, and everyone's talking about what they did or didn't eat and how much they exercised today or that kind of stuff, I know that's when the eating disorders come in... --Ann

Several of the participants reported that eating disorders like bulimia and anorexia nervosa are a serious issue in their houses. Consumed with physical beauty and its impact on their own popularity and that of the sorority, some members diet and exercise constantly and/or binge and purge to stay thin. The pressure to “look presentable” and “nice” is multiplied by the pressure to succeed at almost everything: grades, extracurricular activities, friendships, etc. This pressure for a sorority woman begins during rush, before she is even a member.

...I always felt like they [sororities] expect a woman to excel in all areas, that they...especially...um...both inner and outer beauty...
--Lynn

Many of the women I spoke with had a hard time articulating what their organization's criteria for membership are. I had to ask this question of some of the participants several times. From what I could gather, there are approximately six different issues that are considered before a woman is offered a bid to join a sorority. First and foremost, a woman must be able to meet the financial

obligations of membership. Since scholarships are not available, a rushee has to demonstrate that she (or more likely, her family) can pay the organization's dues and fees for four years. T-shirts and sweatshirts, dances and date-nights, and pizza and beer are all extra! Though some of the participants argued that living in a sorority costs about as much as living in a dorm or off campus, studies have shown that the majority of sorority and fraternity members come from a higher socio-economic class than non-Greeks (Baier & Whipple 1990; Pike & Askew 1990).

A woman must also do well academically to be considered for membership. In some houses, having good grades is more important than anything else – new members in these sororities are selected solely upon their grade point average (G.P.A.), in high school if they rush their first year of college, and existing members are expected to maintain at least a 3.0 average. Failing to maintain this expectation can result in a monetary fine.

Many of the women who participated in this study said that personality is also taken into consideration, though most of the participants reluctantly confessed that “judging” a woman's personality is difficult, especially since formal fall rush on this campus lasts less than a week. Given the number of first year students who go through formal rush in the fall, more often than not, sorority members end up recruiting women who have an agreeable disposition or women who are sociable and make polite conversation. According to Hall, rushees who are outgoing and friendly are more likely to be offered a bid than women who are shy or nervous in a large group of strangers.

[When rushing, members ask themselves] ‘Does she come off real nice or is she hard to get to know, hard to talk to?’ that type of thing. And usually, the girls that are selected are ones that are outgoing and, and easy to talk to ‘cause during rush and even in informal, you don’t have much time to talk to them... –Hall

Compatibility with the active members is also extremely important. Becki said that most of the sororities on this campus think about whether or not a rushee

would “fit in” with the rest of the group. Actives rely on their instinct and intuition to determine if a prospective member would “mesh” well with the active members.

We look for someone who I guess (and this is a horrible term) we mesh with. I hate that term. Someone who we can get along with and feel comfortable with. I mean, usually you can tell, um...someone, if you're rushing someone and you just don't get that feeling. It's just, it's just something you know. –Becki

Sorority members also try to assess rushees' “staying power.” They want members who are willing to work hard for the sorority and those who are willing to stick it out. The women I spoke with said their organizations expect their members to be dedicated and make a four year commitment to the sorority.

[We look at] how interested they are in, in...when they're rushing, if they're accepting a bid just to do it or if they're really interested in the house and would like to become a part of it. –Patrice

We look for a person who is outgoing, who's personable, who is going to be a contributor to the house as far as wanting to hold an office or that type of thing. We look for someone who has staying power, who you feel like is gonna really be a four-year college member. Um...just someone you fits into your picture with what your purpose is. –Mary Anne

It is also important that a prospective member has “high morals.” Again, sorority women are very concerned about the overall reputation of the house – they believe that “one bad apple can rot the whole barrel.” Women with bad or questionable reputations do not usually get offered bids, according to Hall.

...If you have seen her at parties all year and you know that she gets kind of out of control and she's loud and obnoxious, then um...or you've heard that she's gotten together with quite a few guys, then that's usually a person that we don't want. --Hall

As was previously mentioned, the physical appearance of the members of a sorority can dictate the group's status on the sorority hierarchy, how many bids they receive from fraternities, and consequently, the group's overall social success. “Pretty” and “thin” is obviously not advertised as required criteria for membership,

but it is undoubtedly taken into account during every fall rush. Kelly was hesitant, but eventually she admitted that her organization *does* critique rushees on the basis of looks.

...We look at, um...we do look at appearance in a way that you want someone that, you know, looks kinda more together...and is not um...Appearance is a hard one 'cause we're not really judgmental but yet, we wanna make sure that they're put together, that they're not...um...I don't know...um...I guess put together is the best word...
–Kelly

So it seems a sorority woman has to have it all! To become a member, she must be “well rounded.” According to Kayla, well rounded sorority women excel academically, volunteer in the community and participate in philanthropies, get involved in other campus groups, hold leadership positions in the house, attend parties and other Greek functions, maintain high moral standards, are socially active, possess a charming personality, and are attractive.

Um, we just look for someone who's um, kind of well-rounded really. Someone who feels good about themselves, someone who's into academics, someone who um...someone who is going to get along with people because there's so many different people in the sorority that you're gonna have to have someone who's gonna mesh well with other people in your house, someone who kind of wants the same things out of a sorority that we want...My sorority is really into grades and one of our goals is to be #1 in grades or at least top three type of thing. So we really look for people who are um, especially coming out of high school, that have high GPAs. And then we also really, um, want high campus involvement, so um, leadership activities type of stuff. –Kayla

Sorority Hierarchy

Some of the pressure to excel at almost everything likely stems from recognition of the sorority hierarchy. Consistent with the literature on this subject, I found that the sororities on this campus are ranked. Some houses at this Pacific Northwestern university are considered better than others, and this hierarchy is well

established and well known. The status of each house on the hierarchy is recognized by nearly all sorority members, fraternity members, and non-Greeks.

...There's some houses that think they're the best 'cause they have the most members, yet they aren't rushing quality women. They don't really care who they get or...either that or they're throwing out people who look one way or the other or...I don't think that, I think that the houses that think they're on top of the campus or whatever, a lot of them are basing it on things that are absolutely unimportant, you know, either looks or I don't know, whatever. I think that, I think that there is definitely a hierarchy, but I'm not sure how valid it is. –Patrice

Several of the women I spoke with have concluded that fraternities are largely responsible for the ranking of the sororities. Becki, for example, believed that the sorority hierarchy is made “obvious through who the fraternities choose to associate with”. Not surprisingly, fraternities give bids for functions to the most popular sororities which helps to maintain the sorority's popularity. The sororities that fraternities tend to function with most often have the most attractive members, according to Emily and Ann, thereby making the sorority hierarchy, in part, based on appearance and attractiveness to men.

I know the houses guys pick to function, like the, the fraternities [that] are the most fun and like have the most guys and all that kind of stuff, they pick sororities to function with that are like the ones that have, you know, the ones that are...um...bigger houses are the ones that have, you know, according to the guys, more good looking girls or whatever... 'cause I've heard different guys say things before about 'oh, this house, you know, they're all like totally gorgeous.' Or you know, 'this house...they're sluts or whatever,' you know. –Emily

Well, I know that from what I've experienced a lot [the hierarchy] is ranked on attractiveness, as much as I hate to say it. Like if a house is full of hot girls or whatever, you'll hear, like fraternities say, 'oh they're the hottest sorority on campus,' that kind of stuff. –Ann

Most of the participants seem resigned to the sorority hierarchy on campus, and few of them considered the ranking problematic – those who did take offense to the hierarchy did not think there was much they could do about it. A small number of the women I interviewed believed it was justified: the houses whose members are well smart, sociable, attractive, driven to succeed, and all around, well-rounded *are* better than those whose members are not.

Stereotypes

A consequence and a component of the sorority hierarchy are stereotypes. The two are so closely connected in fact that a house's position on the hierarchy is often based solely on other Greeks' perception of the house and/or its members.

...As far as girls, as far as hierarchy goes, a lot of it has to do with...[the] reputation of the girls themselves, like if you know something about some girls, then they kind of shed a bad light on the whole house and you tend to stereotype the whole house based on a few girls that you know... –Hall

Stereotypes are an intricate component of the Greek system, and like the hierarchy, stereotypes are known by almost everyone.

...I think society as a whole, not just the Greek system, but as a whole, is anxious to identify people, to label them, so that they can form a perception and know what to expect from that individual...or to prepare themselves, I mean, to make them feel comfortable. And in the Greek system, it lets them know if they're going to accept or reject that person...I remember, this is an example, I remember my freshman year...I was at this party or whatever, meeting someone, and he was from some sort of a really...a fraternity that I knew my friends would think was dumb. But he was great. We hit it off and we had a great time that night. And the next day, you know, they [friends] wanted to know who I was hanging out with. 'You know, [Lynn], he looked so cute. He looked so fun...what house was he in?' And I told them and they were shocked! 'Oh my god, you're kidding me! He was in *that* house!' And it's so much about labeling that it is almost...I mean...And I got to be very good friends with this person, but I knew that as soon as I told my friends that they were going to be shocked. –Lynn

Nearly every sorority on this campus has been stereotyped. Some houses are thought to be rich, stuck-up, snobby, or bitchy. One or two are considered “goody-goody” houses – the members of these houses all get 4.0 G.P.A.s and go to bed at 10:00 p.m. on Friday and Saturday nights, according to the stereotype. Some houses are “easy” or “slutty” – the members are of these sororities always and willing to have a good time. Not surprisingly, “slutty” sororities tend to be very popular with fraternities and get several bids each term.

...Sororities are known for their good looks or for their partying capabilities (laughs) or for um...being fat or being small [in numbers] or being um, you know um...athletic or cheerleaders or whatever... –Jill

I think, if we have been [stereotyped] it's more kind of that we're...I don't know if 'prissy' is that right word, but we follow the rules, especially like alcohol policies, we're really um, big on that...and making sure that we're doing what we should be doing. But I think that people think that we're pretty down-to-earth too, so I don't...we're not known as the big, like partiers on campus. –Kayla

...I know houses that are like...they're stereotyped because they're all blonde and they all, you know, they're all tan or whatever...you can tell by looking at most girls what house they're in...by how they dress, how they look, um, and that type of thing, how much makeup they wear, body size, that type of thing... –Hall

Most of the participants felt that sorority stereotypes are problematic because they negatively affect membership rates. Rushees believe, or at the very least are discouraged by, the stereotypes and choose not to join a sorority with a bad reputation.

I know that a lot of girls, like our freshmen that we have now, our new pledge class, we talked to them about like, what they heard, like their experience going through rush and how they felt, like when they came over to our house or whatever. And they said like in the dorms they would hear that like 'you have to be pretty to get in, or you have to be skinny,' you know, that kind of stuff, 'that you have

to look a certain way to get in,' and that we're really big on looks. And they hear all the stereotypes... –Ann

The women in Becki's house, for example, have been stereotyped as "fat and ugly." Although the stereotype was started years before she became a member, Becki believed her organization continues to suffer its effects, for her sorority is one the smallest on campus.

I think that it [the stereotype], it mostly affects, um, how other people see us. Uh, it doesn't affect how we see ourselves. We know that we're strong; we know that, you know, that we are all beautiful women and we have things that make us beautiful--not always on the outside, but you know, it, it doesn't matter. We know that we can count on each other and that's the most important thing. –Becki

To alleviate some of the damage the stereotypes cause, some houses have to very work hard, especially during rush, to promote a positive image.

