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Sorority Chapter Presidents: The Experience of Being a Leader in the Greek Community

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SORORITY CHAPTER PRESIDENTS:
THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A LEADER IN THE GREEK COMMUNITY

by

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A THESIS

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SORORITY CHAPTER PRESIDENTS:
THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A LEADER IN THE GREEK COMMUNITY

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University of Nebraska, 2015

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Research on Greek life is plentiful, but literature on sorority chapter presidents is nearly invisible. Sorority chapter presidents undergo many challenges and responsibilities while still remaining full-time students. Though largely unexplored, the experiences of these women highlight aspects of being a leader within the Greek experience and can give great insight into how these leaders operate on a day-to-day basis.

This qualitative, phenomenological study explores the experiences of three women as they reflect on their role as sorority chapter presidents at Midwestern University. Midwestern University is a large, public, four-year institution in the Midwest region of the United States. This study used informal, semi-structured interviews with three women who had completed their term as sorority chapter president within the last two months. The findings reported that sorority chapter presidents face a number of challenges as they lead a group of peers and friends and develop significantly as leaders as well as within their relationships. The primary researcher has identified several implications for future practice and recommendations for further research on sorority chapter presidents.

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Dedication

For all of the past, present, and future sorority chapter presidents who long to change the stereotypes and course of the Greek system; may these words serve as a way to tell your stories better than the media does. Keep striving for change.

Acknowledgements

I thank first and foremost the three sorority chapter presidents who willingly shared their stories and made this study possible. The challenges, successes, and passion you all shared with me rekindled my fire to work with Greek life again. You all are incredible leaders and have been a catalyst for change in many ways in each of your chapters as well as an impact on so many young women who look up to you. I have witnessed first-hand how you have established yourselves as role models and feel more confident than ever that the Greek system on your campus is headed in the right direction.

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Finally, I would like to thank those who never thought I could. I can, and I did.

Please enjoy the next five chapters.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

As the Friday evening darkness begins to set in on a Midwestern college town, the earlier academic atmosphere begins to slowly fade away into nothing more than another week of classes completed. Sidewalks previously filled with students hurrying to class while laden under backpacks and university gear are now comprised of only those looking to celebrate the two-day break of being confined to classroom after classroom. Sneakers have been switched out for high heels and sweatpants transformed into jeans or skirts as the masses slowly make their way to the most popular places and spaces in town. Plans are being shouted to each other across streets and into smartphones as the excitement for the night heightens with each step that brings them closer to stress-free relaxation. The laughter is in abundant supply and worries are nowhere to be seen.

Through a propped open window on the third story of an old house with Greek letters emblazoned on the front, the laughter and conversations drift into the ears of one type of student not partaking in the Friday festivities. Instead, she sits at her desk, intensely staring into her laptop screen as if it were the only thing visible in the room. *Just tune it out*, she thinks to herself. *Everything will be fine tonight*. Whether she believes it or not, it will be thoughts like these that sustain her throughout the weekend nights. While everyone else has the luxury of letting go and shirking responsibilities until morning, her responsibilities were just beginning as their nights started.

In the room next to her, her sisters are laughing as they put the finishing touches on their wardrobe. *Please, please be safe tonight*, she thought, just as she did every time they went out. Those thoughts are interrupted by a knock on her door. She swings the door open to find another sister, this one crying. Tears stream down her flushed cheeks,

making tiny droplets on the iron-on letters across her shirt. *Here we go, crisis number one*, she thought. She pulls the sobbing woman into her arms without question and can only wonder, *what now? What situation am I faced with tonight? Will this be the only one?*

Who is this woman and why is she faced with so much responsibility? This woman holds the title of sorority chapter president and the burden of being responsible for over 150 women on the campus of Midwestern University. This responsibility includes not only ensuring safety for all members on weekends, but also being held legally responsible for any incident that may occur under their presidency. The actual duties, responsibilities, and incidents on the plate of a sorority chapter president are largely hidden in research and their experience as a leader is lost. The media consistently highlights negative incidents in Greek life without noting that not all members contribute to these labels.