...I think during rush it's important to like, portray, a different, get a different message across and like, be genuine, and that kind of stuff to delete it [the impact of the stereotype]. –Ann

Small sororities, like Becki's, encourage their members to wear their letters on campus regularly. The hope is that a demonstration of group pride will help to counteract the impact of the stereotype and boost membership.

It's important for us to get out there and show our pride in our sorority and to try to get people, you know, to get to know who we are. But we can't make them do it, you know. I think that out of every sorority on campus I think we wear our letters the most, you know, to show people that we are proud to be who we are. –Becki

Not all of the sorority stereotypes are negative, however, according to the participants. Some are positive and well deserved. Certain houses are known for having intelligent, classy members who are actively involved on campus and in the community and who maintain a high grade point average. Others are thought of as

“fun” and “easy going.” Janiene and her sisters, for example, are seen as the “marrying type.”

...People think that we are the nice sorority, you know. We’re the girls that you marry someday (laughs), you know, that you’d wanna settle down with... –Janiene

Sororities like Janiene’s are proud of the way they have been stereotyped – she insisted that these kinds of stereotypes attract “desirable” women.

Other participants claimed that their organizations have not been stereotyped at all, positively or negatively. Not being stereotyped gives the members of these sororities a sense of satisfaction. For these women, not being stereotyped meant that their house is diverse, that all of their sisters are different and unique and/or that no one has done anything to warrant a stereotype. In this way, stereotypes, like the sorority hierarchy, are accurate and deserved. Sororities earn their reputations. Emily asserted that because her house does not have a reputation, “we’re obviously trying to do something right...not you know...we’re not going out and doing the things that people look down upon...”

Competition between Sororities and Horizontal Hostility

The status of the houses is in constant flux. A sorority that was once considered popular could develop a bad reputation, lose members, and fall down the ranks in the course of a couple of academic terms. Consequently, there is a lot of competition between the various sororities. Individual members, as representatives for their organizations, compete, and entire groups compete. After all, “every house wants to be a good house” so said Emily.

Rush is a highly competitive time for sororities. Houses compete for membership and may use any means necessary to win the numbers game. Even though the verbal bashing of other sororities is forbidden by the Pan Hellenic council during formal rush, “dirty rush” is a serious problem.

[Sororities compete]...for the best women, competing for the beautiful women, the, you know, just...it's just...I think it's a competition to keep the name up, you know, and that, that doesn't always portray something positive, you know. Because, 'oh well, you're not as pretty as us, so I'm sorry, you can't be here...'
Or I just...it's mostly a competition for numbers. That's where it all comes down...who can stay on top. –Becki

Indirectly, the competition between sororities during rush is competition between women for male approval. Sororities want “good” members (i.e. attractive, social, friendly, rich, well-rounded), because “good” members appeal to fraternity men.

...You're competing most of all just to get your numbers up. And it's such a numbers game, so obviously I mean, everything reflects on that. I mean you want your house to look good to the fraternities because if the little rushees are coming through [and asking fraternity members], 'well, what house do you think?...' I mean, guys have a huge influence on that. I guess you want your house to look good to the fraternities... –Mary Anne

Although the most competitive time is during formal rush, sororities compete against each other year round, in other ways.

They're competing for everything. They're competing to be the presidents of groups. They're competing, um, for any, any event that's held on campus...because we all want to be the best sorority that there is. We all want to be the biggest and the best. –Jill

Sororities compete in intra-murals sports and IFC Sing. Sorority members compete for Pan Hellenic leadership and other positions on campus. Houses compete to see who can raise the most money for their charity. According to Emily, sororities also compete for grades.

Like grades is a huge thing, you know, trying to be...number, in the top three or #1 in grades, you know. 'Oh, so-and-so beat us,' you know, 'we gotta try to beat them the next time,' or whatever. Um, so I think there's a lot of like that type of competition... –Emily

Not surprisingly, sororities compete with each other for bids to fraternity functions. Some houses actively lobby fraternities for these bids.

They [sorority women] might say [to fraternity men], 'you're giving that to them, well give it to us instead,' Or there are certain functions that they have every year that everyone knows about and so everyone wants that function for the next year... –Patrice

...If there is a big party, like a fraternity gives once a year, then um, the sororities might want that bid. And so, like the week before, they'll like go over there and hang out at the fraternity a lot. Some of them will like bake 'em cakes, kind of like just catering to their needs... –Kayla

Some of the women I interviewed insisted that the competition between the sororities is fun and good humored; however, not all of the participants agreed. Some described the competition as unhealthy and even harmful to the houses and their members, particularly the competition during rush. Patrice and Becki both felt that cooperation rather than competition is absolutely necessary for the survival of the Greek system. Greek membership at this university as a whole is dropping and sororities should be joining forces instead of fighting one another. The inner sorority conflict may temporarily benefit some organizations, but in the end, it hurts the system as a whole.

I'd say, overall, [the competition is] unhealthy. I think a lot of times they [sororities] forget that. If they don't help build up the whole Greek system, then it's not going to be here much longer...numbers going through rush every year has been dropping, and enrollment has been dropping. But the proportion of people who are Greek has been dropping also. –Patrice

We're all in this together... 'cause we all know what's going on. We all feel it, and if one person, if one house goes down, then we all feel it... –Becki

It seems that the competitive spirit fades as members age. According to many of the women I interviewed, the bulk of the competition that occurs between the various sororities is instigated by the younger members in the houses and the

young women recently initiated into membership. When they grow up, they grow out of it, in some cases, after developing friendships with women from other sororities.

...I think among the younger...when you're younger, when you first join, there's a lot of competition, especially between the freshmen, maybe even sophomores, just because you're in a dorm, and you know, you want everyone to know that your sorority is the best sorority and, and it becomes, you know...When you're a freshman, you wear the letters everyday and you're just, you talk about your sorority all the time and that type of thing, so I think it's really competitive as to 'mine's the best,'--'no mine.' 'This is what we do,'- 'this is what *we* do.' And, but I think as you grow older, you grow out of that competition phase and um...realize how trivial it is and dumb it is. And, um...our, it's easier to form friendships with other girls in other sororities and, and not be so competitive...
-Hall

Competition between Sisters

Not only are the houses competitive, but there is also a great deal of competition between the individual members of the organizations, and when sisters compete with each other, it is usually over men. Sororities tend to socialize with the same fraternities over and over again, so it is not hard to imagine how two or three members of one house could meet and become interested in the same fraternity man.

...I think it's one of those things where you're meeting the same people. We obviously all have the same interests, so we're attracted to the same people. -Janiene

For Ann, the competition for men is natural and normal.

Well I just think that when there's like 60 girls living under one roof, and you're all partying, you know, some of you are meeting the same people in the Greek system...I mean, there's 60 girls living in one house, you're bound to have conflicts with like people wanting to date the same guy or you know, like, someone dating your ex-boyfriend or something like that, I think it's just going to happen, and I know that causes, that does cause a lot of problems,

but there's just no way to get around it when there's that many girls under one roof. –Ann

The participants disagreed on the effects of inner-organizational competition. Some insisted that the sisterhood bond is not affected when members compete. Others said that this kind of conflict damages the bond between the feuding members but not necessarily the entire sorority's sisterhood bond.

I think it's, it's [the sisterhood bond] weakened. Um, um...there's a point when that...I think it's, it's weakened because the friendship is weakened. Um, there's still the, obviously the common sorority bond, but um, maybe it's harder for those two people to sit in the same room together, for a while... –Janiene

Between people, yeah [the bond is affected]...um, house-wide, no. It just, it, it's something that only those couple of people, or whoever's involved, [need] to work out...I don't think it weakens the, you know, sisterhood bond house-wide, just between a couple of sisters, but then again...a chain is only as strong as its weakest link... –Becki

A few of the women I spoke with, on the other hand, were convinced that the whole house *is* negatively affected when members compete. When women choose men over women, the sorority loses, because this kind of conflict weakens, if not destroys, the sorority bond. There is no sisterhood without respect, for respect is the tie that binds, and when that respect is lost, so is the bond of sisterhood.

Unfortunately, the organization and its leaders seem to do very little, if anything, to resolve such conflicts, even though such conflicts put the sorority bond in harms way. A sister who is especially close to one of the feuding members typically sides with her friend, but the house, the officers, and the national/international chapter rarely get involved as per standard procedure. Sororities encourage, if not make obligatory, strong connections among their members, yet when problems arise, they do next to nothing to protect that connection. Defending one's romantic interests (even those from the past) seems to be more important than maintaining friendships among women. In their refusal to

help their members put an end to their disputes, sororities prioritize men over women, even those women who call the sorority “home.”

The competition among sorority members for the attention and approval of men leads to horizontal hostility towards women. The participants generally described women as harsh, cutthroat (particularly about physical appearance), selfish, under-handed and catty. A few of the sorority members I spoke with reported that they are more cautious and less trusting of women after being in a sorority.

I think, women, in some...they can be like pretty harsh towards each other... ‘cause there’s always that, there’s a competition, especially now like with...like with such an importance on like appearance and that kind of stuff, you know, in society today and everything, there’s always going to be that competition, you know... –Ann

Heterosexism and Homophobia

Heterosexism, like horizontal hostility, impedes the relationships between sorority women. Although they are encouraged to love, trust, and support their sisters, sorority women are discouraged from getting *too* close. Their relationships are intended to be platonic; romantic love and/or physical intimacy amongst members are not permitted.

Lesbianism is so far removed from sorority life that few of the participants had even considered the possibility. Until the interview, many said that they had never thought about what it would be like to have an openly gay member, how their sisters would react to a lesbian in the house, or whether their organization has a policy for or against lesbianism. If there are lesbian sorority members, no one talks about it, according to Ann. Becki responded similarly.

I don’t know anybody that’s even thought of it. I mean I’m sure people have thought of it, but no one’s ever said anything out loud...like, ‘what would happen if, you know, that kind of situation occurred?’ I’d, I don’t even know. –Becki

Some of the women I spoke with, like Mary Anne, believed that the organization would adjust and adapt. Although having a lesbian as a member would be difficult, she and her sisters would deal with the issue diplomatically.

I think it would be really weird...just because you dress with these people and you shower, and you all, I mean, we all have, live so closely together that...just if you added that factor in that people would be...it'd just be hard to get used to. But I don't think that um...I don't know, I mean, I don't think that people...I think it just would be something that you'd have to get used to because I don't think that people would shut someone out because of that. Obviously you're not going to find that out when you're rushing a person. You're not going to say, 'are you a lesbian?.' And if this is a person that you've accepted into your membership because you feel so strongly about their person, then that's just going to be something that comes along with them. And I think you're going to have to work through it. I mean, and obviously...I mean I don't think that, I don't think it's out of the question at all...It just hasn't happened in our chapter, just as far as I know. But I, I have a feeling that we would try to be diplomatic about it. But it just would be, it would be a challenge I bet. –Mary Anne

The majority of the participants, however, predicted that the response would be negative. Most of the women I interviewed felt that having a lesbian in the house would make everyone uncomfortable. As Mary Anne pointed out, members shower together, dress together and sleep in one room – a gay woman in this context would be “really weird.” Lynn, one of the few interviewees who had actually considered the possibility prior to the interview, stated that her house would not be receptive to having a lesbian sister.

...I guess there was one girl that people, I mean, people thought, 'maybe...' but it was only because she never, ever, ever was heard of being with a man. And so people thought, 'maybe...' And it was like, 'I bet she's a dyke!' I mean that was, that was the quote, 'I bet she's a dyke!' But it was really...even that was really hush-hush, and only certain people said that. And, but the thing is that we have discussed it. I know that...girls and I have discussed it and thought, 'if you imagine how big the Greek system is, there has to be women in the Greek system that have...experimented, thought about it...bisexuality, lesbianism...' –Lynn

Hall agreed. She did not think her sisters would accept an openly gay member either.

Um, I don't think they [the members] would act very positively. Um, and I don't really know why. But in some aspects, like...the sisters are, are really close. I mean...and, probably closer than normal people are. There'll be a big couch and we'll sit practically on top of each other, you know, always like touching each other, that type of thing. But then when, you know...I just don't think that if you were to find out that two people like were together or if one was like seeing another woman, that it would be very favorable. I think it would make for uncomfortable situations...
-Hall

Patrice predicted that in her house, lesbianism would not be tolerated and a lesbian member would be asked to leave.

I don't, I don't, I just don't think it [lesbianism] would be stood for. I mean, I know I would feel uncomfortable with that happening, when it's under your roof, where...I just don't, I don't think that...it wouldn't, it wouldn't be tolerated...We have the right to have live there who we choose to live there. And...it's, it's a membership definitely. I, we, we don't kick people out, but I think that for something like that, they, they would be asked to leave if that was going on. I mean, it's never even been close to happening. But I just think that's probably what would happen. I don't think it would be tolerated very well. -Patrice

Lesbianism is not considered acceptable in sororities because it goes against one of the main functions of the Greek system. Within the exclusive Greek system, heterosexuality is compulsory.

...I guess for me, if I was, had, if I felt that I was a lesbian, I would not want to be in the Greek system. Um, I think it would be difficult enough, difficult enough to deal with it on this campus, let alone to be in a system that...that um...preached heterosexuality and that encouraged it and that felt that that was the only acceptable way...I, I, as a, if I was lesbian, I would not want to um...I would not like to, I would not want to submit myself to that...Well you get...it's a Friday night, and there's a fraternity party, and it's been planned for three months--this is just an example--but the fraternity is preparing

for it...It's this ritual: the fraternity prepares for it, you know. They get the beer and start drinking at five or whatever. And the women primp and priss and talk about it all day long and what they're going to wear and how they're going to do it and who they have a crush on and who they think they're going to...mash with...I'm reverting back to, I mean, I, this was like from my freshman and sophomore year...but, you know, who they're going to dance with and who they're going to shack with and who they're going to do this with. And I think it just solidifies the acceptance of heterosexuality. And...a girl, a woman, being in a sorority saying, 'god you know, I heard, I heard this girl from this sorority is going to be there, and I think she's really hot!...' It jus doesn't...it just doesn't fit the picture (laughs)! I just don't see it, and I'm trying, I mean, and I, I mean...I have friends that are, that are gay and, but I just, I just think that it [Greek life] is such...it is such a stereotypical lifestyle that...I don't know. I just don't see it, a sorority, being accepting of that... –Lynn

Traditional Heterosexual Dating Patterns

The traditions surrounding sorority and fraternity functions on this Northwestern campus mirror conventional heterosexual dating patterns, and studies have shown that these dating patterns imply different norms for men and women (Lottes 1993; Boeringer, Shehan & Akers 1991; Risman 1987). If these functions serve as the model for personal relationships between sorority and fraternity members, and it is likely they do, then it is fair to conclude that this Greek system, like so many others in the United States, encourages fraternity men to be sexually aggressive and women, passive.

Fraternities are almost always responsible for the organization and initiation of a sorority/fraternity function according to all of the women I spoke with. "Because it's kind of like always been that way," so said Kayla, fraternities approach sororities with a "bids" at the end of each term.

...What'll happen is um...they'll [fraternities] go out to the different sororities and you know, maybe they'll have five functions for a term, and they're going to bid five different sororities, and they'll come up with a theme and you know, do a little bid that matches, invitation that matches the theme. So you might have like a beach party, and you have like someone come in with a beach ball

and some sand and lays and stuff like that, and it's, it's fun and it's cute. Um, and it, you know, it's one of those things that have carried over from years and years and years. Um, and then as a sorority, we vote on whether we want to accept or decline a bid, the invitation... –Janiene

With few exceptions, functions are held at the fraternity house.

I think it goes probably back to the fact that, you know, men always have the alcohol, and they're supposed to get the women to come over, you know, and (laughs), but um...it just seems to me, like fraternities were built to have a specific place for gatherings. Sororities don't have a place where they can just go...you know. It seem like it gets trashed, but (laughs), but fraternities are build with a place where you can do that. –Becki

The sorority may pay for the incidentals—the photographer, the food, the D.J., etc.—and it is common for sororities and fraternities on this particular campus to split the cost of the security guard. However, typically the fraternity bears the brunt of the cost because they buy the booze.

Usually, if it's an alcoholic event, the guys will pay for the alcohol because the girls cannot, um, use any part of their money in the sorority to pay for um, alcohol...so usually they provide the alcohol and we'll provide the food. Um, when it's a non-alcoholic event or when it's like a really big event, we'll just go halves, excluding the alcohol. And the only time we can, we can buy alcohol is when it's for ourselves and um, and we're taking it over as individuals to the fraternity...[the sorority as a whole cannot buy alcohol]...'cause that can be pinpointed so quickly by our nationals that, that even if we wanted to bend the rules and get around it, we couldn't. So it, it, it's very strongly...bad...very bad. –Jill

Risman (1987) found that some sororities discourage their members from asking men out on dates because it looks desperate and this reflects poorly on the house. Though none of the participants offered this as a reason why fraternities usually arrange their functions, given the emphasis on protecting the collective reputation of the house and its members, it is possible.

Traditional dating practices within the Greek context may be putting sorority women at a greater risk for sexual assault. Because fraternities initiate and pick up the tab, sorority women may be forced “pay men back” with sexual favors. Korman (1983) found this to be true for white college women. “The more money spent, the ‘further’ he is ‘entitled’ to go in terms of sexual intimacy” (Korman 1983). Fraternity/sorority functions also get women on men’s turf, and studies have shown that women are more vulnerable in fraternity houses.

Fortunately, changes are beginning to take place. Some sororities on campus have started extending bids to fraternities.

This is one thing that I don’t agree with (laughs), um, the way that the, um, Greek system’s run...the fraternity gives the bids to the sorority and then we accept the bids, or not, and in the past few years we actually have been [having] dry functions where we, since we can’t have parties with alcohol or parties at our house, we have like dry functions and give them [bids] to the fraternity, and that way we’re taking pro-active, we’re giving them, we’re not sitting back waiting for them to give us a bid, and I think that’s kinda cool. –Shila

Unfortunately, however, traditions are hard to change and progress is slow.

...We’ve given a number of bids [to fraternities] for barbeques. Um, we’ve also given some bids for, to participate in [IFC] Sing, and um...so you know...It’s, I think it’s, it’s more common obviously for the fraternities to give the bids, but it does happen that sororities give bids also. –Janiene

Sometimes sororities will extend bids, but not very often. Most, most often it’s fraternities that extend bids. [Sororities will extend bids to fraternities] either if they don’t have, um, as many functions as they like, um, for the next term. Or like, for wake-up-breakfasts, which aren’t an actual function. A lot of times the sorority will, will extend bids...like fraternities don’t extend bids very often for wake-up-breakfasts, it’s mostly sororities that do that, not fraternities. –Patrice

Sexual Double Standard

Many of the participants reported that they and their sisters are taught to take responsibility for setting the limits when it comes to sex. It is their duty to control themselves and the men they are with. Sex outside the confines of a monogamous, heterosexual relationship is not acceptable. Love-making with a boyfriend is okay, but drunken one-night-stands are not, according to most of the women I interviewed. Members deter other members from promiscuous, reckless behavior.

I think that it [the house] discourages sexual experimentation with random people that you don't have relationships with, like a...kind of a commitment to. Um, basically they don't, we don't really encourage people to like, hop around from one person to the next. But if, but if you're like committed with someone, and you have boyfriend or you know, you've been seeing this guy for a while, that's kind of okay type of...or a...we talk about it, and it's not looked down upon. –Kayla

Well um, one of our biggest rules is 'conduct unbecoming,' and I, I don't, I think that, as far as the sorority, it's looked down upon if you're experimenting sexually 'cause it's irresponsible and it's not...it's not becoming... –Patrice

“Conduct unbecoming” is defined as,

um, just to not, not do things that um, portray us badly on campus. Not um, not get wasted at a party and throw up all over everyone and be wearing your letters and...go home with some guy, you know. Just, just in general, just not...to conduct yourself in a way that is positive rather than negative... –Patrice

To ensure that sorority members act appropriately, rules prohibiting men from going beyond the first floor of the sorority house are strictly enforced. Men are not permitted in sorority women's “dorm” rooms on the second, nor are they allowed on the third floor “sleeping porch.” In addition, public displays of affection are not tolerated, and members are not allowed to have sex, of any kind, anywhere in the house!

The reputation of the house is once again cited as the reason for such harsh restrictions. Promiscuity is discouraged because it does not represent the house well. Sororities are undoubtedly concerned about the safety and well being of their members, but more than that, they are worried about the reputation of the house and its status within the Greek system.

...Being sexual with a bunch of partners...I don't think that's encouraged [by the sorority]. I don't think it's encouraged just in society because it's so dangerous. And uh, you can get a name for yourself pretty quick. And uh, it's just, it's not, it's not really representing your house good if you're known for sleeping around.
 –Sara

Well...(sigh)...there's, there's kind of a line...it's like a pretty gray area because to a point, it's none of, it's none of their business, you know. But if, if you're, if it's happening to the extent where you are projecting a bad image on campus or throughout the Greek system or whatever, then that's where they have the right to step in and talk to you about it. –Patrice

The sorority can, and often does, enforce their right to “step in.” If the situation gets out of hand (i.e., if a member's behavior is unbecoming), the sorority will intervene and instruct a member to act more “lady-like” or if necessary, the house will punish her. Promiscuity is a serious “offense” and can lead to probation.

...I know for a fact that you don't just go to a party and sleep with somebody. Because most likely someone that does that would be considered...like a freshman, if a freshman, if it were to be found that one of the freshman girls was wasted at a fraternity party and ended up having sex--I mean, this happens all the time--it comes back to the older members, and she gets called in to the standards board and talked about to her, ‘this is not the behavior that exemplifies the standards we strive to uphold...’ Because our house has this image that we are...we're fun and we party, but we're not *easy*...I don't think that it is really accepted to go...you don't, you don't go out and um...when you have sex, you have sex in a commitment I think. And if you don't, you're a slut! That is, and that's not what, that I, that's not my perspective, but that's the image...Because we want to be classy, elegant, good girls that know

that there is a time and place for everything, but the everything only occurs in a commitment...good girls don't have sex. –Lynn

Some of the women with whom I spoke were fed up and angered by the amount of control their organizations had over their lives. These women believed the house ought to worry less about its reputation and more about the health and happiness of its members. Yet these women felt powerless to do anything about their frustration. Again, the rules and policies in a sorority are extremely difficult to change.