While the Greek system lies under high scrutiny and heavy research is done on their binge drinking and hazing, sorority chapter presidents are prominent characters who are rarely ever pulled into the story. In fact, many of them will never get a chance to tell their stories due to confidentiality constraints and legal issues. For example, Wechsler, Kuh, & Davenport (1994, p. 396) state that “the single best predictor of binge drinking in college is Greek membership” and that almost every study previous to theirs shows that “Greek members tend to drink more heavily and more frequently, and have more alcohol related problems than their fellow students.” In these studies, chapter presidents are lumped in with the entire chapter when their experience may greatly differ. It is time this population is brought to light and we begin to understand their stories below the surface

level in order to examine their needs and what they contribute to the culture of Greek life. As leaders in these organizations, these women may hold the key to revolutionizing the Greek system and the issues that consistently surround it.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experiences of sorority chapter presidents during their undergraduate experience at a large, public, four-year institution. While we often hear the same, negative story about Greek life from campus to campus, we rarely hear anything about the leadership within these organizations. Most research focuses on negative statistics of Greek organizations as a whole and fails to acknowledge individual experiences of students who lead within the Greek community on their respective campuses. Particularly, sorority chapter presidents seem to be left out of the conversation entirely. This study serves to give a voice to these leading women who seldom get the chance to have their stories heard.

Research Questions

This project was prompted by the following question:

- What are the experiences of a sorority chapter president?

I found only one broad, guiding question appropriate as very little research exists specifically on sorority chapter presidents. While there were a number of questions that remain unanswered about those in this leadership position, I felt this general question would allow me to form the study around the overall experience rather than specifics. This study was formulated in the hopes that it would serve as a foundation to begin

understanding these sorority chapter presidents and open the door for further research on this population.

Definitions

- **Chapter:** A group belonging to a national/international Greek organization that resides at a particular campus or institution. While each chapter is bears the same letters of their overall organization, most are one or two additional Greek letters to signify the campus they belong to.
- **Chapter Adviser:** An alumni member who serves as a guide for ritual, events, discipline, and navigating requirements to stay within good standing.
- **Greek Life:** The term given to shared practices and culture of those belonging to a Greek organization.
- **Greek Community/System:** The entirety of Greek chapters, of all councils, that reside at one institution. This can also be used to describe all chapters nationally or internationally.
- **Ritual:** A sacred act or ceremony (initiation, pinning, chapter meetings, etc.) that marks maturation within the organization.
- **Tradition:** A process or event that generally occurs annually or biannually but is not written as ritual (philanthropic events, socials, formals, etc.).

Conclusion

Greek life is large part of the college experience at many institutions and comes with a wealth of both positive and negative stereotypes. In research, the leaders of Greek chapters often never get to tell their stories and professionals forget to think of them as

students who still need support and services. My hope is that these stories serve as a way for professionals to more fully understand these leaders and provide the insight to their challenges and needs that has been lacking in previous research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

A review of relevant research revealed that articles on sorority chapter presidents are scarce. Three common themes emerged which offer a framework for the multifaceted areas of sorority president life: culture of Greek and sorority life, relevant leadership works, and student development. These three specific areas provide a background and insight into the environment that the women in this study experience on a daily basis. In an effort to fill a gap in Greek life literature, this research seeks to first show the relevance of research that already exists and explain how this specific population of sorority chapter presidents fits into the conversation.

Culture

While former research specifically targeting sorority presents is rare, research on Greek life in general is abundant. Much of existing literature focuses on Greek culture and its organization in comparison to the rest of the college campus. According to Schein (1985), organizational culture is defined as:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (p. 17).

Sororities are no exception to the concept of organizational culture. While no research specifically states how sorority presidents fit into this organizational structure, one could argue that in many situations they may have the opportunity to be the cornerstone. Schein (1985) writes about organizational culture with the belief that a real leader’s talent and what makes them unique is solely how they create, manage, and work with culture. Most people looking in from the outside would argue that today’s culture of sororities would

consist not of historical building blocks of ritual, values, academics, and founding members, but of alcohol, parties, and fashion. According to Schein, the most impactful leaders would know how to manage this emerging culture and sustain values and traditions of their organizations. But, at the age of 20 or 21, trying to change the culture of a group of peers while managing coursework, a job, and other extra-curricular activities is not an easy task. With a call from today's society for reform in the Greek system, this is a tall order for anyone and seemingly impossible in the time span of a one-year term.