Maintaining the “good girl” image while simultaneously attracting fraternity members to ensure bids for functions, a high rating on the sorority hierarchy, and popularity during rush, must be quite a challenge for sorority women. These women are expected to walk the fine line between partying enough and partying too much. Members must constantly balance the roles of “virgin and whore,” to again, be it all.

Sexual Assault

Most of the participants reported that their organizations are concerned about the issue of sexual assault and take precautions to make sure that their houses are secure. Nearly all of houses have alarms and keyless entry. The doors and windows are almost always closed and locked.

...Like if you're on exec. [the executive board], we have... 'lock-up/lock-down' is what it's called. And once a week, we'll um, all sign up for appointments to do the 'lock-down' or something. And what my thing is [as a member of the executive board] before I go to bed every night, and it lasts for a whole week, um, I go around and I check and make sure that all the down-stairs windows are closed and locked, um, make sure all the doors, well the doors are automatically, you know, locked all the time, but I check 'em again. Just to kind of survey the area before I go to bed: check the curtains, type of thing... –Kayla

Most sororities on this campus also use the “buddy system” or “sober sisses” at parties. Members make a point to out for each other – no sister is allowed to be alone at a fraternity party.

If like, we’re out somewhere and I notice someone who had been like, who was really drunk and um...they were, you know, like dancing with a guy and like things are starting to happen, I think, you know, we would try to stop those kind of things. Just because, especially if they’re, I mean, there’s, you know, there’s some people who are like total flirts and they, you know, kiss guys all the time, but, most of those girls don’t necessarily, you know, have sex with all those guys, but you know, they’re real, total flirts, and so...Like people like that I wouldn’t be as concerned if there was someone who isn’t like that. And you try to watch out for them. Um, if I, like if I thought that, like if I saw a couple girls just doing something that could be harmful, I would probably try and stop it, you know. --Emily

...If we go to, if we have a function we have two ‘sober sisses,’ that’s what they’re called, and they’re job is to stay sober the whole night and kinda watch out for people who are drinking and to a, if someone’s getting out of control, we tell them that they need to go home and then make sure that they get home safely, things like that. And you know, people watch out for people, even, even if they are drinking. They’re like always watching. ‘Oh, where are you going?...’ like if you’re up in a fraternity house, ‘don’t go.’ It’s like basically, ‘don’t go in a fraternity boys’ room by yourself,’ you know, things like that. So, we’re pretty aware of that, making sure that people are safe, as safe as they can be, I guess. –Kayla

Regrettably, however, these methods are not as effective as one would like. Sisters cannot be watched and protected at all times. Fraternity houses are large and fraternity parties are full of distractions. Although they agree that precautions need to be taken, most of the women I spoke with seemed rather naive about their likelihood of being victimized and did not express much concern about sexual assault in general. None of the women I talked to recognized that they, by their sheer association with fraternity men, may be more likely to be raped than a non-Greek woman on the same campus. One of the women I interviewed, for example,

insisted that date rape was not an issue in her organization. She insisted that if one of her sisters had been raped, she would have heard about it, and since no one said anything, it must not have ever happened. Denial like this is not uncommon.

They also did not understand that the secrecy and loyalty so valued in the Greek system may also be putting them at a greater risk. A strong allegiance to their house and the other sororities and fraternities on campus practically guarantee a victim's silence. The Greek system is a close-knit group, and sorority and fraternity members feel a sense of obligation to defend their own. Sorority women may also remain silent because of shame and victim blaming. Sororities encourage their members to watch their alcohol intake and teach them that too much partying can lead to unsafe situations. Although encouraging women to take precautions is important, forcing women to take personal responsibility for their own victimization is wrong.

Some of the participants were critical of the way their house responded to the issue and admitted that their sororities could and should have done a lot more to educate and protect their members. Sororities on this particular campus encourage, but do *not* require, their members to attend rape awareness seminars, for instance.

Sisterhood

I previously stated that horizontal hostility and heterosexism make it difficult for sorority sisters to foster rewarding and long-lasting friendships with each other. What can result is a bond that is superficial and forced. For some of the participants, sisterhood is weak, especially when they compared to brotherhood. It is just something that they talk about, a slogan to put on their t-shirts and rush posters. Many fraternity members think sisterhood is "stupid" and some of the women I talked to, like Ann and MaryAnn, agreed.

I think the fraternity [bond is closer] because girls can just be so, like backstabbing and that kind of stuff, whereas you don't really know if the bond's there, I mean, it might be there on the surface, like when you're doing 'fireside' activities or like bonding activities,

you know, they say, 'I love you,' you know, that kind of stuff, whatever, 'you're my sister,' that kind of stuff, but you don't know whether it's, sometimes you don't know if it's for real or not. Whereas guys are probably more apt to show their true feelings, they're not going to like, put on a show or anything think...whereas girls would probably just pretend, or like fake it... –Ann

To tell you the truth, I would maybe say that the brotherhood bond would be stronger because, if I can say this, girls are just bitchy! (laughs). You know how girls are just catty with each other. So you, I don't feel like, I don't feel like the house has brought on a really big bond any more so than something I would find with a friend. I mean, I have bonded with some girls in my chapter, definitely, but I wouldn't attribute that to the whole house thing, except for the fact that we were put there together. But I feel like fraternity brothers have, I don't know what they do (laughs), some type of, kind of...strange, really strong bond, sometimes, that I don't feel like we have. –Mary Anne

Not all of the women I interviewed ranked the brotherhood bond over the sisterhood bond, however. In fact, most of them talked fondly about their sisters and the connections they shared. The Greek system is, to a large extent, male identified, and this makes genuine relationships between women hard to develop, but it does not prevent those relationships from forming. Several of the sororities on this campus were able to foster a strong sisterhood, at least amongst some of their members.

The definition of sisterhood varies from sorority to sorority and from member to member. Although no single definition exists, sororal sisterhood is characterized as shared love, respect, and support. Sisters are always there for each other, through good times and bad.

Sisterhood would mean...see, I'm not the type of person that likes to go into really sappy stuff that everyone's always heard of before, so when people ask me what sisterhood means, it's really hard to describe. Because you can't describe the feelings of coming home, you know, um, late at night and just being glad to see your sister's face, you know. It's, it's nice to come downstairs

and just...you're sick and tired of studying and everybody around you is having 'snack-time,' so um, so, and they're studying so you want to study with them. Um, it's really hard to describe like those feelings. Or it's, it's hard to describe...like the other night, when I went upstairs in my room, I was just totally bummed with the world and I was just sick and tired of studying and I open[ed] up my closet and a girl jumps out at me! You can't describe those feelings. And I would have to say, sisterhood is, is just being there for one another, um, in more, in more of a sense than, than just being there. It's um...it's giving your sister money when she doesn't have any...it's, it's taking your sister to class on a rainy day. Um, it's, it's dealing with hard issues, you know like pregnancy or drug abuse or uh, or uh like eating disorders... Marriages now last less than two years and that's because people don't work at them. And with marriage, with the sorority, you have to. I mean, and we see that...and so, sisterhood I think is completely about working through those hard times... –Jill

[Sisterhood is]...a bunch of things. It's uh, you know, you, there's always, there's always someone there to talk to. Um, we protect each other. You help each other out. Um...if, if there's a bad situation that...if someone's sees me, um, starting to like this guy that's just no good or, or you know...we tell each other so that we don't get hurt. We protect each other like that. And um, just a lot of, a lot of love and everyone knows what everyone's going through and stuff, hard times for college and stuff, so we just help each other out. –Sara

Sisterhood is defined as...a trust, um, a devotion...the knowledge, um, that we can all count on each other, and we are all hooked ultimately by the same organization, and we all share something similar...sisterhood is just being able to be comfortable with each other and accept each other for the differences that we might have and to not make judgments. –Becki

...There have been times when I...for example, I had a very, my freshman year, my roommate had a severe eating disorder, and I did not know how to deal with it. And there was a woman in my pledge class whom I probably would have never ever thought that we could ever find anything to connect on, and we really didn't even like each other, and she approached me and said, "I know that your roommate is dealing with this, and I have been suffering from one for four years, and I will sit down and talk to you about this and help you

through this and help you, you how to deal with it so you can help her.' And so...it's amazing that the situations and circumstances...I mean, through four years of college, I was exposed to so many different types of things. I felt like even women that I didn't have a lot in common with, at some point, there was a time when either I lent them some support or vice versa. –Lynn

A sister is a good friend. She is trustworthy, giving, caring, understanding, sensitive, loyal, creative, friendly, warm hearted, compassionate, supportive, easy to talk to, and fun. A sister is a friend for life, a best friend.

...The girls that are in this house I consider my best friends, the ones that are going to be in my wedding, the ones that I'm going to keep in contact with the rest of my life. –Janiene

To build a sense of community amongst members, sororities perform rituals like “firesides” or the “candle pass.”

We'll have certain nights where we do a thing called a 'candle pass.' And that's when we'll sit in a big circle and we'll have like a question about friendship or a question about your best memory or that type of thing, and you go around and everyone says--and it's usually like a heart-felt thing--and everyone will say that...and then by the end everyone's just feeling bonded and as one, as they share their experiences and their feeling for one another. Um, we do a lot of like events with just girls in the house as far as like...they're called 'sisterhood activities,' where we just do like barbeques or we'll do um games and stuff or we'll do like a close house where it's just us and we have to stay there all night. And we'll have activities planned, like watching movies all together or that type of thing. Um...we have a 'sister social' where we have kind of a party. Like in the beginning it's just like games and stuff, and then like we'll have a party with just girls. We'll uh, rent out a basement in a fraternity and only...the guys can't come down. It's just girls. And...stuff like that. –Hall

Indeed, it is the secret rituals and “sisterhood activities” that make the sisterhood bond unique, that separate friendships between sorority women from friendships between non-sorority women. Sisterhood is special because it is characterized by ceremony, tradition, and herstory, experienced only by active

members and alumni. In a sorority, members know what it is like to be a member of a group. Participants described being in a sorority as being a part of something much bigger than themselves.

You could live in like a co-op and things, and I think you still wouldn't have the, you wouldn't have the closeness of the sorority...just because you have all learned like one thing in common, and it's also linked like nationally to other women who have that same thing in common, like no one, like no one else has...
–Emily

I think the thing that's really unique about it [the sisterhood bond] is because of the rituals that you share and the secrets that you know, that... 'cause it, when you know something like that, it kind of binds you together 'cause you know that no one else...knows it except the few people that do. –Kayla

...With initiation and stuff, you go through a lot of, a lot of, you know...initiation is a big thing because that's when you're with everybody the most and so you get to know them better. And, and so I think there's that special thing between um, between sisters, you know, all the time, where we share one thing major in common. With initiation, everyone goes through the same thing. –Sara

For many of the participants and their sisters, the sororal bond is stronger than any other relationship, including those with women outside of the sorority, and for some, romantic relationships with men. In fact, several of the women I interviewed insisted that their relationships with their sisters take priority over their relationships with men. "Friends are more important than boyfriends" so said Janiene. A woman can always count on and trust her sisters, but the same cannot be said of men. Friends are forever; women are always there for you, but men come and go.

I don't think that any relationship with a man will ever substitute for a relationship with my sisters. Um, I, I enjoy the relationship that I have with the man that I'm dating right now, but it won't, it won't ever be they same. They're...my sisters are just, you know...that's exactly what they are, they are my sisters, and they are my friends.

And I can tell them things that I can't tell anybody else, and I know know that someone will always be there for me... –Becki

...If it comes between, you know, choosing a guy and choosing your friend, a girlfriend, the girlfriend just about always wins. Guys can, boyfriends can last a couple months, but you know, friends are forever...the, the sisterhood bond I think is more, um, a lot stronger than they guy, the boyfriend thing. –Sara

I only have one chance to uh...be in this situation, and I can, you know, date guys for the rest of my life...and usually, they're more of a problem than they're worth anyways (laughs). I think for girls, it's really important to have like, close friends... –Emily

Several of the participants said that they are now more critical of their relationships with men and more appreciative of their relationships with women. In high school, they identified with men more often than women, but after living in a sorority, they were proud to call themselves women and happily aligned themselves with other women.

I have more confidence in women. I can tell them more, and I'm, I'm more open with women now. And before I was kind of like, you know, kind of more dependent on men than I was on women. And you know, I was more flirty and batting my eyes and talking to them [men] and wanting, you know, attention from men, you know, kind of thing. Whereas now, I don't need the attention from the men...I have women to rely on now. –Sally

I think I've become stronger. I think that I have grown a lot. Um...I...had some really bad experiences with men...um...early on in, and so that helped me to, you know, first of all: depend more on myself, but second of all: to, to find other people to help me go through times like that. And...the sorority has been my support, and it's just, you know, helped me to discover who I am, and you know, what I need to do for myself. –Becki

Being in a sorority teaches (at least some) of its members the value of women. Membership helps women realize that women can be one another's allies. Affiliation with a sorority may provide a woman with friendships that will last forever, and that by itself, may be enough.

Gender Separatism

The gender exclusivity of Greek organizations provides the foundation for the development of the strong connections among women that develop within sororities, according to nearly all of the participants. In their words, the close friendships that form between sorority members are the result, to a large extent, of the time they spend together, as roommates. Because their lives are so intricately linked, sorority women come to care for and depend on each other.

[A strong bond develops among members] because you're going through your daily routines together. I mean it sounds bad, but we all shower together, you know, we all go to the same place to shower. We all go to the same place to eat--we have set times when we eat. Um, I think, just because we go through our, our lives for four years together. --Jill

...You are not only supporting them as a friend, but you're dealing with everything they go through, you know, day-in, day-out--in the middle of the night when their papers won't print out, when you...come home from a test you just flunked--It's not like someone you keep in contact with over the phone or see a couple of times a week. It's, you, you live with them all of the time. You eat your meals together. You're with them all of the time. So you're like there to support them, more often than you would be if you were just, you know, a friend who...no matter how good of friends you were. It's just the fact that you're like living...it's like a family, big time. I mean, you're living with them all the time! --Patrice

Most of the participants valued the time they spend with their sisters and recognized the importance of having woman-only space in their lives. They insisted that women need to be with women and men need to be with men and they were thankful that sororities and fraternities are gender segregated.

...I lived in a co-ed dorm, and um, sometimes it got to be really, you know...When you wanted to be alone or just with the girls, you couldn't, 'cause you know, all these guys were still around. And I think it would be the same thing if a fraternity [or a sorority] were co-ed. There are some times when you just wanna be with your

fraternity or sorority and no one else around...or with your own gender... –Janiene

...Girls offer you something that guys can't...when you're with one person or when you're with, um, one sex, such as women, you're going to learn stuff that you wouldn't be able to learn anywhere else. And by having an all-woman sorority, we all experience the same thing, just in different realms. And by having that, we can all relate to each other on, on a level. And granted, we can relate to each other on a million levels...[but] some of us an only relate to each other on that one level: that we're both women...And, and just solely on the fact that we're both women already gives us a common step in the right direction. –Jill

There's certain things that just happen...you know, [in] a house of girls, like you've been sitting around, and you know, you talk about boys and just, you know, the way you would act like around your girlfriends that you maybe...like how you wouldn't...like you can totally cut loose! You can, you know, you can do pretty much whatever you want to do, you know. You don't have to look...look good, you know. You don't even have to do anything. You can just, be whoever you want to be. And I don't know like if people feel like they have to be like someone different in front of boyfriends or whatever. But...it's just a house full of girls and you can pretty much do whatever you want. You just have to relax and just-hang-out-with-your-friends kind of atmosphere...there's, there's just something different about just living with a group, you know, a group of girls. –Ann

The gender exclusivity of sororities can benefit sorority women in a number of ways. Feeling silenced and stifled by men, the interviewees said they appreciated the non-judgmental support their sorority sisters often provided.

[A sorority] allows women to express themselves openly...without worrying about maybe what a guy is going to think. –Janiene

...Women I think are there to mainly help each other and you don't really have a male figure there like putting you down, um, mocking your views or whatever. I think as women we're all open to each other and we all have the same kinds of needs and want the same things, and so...I think that if guys were around, women would be less likely to voice their opinions and that type of thing. –Hall

A woman-only organization like a sorority gives women the space they need to “let their hair down.” Freedom from the gawking eyes of young and virile men, albeit temporary, was welcomed, according to the participants.

...You can be changing and someone can open the door and come in and talk to someone else and it's no big deal. It's just like you're in your swim suit or something (laughs). I think it's um, you know, you can, you can walk around the house with no makeup on and, and uh...not feel...ugly. Um, there's a lot of girls that if they don't have makeup on, they don't go around guys. And, and I think that that would be awful. Everyone just kind of let's their hair down and can look ugly and no one really cares (laughs) because we've all seen each other in just about our worst times! –Sara

Sororities provided some of the women I talked to with an opportunity to learn about women's issues as well.

...As far as like women's issues, um...we're more open to it, 'cause we're all women that live there and it's something that's important to all of us. Like we have speakers that come about rape and um...and alcohol [abuse] and stuff like that. And I think that it's important, 'cause as women, we can all join in together. –Hall

Many of the participants take pride in their organization's herstory and the efforts of their fore-mothers and fore-sisters. The heritage of her sorority is often an important part of a sorority woman's membership.

It is a really special thing, you know, what the organization has done as a whole and you know, how long it's been around and what it does for women. And you know...and [the sorority] is the only sorority in the entire nation that was founded solely by women. Most other um, sororities were like sister-sororities of men and so...our, our, our organization was solely founded by women, which is like...we take total pride in things like that. We're like, 'heh, we're the only ones that were founded by women and you know [didn't] get anybody's help... –Sally

I think they [sororities] were founded on um, coming together as women, and you know...empowering each other. You know, back in the 1800s, you know, mid-1800s, when our house was founded,

our sorority was founded, there weren't sororities, you know. There weren't organizations that women belonged to, and this was a way for...women to get together, um, have meetings, talk about what was going on, um, you know, be together, and maybe even, you know, contradict society at the time and you know, 'let's stand up for what we believe in!' And I think that that's what continued, and that's why sororities should...our strength...and that's what we were founded on...We were founded on, 'how do we advance women?' And how can we um, women come together as a group and support each other, you know, be together... –Janiene

Sororities, as all-women organizations or women-centered organizations, also help promote strength in women through the formation of a kind of “solidarity.” When women are united, they are strong, according to Patrice.

I think that it [gender exclusive space] promotes strength of women. I think that, I mean, definitely as far as career, campus involvement, things like that, um, the sorority really stresses that. So I think that, I think that you become a better woman by living all together as women and learning who you are. And you have all these women helping you build yourself up, whereas the part of society, when there's men involved, can be less, woman-promoting. –Patrice

The feeling of solidarity was not confined to the walls of Jill's sorority house. Although she admits that there was a great deal of competition amongst the various sororities on campus, Jill made an effort to befriend women from other houses. She believed that “the more friendships you make, the, the happier you life will be...” Improving sorority relations on campus was important to some of the other participants as well. A sorority that was completely segregated or cut off from the rest was missing a great deal, according to Sara.

...If a sorority sticks to themselves and themselves only, you know, you're not branching out at all. Then I think you're, you're really held back because you don't get the full college experience. If you don't um...if you don't have functions with other houses, you don't get to know other people in sororities. You just, 'oh my house is the best, and I just don't want to talk to anyone but anyone in my house.' So...I think that's, that's a selfish way to look at it...
–Sara

Sororities on this northwestern campus socialize with other sororities at least once a term. Although these “sister socializers” are held less frequently and are not typically as well attended as sorority/fraternity functions, many of the women I interviewed said that they were a lot of fun.

...Girls connect by talking and doing cool things, and it's fun to um, to, to just go out, you know. It's fun to go downstairs and watch 90210. Guys don't like to do that, but girls, you know, you get some food down there, and it's a good time. Making cookies: guys typically don't like to bake. I'm not stereotyping guys, but typically they don't, and it's a good time to get together [with women from other sororities] and make up, you know, however many dozens and dozens of cookies and eat them. We don't have to give them to anyone. We'll just bake 'em to eat 'em, you know, or give 'em to each other. And um, it's just a good time to get together with...you live with these 50 women for four years, it's a good time to go outside your organization and still spend time with your sisters, but get to know new people. –Jill

Hazing

Hazing, according to the women I interviewed, is not tolerated. The university, the sororities' (inter)national chapters, and federal lawmakers passed anti-hazing policies and laws that all of the sororities on campus are obligated to follow. Disobeying them has serious consequences.

...Our internationals came out with an absolutely no-tolerance-for-hazing, um, stand, which means that if our house was brought up on hazing charges or brought up on, you know, inhumane charges, um, our charter would be immediately revoked um, from our, from our headquarters, and we would be disbanded. The university um, would also have some say in that you know. They would put sanctions on as well... –Janiene

As a result, no one is forced to do anything during pledging that they do not want to do, according to nearly all of the women I spoke with.

...Everything is a choice and there is no push, ever. If you choose not to participate in something that you don't feel comfortable with, that's fine. But we don't, we don't have activities that will

make you feel horrible or make you feel like, you know, you're lower or what-not. That just doesn't happen. –Becki

The strict hazing policies are a strong deterrent, yet most of the participants believed that hazing is wrong and they would not have hazed their pledges even if they could have. Sara said that “mature women are above hazing.”

I think it's awful. I think it's degrading. Um, it doesn't matter if it's, 'strip off your clothes and, and circle the parts that you don't like on your body,' or whether it's paying for, for something that you don't want or um, paying an extra thing on your fee that you weren't told about or stuff like that. Whether or not it's that, it's just, it's just not called for I don't think. –Sara

Several of the participants looked at those who haze with disgust and contempt.

...I don't know why anybody would want to be in a sorority that, you know, woke you up in the middle of the night to go drink or shoved you down in the basement or things like that, you know.

And, I mean...I don't know why anybody would want to do that to someone else really. I don't know how you would feel good about yourself doing it. And I think that's how everybody in my house feels. –Kayla

Hazing is disrespectful towards women and therefore in opposition to the purpose of sororities, according to many of the participants. Hazing does not promote membership either. Sisterhood is not supposed to be about making women feel uncomfortable. Hazing hurts women mentally, physically, and emotionally, and sororities are not in the business of hurting women, so said Kayla. Most of the participants insisted that their organization's herstory and traditions can be taught to new members without hazing. Initiation is meant to be a celebration (of sorority membership), not a time for torture and abuse.