Schein's (1985) definition shows that organizational cultures may be different from group to group based on approaches that work well for the organization. When it comes to sorority life, the culture could be different for a group with a national organization from campus to campus. While this difference in culture is not explicitly stated in literature, this could make leadership from chapter to chapter non-transferable. Schein's concept of organizational culture could also be recognized as lacking in many chapters. For a sorority chapter president, creating this organizational culture from scratch could be more difficult than changing a pre-existing negative culture.

Organizational culture continues as a theme throughout literature with Tierney's work in 2006. His feelings on organizational culture and leadership seem similar to Schein's, but Tierney goes one step farther. He states, "As a cultural activity, leadership is a learned behavior such that individuals are socialized to what the organization expects. Obviously, leaders can enter a culture and not fulfill the members' expectations," (Tierney, 2006, p.1). Just as Schein points out being able to work with an organization's culture is a necessary ability, Tierney begins the thought process on what might happen if

a leader does not possess this ability. For example, when a new sorority president begins her term with the hopes of changing significant parts of the organizational culture, members of the chapter may classify that as not fulfilling their expectations. There is a lack of research on this correlation, but further research could provide evidence that the absence of a leader's ability to work with the culture of an organization could be the link to what makes a Greek organization's reputation positive or negative. The president could point the sorority towards a culture of high academic goals and leadership or towards a culture of the negative media stereotype of alcohol and hazing. Tierney again emphasizes the correlation by saying, "indeed, one key challenge for any organization and its leaders is to be able to hold the culture together while at the same time adapt to external challenges, threats, and opportunities" (Tierney, 2006, p.1). If Tierney is correct in this statement, it can be assumed that there is a high level of pressure put on a sorority chapter president to hold consistency in culture while adapting to the things happening around it. For these women, it could mean changing campus policies, national corporation rules, and campus events that directly affect the chapter and its members.

Rituals. Callais (2005) is at the forefront of examining rituals, another element of Greek culture. Those who are not members of Greek organizations may view drinking and hazing as the foundation of culture in sorority life when in reality rituals should be the foundation of these groups. Recognizing this view alone may give outsiders a brief view of the difficulty of upholding culture and ritual in a sorority. Callais (2005) specifies that rituals were created in order to show transitions and growth for individuals in a fraternity or sorority. As presidents, a seemingly important part of the job would be

keeping ritual sacred and meaningful. However, Callais (2005) states that this matter is not so easy.

I have had students who have said that ritual is not performed correctly in their chapter and has no meaning in their chapter experience....some say the ceremonies are 'boring and long.' The rituals were written at a time in history of these organizations when the groups were much smaller than some of the chapters have become today," (Callais, 2005, p. 35).

This proves to be a challenge for these sorority leaders to keep historical ritual at the forefront of their members' minds instead of false rituals, generally just traditions, such as themed parties or alcohol centered activities. Callais goes on to describe the difficult task of making ritual meaningful:

Fraternities and sororities cannot assume that ritual is understood to be an important part of an undergraduate chapter member's experience. Many of the participants indicated that some members in their chapters do not even understand the ritual, much less apply it to their daily lives. They want it to be different but do not know how to achieve this goal." (Callais, 2005, p. 35)

While standing on her own two feet on the topic of ritual as it applies to presidents, Callais paints a vivid picture of the fight to keep ritual preserved in Greek life today. Because ritual is often rarely referenced in the literature unless it is related in a negative way to hazing, it is difficult to draw comparisons on how this directly affects sorority chapter presidents. With my research, I hope to find more information from my participants on how this plays into their daily work as presidents.

Hierarchy. Tied into both culture and tradition of prior literature is the concept of hierarchy in Greek life. Many fraternities and sororities currently state the development of leadership skills as a primary outcome of membership (Harms, Woods, Roberts, Bureau, & Green, 2006, p.83). The wealth of opportunities to assume leadership positions

within fraternities and sororities gives the understanding that leadership is an inherent aspect of membership in these organizations. In reality, prior work shows that leadership is a structured and intentional benefit of these groups and maintains a hierarchy that varies with each chapter's organizational culture. Whether intentional or not, a central piece of my study seeks to shed light on a sorority woman's leadership experience directly impacted by their role as president.