...I think that's ridiculous that it happens, and it shouldn't happen. That's not what a sisterhood is. Sisterhood is not...making someone feel uncomfortable or, or um, you know, that...it goes against everything that a sorority was founded on--when you're hazing someone or when you're watching someone being hazed.
–Janiene

...Initiation is supposed to be a time of, you know, of a realization of your commitment, and a celebration, it's not supposed to be something that's going to make you scared. –Becki

Members who are not hazed have a lot more respect for the older actives and the organization, so said Emily. Hazing is disrespectful toward women.

I think it's [the no-hazing policy], it's really good 'cause it definitely shows respect for the, the girls coming in. 'Cause it's not like you hold a grudge 'cause the older members did it to you so you need to take that out on somebody else...It doesn't really, necessarily promote respect, just to, you know, push somebody around or whatever. –Emily

Fraternities are bound by the same university rules and federal laws as sororities; yet most, if not all, of the fraternities haze during pledging according to the women I talked to. Many of the participants mentioned the harshness of fraternity pledging and had heard horror stories about fraternity hazing. It is probable that some sororities, like their brothers, engage in activities that are technically defined as hazing. Although they emphatically denied that their organizations haze, nearly all of the participants believe that other sororities do. When asked if other houses hazed, Kelly responded,

Uh huh, I think they do. I've heard only rumors, uh, with different things, like um, making them [pledges] drink certain things, um...or they give them like demerits, and if, so many they give they have to drink that many shots or something. I mean this is all rumors so um...And then I've heard other rumors where they stick them in rooms and yell at them, like mean things at 'em and then they'll stick them in another room and say a bunch of nice things about 'em. And so I don't know...that's just rumors. –Kelly

Knowing how much trouble they could get into if the university or (inter)national chapter found out their house hazed, it is likely that some of the participants were not completely honest. Other researchers have shown that thousands of sorority women are hazed every year. That said, I cannot help but be

struck by the anti-hazing sentiment on this campus – it is certainly pro-woman, and I was pleasantly surprised to discover this. The anti-hazing policy and the sororities that follow it, promote the health and well being of women.

Skill Development

Sororities encourage their members to get involved on campus and in the community – in fact, the more active a member, the better. Given the decline in interest in Greek membership on this particular campus and thus the need to “get the sorority’s name out there,” it is not surprising that sororities want their members joining groups and attending special events. Getting involved on campus and joining a sorority was synonymous for some of the participants. They rushed because they wanted to get involved.

Coming from a small town, I didn’t really know that many people, and so they made it seem like it was a way to get involved and to get to know a lot of people, like through rush, you would meet other freshmen, and then in your house, you would have like older members that would, you know, guide you and like, help you out. I think that was the main thing, and just like I said, just a way to get involved, just to have something to get you going. –Ann

...If I wasn’t in a sorority, I’d probably be living in some kind of apartment or house with some girls and I just think that’s so different than living in a house with 50 people, with having like a structured um, environment, with having um, leadership positions and management positions, kind of like, um... ‘cause it’s called a corporation. It’s kind of like a corporation in the business world. Whereas kind of living on your own, with a couple of people, you’re not interacting with different people...so um...you’re not taking chances, you’re not getting out there and knowing what’s out there on the campus. You’re not um, seeing all your options with majors or classes or clubs or that type of thing. ‘Cause I think you’re exposed to a lot more in a sorority, so it helps to develop yourself as a person, so that when you graduate, you kinda know who you are and what you wanna be like because you’ve experienced a lot of different things. –Kelly

Being in a sorority or fraternity puts a college student at an advantage if she or he is interested in getting involved on campus and in the community. Student and local organizations regularly sent information directly to the houses.

...People from campus, um, when they want to make announcements, they'll come to the sororities and fraternities. So you hear a lot about different things than if you were just living with a couple people--you wouldn't hear of what's going on on campus...I know different organizations on campus, they know that sororities are a big organization and fraternities, so they would mail you fliers or send you internship opportunities or that type of thing that you would have to, if you were on your own, you'd have to figure out yourself. You wouldn't know all your options.
 –Kelly

Some of the other women I spoke with joined the sorority because they wanted an opportunity to lead a group of their peers. Leadership experience is very important to nearly all of the participants – they considered it one of the main benefits of sorority membership.

I'm not much of a leader. I'm not, I tend to just let others lead me. And I'd say, through the sorority, I, it has really taught me to assume leadership roles and take initiative and action and do, doing what I want to do...Since I became in a sorority, I've taken on leadership positions on campus and things, and done things that I wouldn't probably normally do, um, good things that I probably wouldn't normally have done or even wanted to try. But through encouragement and that type of thing...I went and decided to do it, like, you know, win or, win or lose type of thing. Like before I was afraid of losing, and now, it just doesn't matter, as long as you try. And I think that, that I learned that definitely through the sorority.
 –Hall

The leadership skills learned in a sorority prove useful in later life, according to Patrice.

I, I've learned to plan things. I was rush chairman two years ago, so I was in charge of 50 women for two weeks. I, they did everything I said (laughs), you know. I mean they had to ask me if they wanted to go anywhere. I planned everything for that. So...organization, um, organization is another thing, just living in a room with two or

three, two or three people, you have to be considerate of their space. You have to a, you know um... leadership is a huge thing. Um, I think I've become a better friend. I've learned how to become a better friend because I've started to take pride in like doing as much as I can for other people, because I know that they really appreciate it. And I think that, just the relationships that I've formed are going to take me through the rest of my life. I know that there's probably fifteen people who I'll keep in contact with forever. And um, just every, every bit of it I think is a useful tool for the real world. I mean every part of it... –Patrice

...The structure just kind of prepares you for, for like work life... You have meetings every week and, um...that you have to attend and duties you have to perform... –Hall

Sally, a business major, got hands-on experience as the house treasurer for two years. She saw that experience as an introduction to her future.

Yeah, yeah, it's the biggest position in the house...so through that I learned a lot about my major, you know, like financial management, financial planning, advising, budget keeping, things like that. So for me, it was a huge eye-opener to what I [am] going to be doing for the rest of my life...I loved it. –Sally

Living in a sorority also teaches members how to work effectively with others. Sorority women develop the skills they need to work together toward a common goal.

...There's been ups and downs, and I'm not, I'll be the first one to say that there were times when I was so frustrated that, you know, I didn't know if I wanted to stay [in the sorority], but it's also those times that help improve, help make you better, you know. And you've learned how to resolve that situation. You've learned how to take care of what happened, and that's only going to help you in, in the future, learning to deal with others, other problems, or you know, work type situations. –Janiene

In some sororities, academics come first, before anything else, including obligations to the sorority, which encourages women to work hard and excel academically. According to Kayla, there are fewer distractions in sororities compared to fraternities, which allows women to concentrate on their studies.

...There are [distractions in sororities] just because there are so many people around. People will be like, “oh, let’s go to TCBY, let’s go watch a movie,” which can draw you away from your studies. But pretty much, I mean, in my house we have quiet hours, I mean, after 7:00 p.m., I mean, you know, people will pretty much respect people who need to study and we have a basement that’s 24-hour quiet, so you can always go down there, it’s guaranteed. –Kayla

Sororities also help their members develop strong communication skills.

Being in a sorority, especially going through rush both as a rushee and as an active member, prepares women for job interviews. After being in a sorority, women are more outgoing and social. Many report that they are now less timid and shy around strangers.

I’ve, I’ve definitely become more outspoken, um...I wasn’t really quiet before, but um...definitely more outspoken, more aggressive. I can deal, I am dealing with issues more head-on, rather than skirting past them....I think that there’s been a lot of people who have really come out of their shells and found themselves and become leaders and gotten so much good experience that I don’t think they could have ever gotten otherwise. –Patrice

I think I’ve like become a stronger person, um, more outgoing. I feel, I feel more comfortable now than I used to, like walking into a crowd of other women, not like: I don’t have a friend with me, and I’m not comfortable, and I have to have somebody there, you know, that I can talk to... –Emily

...A girl [in the sorority] who was recruiting for an accounting job, she was saying, ‘you know, the funny thing was, it was just like rush. You go in there...’ And she was like, ‘I was so glad I had the experience of going through rush and rushing people.’ She walked into, you know, the thing for accounting and started introducing herself to everyone, and she said, ‘I, I couldn’t believe how much it was like rush!’ –Patrice

The sorority experience also teaches women to be more independent, according to many of the women I interviewed. Members reported that they are now more self-assured and confident in their abilities and strengths. Sororities help

women become someone who is smart, strong, opinionated, and not afraid to stick up for her own beliefs.

...I can be more of a timid person, or quiet...um, but I can also be aggressive if I'm put in the right situation...so I think definitely, um, our sorority...teaches women to be independent, to be responsible for yourself, to speak up, 'cause there's going to be things that you disagree with, and in order to make our house stronger, you need to speak up and be aggressive and to take your own initiative to do things, to improve the house or to improve yourself. –Kelly

Membership teaches women to be responsible and dependable as well.

Sorority life demands a large commitment, so members must learn how to manage their time well and finish something once it has been started.

[The ideal member] um, she balances um, social with um, with like, um, academics, school. Um, she'll go out and have fun, but yet, she'll do really well in school. Um, her priorities are straight. She takes responsibility for herself and for our house, you know, making sure she does her duty on you know, the day she's supposed to do it or that she fulfills her responsibility as an executive officer...She knows she has a goal in life, you know. She's at school, she has a goal that she's going to major in this and to do this with her life, and she's just not kinda wandering from you know, party to party and not really being responsible for herself. –Kelly

...I think that it [membership] teaches you...be, be responsible. Um...and, and...reach out, set goals, and, and reach your goals. And do, do things that you want to do in life. –Sara

Lastly, the sorority experience encourages women to set goals and work towards making those dreams a reality, according to many of the women I talked to. The ideal sorority woman knows what she wants, and she pushes herself to succeed. As a go-getter, the ideal member is focused, driven, and ambitious. She wants to do well and she is constantly trying to improve herself. The sorority pushes women to be the best they can be.

I think that it made me grow...knowing that I can, you know, I can survive on my own, you know. I want, I need to have my own goals

and my own direction, and I think it's helped me, you know...I think it's just helped me grow and become more, maybe more...I don't know, more confident in myself...And personally maybe just, um, like having future goals. 'Cause you know, you're all living together and you're all, um, like you all have your major and all that kind of stuff, and you're all kind of striving for something, and I think that might be a little bit of a motivation to, you know, to keep going. Just 'cause, you know, like you listen to others and you like, like you see the older girls get older, get out and get a job and that kind of stuff, and you just kinda, like it might be a little bit of a motivation for you. –Ann

...We're based on a system that, that demands um, I don't know, achievement. It, it demands you to excel...In, in a sorority, um, it is required that you partake in, in our sorority, it is required you partake in campus activities and that you do study hours and you do participate in a philanthropy and that you do an alcohol awareness, you know, um, once a term, a meeting once a term, and that you do a house duty, and that you do this and this and this and this. And even though at the time, um, they may seem like, 'oh, why do I have to do this?,' they're steps to make you grow and they're steps to make you a better person. When a lot of times, um, sororities are looked down upon, you know, because they think all we do is party. Um, it's [membership] made me a much better person to do philanthropy after philanthropy and be involved in two campus activities a term. It's made me a much better person... –Jill

Feminism and Sororities

Sororities on this Pacific Northwestern university campus foster strong friendships among women; they are woman-centered; they place women in positions of leadership; they are woman-only or separatist; they treat women with respect by refusing to engage in hazing practices; and they encourage women to get involved on campus and in the community, which helps women to develop useful business skills. Nearly all of the participants described their sorority experience as empowering and many argued that sororities are “pro-woman.”