Research on the specific hierarchy of sorority life is problematic because it is rare that any two are organized in exactly the same way. The majority of authors state the basic positions within sorority life without using specific titles. Some of these positions are also heavily laden in ritual and unattainable by the public due to their historical and secret nature. Most institutions have brief definitions on their websites in order for outsider and prospective students to gain understanding of Greek hierarchy, which is where I began my search for hierarchical information.

Beginning from the bottom, the bulk of each organization is the general membership, or the active members (Cornell University, 2013). Sorority chapter size varies from institution to institution and ranges from one member to several hundred. Perhaps the most beneficial piece of existing information in helping understand the hierarchy of Greek life is how Harms et al. (2006) views the general membership of a chapter. General membership would not be argued as a formal leadership position by some, but Harms et al. identifies leadership in Greek organizations as not only positions with titles by stating the following:

Leadership can be thought of alternatively as objective or subjective. In the objective sense, either one is in a formal or recognized leadership positions where one is a leader or not. In the subjective sense, one can be ascribed leadership by one's peers through social reputation. (p.89)

This opens up a wonderful view that a sorority chapter president may be supported or challenged by members other than those with a formal leadership position and of what that may look like when she is challenged by a close friend. While not given a specific position name, the bulk of the organization as general membership can still have significant power based on personality traits like extraversion, sociability, dominance, conscientiousness, and agreeableness (Harms et al., 2006). These traits can typically be found in the early membership of those who eventually take leadership positions in the organization as well as those who lead without a title (Harms et al., 2006). “Individuals with formal positions of power are not the only members with influence, and sometimes they are superseded by members who never served in formal leadership roles” (Harms et al., 2006, p. 88). If this is true, a sorority chapter president could encounter members of the chapter who either positively reinforce their leadership style or members who negatively try to disrupt their authority. Just trying to navigate around members who dislike them may be a full-time job in itself.

Size and length of establishment for an organization is a contributing factor to how many leadership positions are available past general membership (Porter, 2012). Each chapter has specific terminology for leadership positions and it is important to know that even those that have like terms may be vastly different from chapter to chapter. Porter gives a blanket structure of most Greek organizations in her article on diversity opportunities available to Greek leaders (2012). Porter shows that most organizations have the following positions that may have a different term: president, vice-president, treasurer, secretary, various committee chairs and co-chairs, and then smaller leadership positions that will greatly vary depending on the size of the organization (2012). So,

while the president may act as the face and overall decision maker, there are supporting leaders and members of the chapter who have equal roles in some areas of leadership. The interesting piece is a question of power that is not addressed in literature related to Greek life: what happens when the president is overshadowed by another member's leadership? As in any position of power, it is important to explore the potential impact of other leaders in the chapter and how that contributes to the efficiency of the sorority chapter president and her view of her own leadership style.

A blanket description can be given of chapter hierarchy, but it is exceptionally difficult to piece together the concept of external hierarchy in the chapters who are part of national organizations. Outside of collegiate membership, sorority chapter presidents, as well as many executive and selected positions, must communicate and be liaisons between the chapter and the chapter advisor, regional leadership, and the organization's international/national board. The chapter advisor is the closest higher-level leadership to the collegiate members of the Greek organization. Responsibilities include overseeing events, ritual, membership selection, and discipline while reporting all processes to the regional or international leaders. Regional leaders oversee multiple chapters and handle all communication that must be forwarded to international entities. The major roles of these positions consist of membership and event paperwork and ensuring that rules set by the international board are being upheld. Understanding the presence of external hierarchy for sorority chapter presidents is imperative.

Leadership

The maintenance or change of an organizational culture is often left up to those in leadership positions. For sororities, this points primarily to presidents and their executive

board. Though there is little information in literature to the link between individual leadership characteristics and organizational leadership, it can be inadvertently gathered that positive forms are needed for efficient leadership. Further studies could either could provide more evidence of this theory as it relates to sorority chapter presidents.

There are various definitions of leadership available in the research world. For consistency in this project, Northouse's (2004) definition was referred to throughout the process. Northouse defines leadership as, "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 3). As mentioned in the culture section, the difficulties of culture can make leadership very difficult. For a sorority chapter president, attempting to get a group of possibly hundreds of women to achieve one goal could be nearly impossible. The answer to this is not explicitly stated in literature and little research is done on the specific leadership of sorority presidents and leaders.