Our sorority promotes women in a positive light. It says that we can, we can do whatever we want. Um, we just have to, you know, know the right way to do it...um, get in there, have our say. I think it encourages us to have a voice...I think that um, yeah, our organization definitely says that, you know, 'just because you're a woman, doesn't mean you have to, you know, take on the womanly role in life.' You can do whatever you want. –Becki

I think um...a sorority does a lot for like, women. It gives, you know...it teaches them like all the leadership and that kind of stuff. And like...about myself, like I've become more independent. And you, you grow as a person and I think the sorority helps you do that, just from being in that type of an...like with 60 other girls...you're naturally going to learn stuff about yourself and what makes you happy, and that kind of stuff. But I don't think we're like gung-ho, like, 'Women should be equal!', that kinda...I don't think there's any type of a...that, that type of attitude... –Ann

...You even hear guys in fraternities saying, saying, 'yeah, well my wife's going to be in the kitchen and not work,' and everyone just, all the girls just kind of rage at him (laughs), you know. It's like, 'what do you mean? Get out of here!' You know, 'what do you think, who do you think you are?!' I wanna work when I'm older. I wanna earn money, and, and be independent and stuff. And, and uh, I think, I think almost every girl in this sorority and others believes that, you know, they should have equal rights...They may not know it, you know, that that's what feminist means, but, but I think that that's what they believe..." –Sara

"[Sororities are feminist organizations]...in ways that we're a lot about encouraging each other to succeed and achieve goals...um...and a lot to the point where, you know, 'don't let anyone tell you you can't do it.' Um, I had a male professor, uh, my freshman year who really discouraged me and you know, I told them [sisters], and you know, it's all about um, bettering each other and bettering um...each person individually and as a whole. And so I think that a lot, we're pro-woman..." –Hall

There are many differences between sororities and feminist organizations, however. While "feminists fight for women's rights, a sorority is just a group of women" according to Patrice. While feminists work to improve women's political, economic and social status, sororities "go with the flow."

I think a feminist organization, or how I feel it, just more like, you know...‘we need this kind...you know, women need these kinds of rights,’ or ‘this is what women are demanding and this is what, you know, how we feel as women.’ Whereas the sorority organization is more of like...we don’t, we’re just a group of women living together, living day-by-day. –Sally

Well, strong feminists would believe...very strongly in the rights for women, not necessarily the rights for women, but um, but [that] there are needs for women that need to be met...And um, a strong feminist would, would want those needs met and would do everything in it’s [sic] power to get those needs met. And I mean this sounds really bias but almost goes out and um, finds needs to be met. Um, this, this organization [the sorority] just goes with the flow of things and doesn’t necessarily need to fight for women or even, even um, even...fight is a strong word...They don’t need to um...individually we make women reach their potential, and um, we like to get them there, but we don’t um, fight to get them there, you know. A strong feminist would do everything in their power to...we try, but we wouldn’t necessarily go to jail (laughs) for it. –Jill

Sororities may benefit some women emotionally, psychologically, and intellectually, but none of the women I interviewed said that their sorority actively struggles against sexism and other forms of oppression. Sororities are also very particular about the kind of women they want as members. As previously shown, sororities are exclusive. The majority of their members are white, middle to upper class, and heterosexual. The benefits of sorority life are enjoyed by only a small number of women.

Many of the participants disassociated themselves and their organizations from feminism, probably out of a fear of the negative stereotypes surrounding feminism. “Feminists are too aggressive,” according to Patrice, and “sorority women are not aggressive” – this is ironic, however, since I would describe Patrice as fairly aggressive. Some of the women I interviewed believed feminism sells women short because it forces women to be radical. The participants were willing to say their organizations are empowering but few of them described their sorority

as *feminist*, not because they recognize the Greek system as sexist, racist, classist, and heterosexual, but because the term “feminist” is loaded.

I guess I think of a feminist as someone that is kinda anti-male (laughs) in a way I guess. Some aren't that strong...I don't know, they're not like...I guess I think anti-male and I don't think they're [sororities] that way at all. —Kelly

It's...um...I really don't think it's a goal [of sororities to promote women's rights], no. I think individually, everybody wants that. Everyone wants women's rights and everything, but it's not talked about as a whole. Partly because of that stereotype, they don't want to be thought of as...you know, these burly women that are men bashers. —Sara

...I just, everything...and I mean, I could be totally wrong, but everything about a feminist organization that I felt and heard and seen just seems really...aggressive is the word that comes to my mind. Um, to the point where people shut you out and aren't gonna accept what you're saying because it's so overpowering to them. I just feel like we can exemplify what we want to be, you know, and just show that, through our actions, show that we're strong women, without having to say, be really aggressive about it...I don't know, maybe I'm just not, um...I'm probably not educated enough about the like, true feminist movement to say, um...maybe back to the lesbian question...um...We're not going to go out and actively recruit lesbians because we think that is a great feminist thing...I'm just...if it happens, we'll deal with it. It happens, and we'll become stronger for it, but we're not going to look for...something like that...
—Mary Anne

Role Models

Though sororities are not feminist, they were, without a doubt, a place of growth and maturation for the women who participated in this study. They saw their sorority membership as a learning experience and believed that being in a sorority has affected them considerably, in positive ways.

I think that, that um, sororities are a place where you learn a lot of things. And I think sororities really make you grow...as outsiders look at us they say, 'sororities are just a place to party and have a

good time.’ But then, when living in a sorority, I see that differently. I see it as a place to grow... –Jill

...It has empowered me to um, deal with a lot of bad things, as well as deal with a lot of good things. And um...and to just move on from the bad, and I think it’s taught me to...it’s just empowered me to believe in myself as a person and know that I can do things. Um, I, I believe that I achieved a lot of successes within the sorority that have enabled me to gain a better, um, confidence in myself to, that I could achieve things outside as well... –Hall

...I feel like it [membership] allowed me to question myself...It I guess provided the framework to where I was exposed to so many different types of women that I feel like I did learn a lot about who I wanna be in, in the big picture. And I learned a lot of things about...I think I learned about myself: what it is I like, what it is I don’t like... –Lynn

Sororities surround their members with a strong network of women. Older actives serve as role models for younger members, and women learn from one another. Younger members look upon older members as leaders, as guides.

...I think that it [membership] teaches you um...um...I think that it just teaches you to respect yourself as a woman. Respect yourself, respect your body. Um...you know, don’t, don’t do anything stupid, you know...There’s, there’s so many things in life that can, that can either take you down the wrong path or take you down the right path, and I think being in a sorority gets you around people that have had similar situations that just kind of help guide you sometimes. If you’re kind of running off in the wrong, the wrong direction. And you know, some people don’t get on the, don’t get back on the right track and, but it’s, it’s nice to know that you have girlfriends looking out for you and, and things. –Sara

One thing that’s kind of neat is seeing as a freshman or sophomore, seeing the older girls that are graduating and seeing them either getting married or going off to graduate school or on an exchange or something. So you see after they’re done...so you go, “wow!” you know, “that’s what I’m going to be like in a few years,” and kind of as role models... –Kelly

...Many of the girls [go] through the same life changing events and situations and [are] understanding one another, and I think it can be a very empowering and positive situation. Where a younger girl says, 'I'm going to do this and this and this,' and I think back to myself, 'god, three years ago...I, I understand, I know what you're going through. I know that identity that you're searching for. I know what you are striving to become and all these things.' And it can be very, very empowering...Um, I think that really can be a very positive experience to be able to connect with all these women who are, who you have been in their shoes or will be in their shoes or you can understand and relate to one another. –Lynn

A “big sis” is an example of a significant role model in the sorority system. A “big sis” is usually assigned to each newly initiated member during pledging and is responsible for making sure new members are successfully acclimated to sorority life.

...As you become like a sophomore, junior, you start looking at like the seniors and things like that. And the, like, at the end we always have like a senior banquet and they say what they're going to be doing in the next year, whether they're going to be continuing their education...or if they're getting married or whatever. And so, I think, you know, it makes you think, 'well, what do I want to be doing when I'm standing there?...' And I think like too um, being like a sophomore, junior, having like a little sis...what do you want to portray as a good thing to them? You know, what do you want...do you want them to look up to you? And what do you think that they will see in you that's a good quality? Whereas in like other living situations you wouldn't really have that. You wouldn't be, you know, forced to look at like, what kind of role model you want to be for someone. And I think that having a little sis is really important for that 'cause it makes you take on responsibility for having someone to look after... –Emily

The “training” of younger members by older members is usually done informally. Members see in each other who they want to be, the characteristics they admire and those they do not. They watch one another and in some cases, imitate one another.

...I think I've kind of seen, um...like what I want to be in my life. “Do I wanna...?” ‘cause you kinda compare yourself to other people

and you think of yourself as others see you. So...you're personality is shaped that way because people see you a certain way. Or you're um...or I see how other people behave and I say, "oh, I'd love to be like that," or "I, oh I wouldn't want to do that..." --Kelly

...I don't think I realized how many great people there are out there. There's been probably...four or five in my four years, people who I just...they're just amazing! And I...I mean, I just, I just look at them, and I'm just like... 'that's just great!' And they're my good friends, and I, not all of them, but I just, I think that, um...I don't know. I think that's had a big affect. I mean, just being able to see them as like, kind of like a role model. --Patrice

Celebration of Women and Women's Strengths

According to several of the women I spoke with, sororities give women a place to show their stuff, a place to put their talents and strengths to good use. In a sorority members develop self-pride and confidence because sororities give constant praise and recognition for a job well done. Women's accomplishments and achievements are celebrated and appreciated.

I think the women in the sorority do that [provide encouragement] for each other. They're very vocal with... 'this is what we like about you,' 'this is what we don't like about you,' in, in a positive way...It is this...kind of this process that you go through when you're there...um...just learning about yourself and it, it constantly... you're...I felt like I was receiving constant gratification, constant recognition, acknowledgment for everything I did for women. It's not like you go unrecognized. --Lynn

Sororities encourage their members to try new things, to take a chance. They teach their members to believe in themselves. This is particularly important for college aged women, who are away from home for the first time. Gone from their immediate frame of reference is the unconditional love and support and familiarity of their family. Sororities re-create that feeling for many women.

...They're more, I think, encouraging as far as, you know, when a sister wants to do something, she'll usually have the support of the whole house in whatever they do. --Hall

All of the women who participated in this study described their experience as positive. They were happy they joined the sorority and had few regrets.

...I mean you're only here at college for four years and you want to get as much out of it as you possibly can and by being in a sorority, I feel like I'm, I'm doing that... –Kayla

“...I wouldn't trade the last four years for anything...” –Janiene

CONCLUSION

In “College Women and Sororities: The Social Construction and Reaffirmation of Gender Roles” (1987) Barbara Risman, and “In the Fraternal Sisterhood: Sororities as Gender Strategy” (1995) Lisa Handler, demonstrated that exclusive sorority women engage, individually and collectively, in constructing womanhood. Exclusive sororities play an important role in the process by which their members become gendered by influencing their ideas about what it means to be a woman. After talking with the women who participated in this study, I agree with Risman and Handler. Exclusive sororities can and do affect the attitudes, values and behavior of their members dramatically and within exclusive sororities, women negotiate gender.

Women and men become gendered through regular social interaction with other women and men (West & Zimmerman 1987). Our mundane, day-to-day experiences with others “train” us to think and behave in certain ways (Stivers 1993). Just as society is comprised of social institutions, we are the sum of our social parts. The social interactions within primary groups are extremely influential (Boeringer, Shehan & Akers 1991), and as we age, our peers replace our family as our primary group (Eisenhart & Holland 1983). Peer groups that are small, homogeneous, and isolated – like sororities – have a profound impact (Milem 1991; Smucker 1948). Sorority women do, of course, associate with non-Greek students, instructors and parents while at college, but the bulk of their interactions are with their sisters or fraternity men (Risman 1987). A sorority woman cannot find the time to maintain extensive contacts outside of the Greek system; consequently, the Greek community becomes one of her few frames of reference (Risman 1987; Gerson 1969). When she is a “live in” (like all of the women who participated in this study), a member’s whole world becomes the sorority (Risman 1987).

Although individuals “do” gender, gender is not the property of individuals (West & Zimmerman). Gender is one of the major ways that we organize our lives – gender, along with race, class, age, sexual orientation, etc. – is the texture and scaffolding of our social, political, and economic worlds (Lorber 1994; Butler 1990; Gerson & Peiss 1985). This is why it is so important to consider the consequences of gender negotiation in all arenas, including those dominated by a small number of privileged and educated young women. Any social encounter or event, including those that take place on a “sleeping porch,” at a “sister socializer,” or at a fraternity/sorority function, can be made to serve the interests of doing gender.

Seeing gender as an institution, rather than a characteristic or role, helps us understand how gender differentiation and women’s disadvantage are created and maintained, how gender is both a product of and a rationale for all sectors of society (Acker 1992). Taking the time to observe and analyze the various ways gender is negotiated and considering the impact it has on individuals are necessary steps for eliminating the institutions and structures so dependent upon that negotiation. One of the long term goals of feminism is to eliminate gender as an organizing principle of society (Lorber 1991). To do this, we must first understand why, how and in what ways gender is constructed/negotiated/transmitted in our social interactions.

So what kind of women are exclusive sororities “producing”? What are the ideas about gender sororities are teaching to their members? How is womanhood constructed by members of exclusive sororities? For the most part, the sorority women who participated in this study negotiated traditional gender arrangements and constructed what I consider to be, conservative identities. Sororities on this university campus created and perpetuated conformity, dependence and political apathy in their members. These organizations developed an environment in which gender stereotyping and victimization was learned and then legitimized. The Greek system on this Pacific Northwestern university operates as a microcosm of the

larger society, and the participants of this system – the individual sorority and fraternity members – perpetuate sexism, racism, classism and heterosexism in society but perpetuating it within their own community.

Within sororities, however, are pockets of resistance, non-compliance, empowerment, and what could be called “potentially feminist” gender negotiation. Gender is contextual, constantly created and re-created to fit each unique social situation (Lorber 1994; Butler 1990; Gerson & Peiss 1985), so it should come to no surprise that the gender lessons for sorority women do vary some. Rarely is there 100% compliance and acquiescence. Gender negotiation within the exclusive sororities on this Pacific Northwestern university vary by the level of a member’s involvement in the sorority, the status of her organization on the sorority hierarchy, the type of sorority to which she belongs, the extent to which she interacts with fraternity men, her age, whether she is a “live in”, and whether she holds a leadership position within the sorority. Some (i.e., juniors and seniors, leaders, members who have interests outside of the sorority, and members who tend to date non-Greek men) credit the sorority for helping them become self confident and independent. Though they recognize their organization as flawed, they are proud of what they accomplished. To these women, being in a sorority is more than just fraternity parties, songs, and philanthropies. It was something they built, something they contributed to, something they could be proud of, and thus, a source of strength and empowerment.

Consistent with the literature, an affiliation with a woman-exclusive space granted the participants more opportunities for leadership (Kamm & Rentz 1994; Packwood et al 1972). Most student organizations at co-educational schools are co-ed, and men tend to hold most of the leadership positions, which leaves women with very little chance to gain leadership experience (Kamm & Rentz 1994). As women-only organizations, sororities give many women, each term, a chance to gain these skills. Previous researchers found a link between leadership and the development of liberal (or feminist) attitudes in women (Kamm & Rentz 1994).

Hazing is a serious problem on our college campuses; over half of the sororities in the United States engage in activities that constitute hazing (Shaw & Morgan 1990). Hazing is one method through which pledges learn and embrace the norms, values and beliefs of an organization (Nuwer 1999), making it a concentrated source of the gender process. Hazing, at best, denigrates the worth and dignity of individuals, and at worst, threatens and takes lives (Kuh & Lyons 1990). Sororities that haze dishonor women, and sorority hazing is an expression of misogyny. What is most disturbing about sorority hazing is that it humiliates and scars (in some cases, literally) women in the name of sororal sisterhood (Shaw & Morgan 1990).

I was happy to learn that the sororities represented in this study do not participate in hazing. Though it is possible that the women I interviewed were not being honest when they told me that they, and their organizations, vehemently oppose hazing, I am inclined to believe them. Refusing to participate and agreeing not to force others to participate in hazing activities puts the safety and well being of all women who pledged one of these sororities first. It taught the members of those organizations to respect one another and that the dignity of their “sisters” ought to be valued, not broken.

Though horizontal hostility, male identification, hierarchies, stereotypes, and competition are powerful forces at play in a sorority woman’s world, operating to keep women apart, a strong bond can, and often does, develop amongst sorority women, and this bond is referred to as “sisterhood.” The bonds of friendship formed for the women I interviewed were strong, so strong that they described these friendships as the most important of their lives. The sorority women I spoke to loved, respected, and for the most part, were loyal to their sisters. Though use of the term “sisterhood” to describe the relationships amongst exclusive sorority members is problematic from a feminist perspective, hundreds of women each year are able to find love and support in the sororities on this Pacific Northwestern campus, and this deserves acknowledgement.

Unfortunately, very few of other lessons learned in sororities are pro-woman, from a feminist perspective. Most of the gender arrangements negotiated by exclusive sorority women are quite traditional. Privacy in sororities is almost impossible – members must always be on their best behavior – they are almost never alone – they are constantly on display for one another and/or for fraternity men. Sorority women are convinced that “diversity” and “tolerance” can be accomplished by accepting into their organization women who prefer country music over rock. They believe that the differences between sorority and fraternity houses and sororal and fraternal bonds are manifestations of natural, inevitable differences between men and women. They take great strides to act according to the sorority’s definition of “conduct becoming.” They scold and discipline “sisters” who fail to reach this ideal. Sorority women accept as fact the stereotypes that plague the other sororities on campus and protect the image of their house at all times, even if it means sacrificing individuality and personal identity. They defend the need for strict rules and are convinced that these rules are “for their own good.” Sorority women pressure one another to look “nice” and “presentable,” especially when wearing their letters, always concerned about the way the house is perceived. They compete with one another for the attention of men and do whatever they can to ensure a bid from a popular fraternity, knowing their success is dependent upon their sexual desirability. During rush, they treat the women in other sororities as the enemy and essentially, re-establish the hierarchy and horizontal hostility between the various sororities on campus.

Sororities across the United States, including those on this particular campus, teach valuable business skills and help members make business connections, but at the same time, sororities perpetuate inequalities between women by denying the opportunity to learn these skills and make these contacts to lesbian women, women of color, and poor women. Sororities help to open doors for their members, but the doors remain closed to so many other women. Only those who fit in certain criteria are allowed to reap the benefits of Greek

membership. Openly gay members are not welcome in the Greek community (Bogues 1997), and with sororities and fraternities, heterosexuality is compulsory (Handler 1995). Financial wealth is of particular importance in the Greek system (Martin & Hummer 1989). Sororities and fraternities are regularly accused of being materialistic and consumer orientated (Kuh & Lyons 1990), and they have a long history of discrimination based on class (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992). Sororities and fraternities are also believed to be responsible for many of the racist acts perpetrated on college campuses (Muir 1991). Greek members are more likely to hold negative stereotypes of people of color than independents (Muir 1991). Most Greek organizations are racially segregated (Spitzberg & Thorndike), and despite the popularity of black sororities and fraternities, the majority of Greeks are white – this is certainly the case on this campus. Sorority and fraternity members proudly consider themselves members of special, prestigious organizations (Krain et al 1977). Their identity-markers symbolize their separation from the rest of the student body and exacerbate the distinctions among students (Kuh & Lyons 1990). Sorority women and fraternity men wear t-shirts, sweatshirts, hats, jewelry, etc. that display the Greek letters associated with the group to which they belong, and they live in separate houses, often occupying entire city blocks – all of which make a powerful statement about their “social distance and claimed superiority” (Boynton-Arthur 1997; Thorne 1993). Members recruit women and men they presume will support the goals and fulfill the demands of the group, women and men they believe will “fit in” (Longino & Kart 1973), creating an atmosphere of “like choosing like” (Spitzberg & Thorndike 1992). The participants admitted that no effort was put forth to recruit women of color and that few of their sisters would embrace a lesbian member.

Previous studies have considered the possibility that sorority women may be more likely than non-sorority women to be raped (Kalof & Cargill 1991). These studies have certainly shown that fraternity men are more likely than independent men to victimize women (Lottes & Kurlifoff 1994; Kalof & Cargill 1991;

Boeringer, Shehan & Akers 1991). Yet none of the women I interviewed seemed very concerned about violence against women within the Greek community. Fraternities create a physical and socio-cultural context that is built upon the sexual double standard, group loyalty, male bonding, and an over-emphasis on competition and superiority, and this rape culture facilitates the sexual coercion of women (Lottes & Kurlihoff 1994; Copenhaver & Grauerholtz 1991; Boeringer, Shehan & Akers 1991; Martin & Hummer 1989). Even though some fraternities are less dangerous than others, depending upon how strongly the members adhere to rape myths and are indoctrinated into the rape culture, there is no such thing as a safe fraternity party for women, despite the presences of “sober sisses” (Boswell & Spade 1996). Sorority and fraternity members spend an enormous amount of time together; yet sorority women on this campus do very little to protect their sisters.

The traditional arrangements negotiated within the exclusive social sororities on this particular campus ultimately function to limit women’s freedom and keep sorority women subjugated to fraternity men. These arrangements also ensure access to and maintenance of the dominant power structure based on race, class and sexual orientation. In the introduction, I described an empowering environment as one that is supportive of women, respectful towards women, celebratory of women’s talents and contributions, and committed to protecting women from violence. An environment that facilitates the negotiation of conventional gender identities and relationships, on the other hand, is disempowering for women, on both personal and social/political levels. By my own definition, sororities are empowering in some ways, for some women and disempowering in so many other ways, for most women. The potential of sororities for the feminist movement is huge, but unfortunately, they fail to reach their potential. The gaps between the possibility and the reality are clear.

Though this project brings us one step closer to understanding how gender is negotiated within exclusive social sororities, questions remain. These questions could be answered by additional research. If I had the ambition, the time, and the

resources, I would consider looking more closely at the differences between sororities and fraternities and how those differences reinforce traditional notions of gender. The relationship between Greek organizations and family and the implications of this relationship also interests me. To assess the long lasting impact of sorority membership on women, I would like to interview sorority alumni in their late twenties and early thirties. Interviewing legacies (mother and daughter, grandmother, mother and daughter sorority sisters) and comparing their experiences would also be fascinating.

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