Dugan's (2008) study reports five behaviors from the Kozes and Posner (1987) model that individuals are found to practice at times when they achieve their personal best as leaders. These include challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modeling the way, and encouraging the heart (Dugan, 2008). If focusing on the president and executive board, these traits would need to be found in each individual, not just the president, for a positive outcome. It could be argued that sorority chapter presidents who share leadership with executive members who do not possess any of these traits would, then, have a much more difficult time efficiently leading their chapter. Further research on

executive members who work with presidents could give much better insight into whether this relationship is imperative.

I originally chose to leave fraternity chapter presidents out of this study because while they also lead Greek organizations, there are vastly different structures and issues between sororities and fraternities. Dugan's study focuses solely on the difference between sorority and fraternity presidents in what seems to be an attempt to parallel their leadership abilities. Kouzes and Posner (2002) include the following phrases when describing challenging the process: making something happen, encouraging initiative in others, and leading through delegation. Dugan (2008) found that challenging the process came more easily to sorority presidents than fraternity presidents, although they underrated their ability to do so (2008). Fraternity leaders were found to overrate their ability to challenge the process in leadership settings (Dugan, 2008). Dugan does not state that this fact is directly proportional to the participants' leadership ability overall, but just a discrepancy between the two groups in the area of challenging the process. For sorority chapter presidents, this could mean a myriad of things. They may be adept in challenging the process of their national board's rule making, the current binge-drinking culture, or even the idea that academics should be important in an organization. These leaders have the option of challenging the process for harm as well as for good.

Modeling the way, another of the five behaviors from Kouzes and Posner, can also be applied to sorority chapter presidents. This behavior includes a leader knowing their values and setting an example based on these values (Kouzes &

Posner, 2002). Greek organizations are often criticized for their association with alcohol and its effect on their members' academics. Long and Snowden (2011) report that in a study by Cashin (2002) fraternity leaders consumed more alcohol on a weekly basis than general members. A follow up study by Gurie (2002) reports no difference in alcohol consumption between leaders in fraternities and sororities and their general membership (Long & Snowden, 2011). While not specifically researching sorority presidents, these differing results show that alcohol consumption can be different for each organization depending on various factors. A more purposeful study perhaps, would be to examine the individual leadership qualities of those who consumed alcohol more as leaders compared to the leaders who did not consume more alcohol. Results of such a study might tell us if better leadership qualities in presidents could change patterns in alcohol consumption in fraternities and sororities.

Five bases of power. Power is an important variable in most leadership positions. Whether it is in the business world, a community, or within family, there tends to be someone receiving power and someone giving it. For sorority chapter presidents, power can be a tricky thing to gain and even harder to keep depending on the woman's leadership style. More complexly, she may have power in certain areas of sorority life and none in others. The experts in power, French and Raven (1959) identify and define the five bases of power: reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert power. Sorority chapter presidents may exhibit multiple types of power, but this study will focus on legitimate power,

coercive power, and referent power and how they play seemingly the largest roles for these women.

Legitimate power is defined as “power which stems from internalized values which dictate that a person has legitimate right to influence, and that another person has an obligation to accept this influence,” (French & Raven, 1959, p. 153). Sorority presidents fall into this category simply because they are presidents, regardless of their individual leadership style. Because we are socialized to obey those in leadership positions (French & Raven, 1959), sorority presidents have legitimate power over members in the organization, just as the president of a country has legitimate power over those who live there. This is not a cut and dried issue, however. Just as people who live in a country often deviate from the president’s values and wishes, so do members of a sorority. This could pertain to issues of social life and drinking, academic life and cheating, rules in general, etc. Because of this, it is important for sorority presidents to realize that they inherently have legitimate power, but not rely on it as their only source of power. When legitimate power fails, some sort of discipline process may be put into place, which may slowly turn into coercive power.

Those who operate under the base of coercive power give the expectation that if a member does not comply with the rules, they will be punished (French & Raven, 1959). Coercive power is generally associated with cruel dictators and blackmail but can live within the sorority world as well. The discipline process may be put in place to coerce women into behaving in the way that the president or other chapter leadership wants them to. As with the other bases of power, the

chapter president could use this in a positive way or in a negative way. Women could be coerced into improving their academic GPA by attending study hours or they could be coerced into hazing other members of the organization. This power of coercion specifically within sorority chapter presidents is not looked at in research and may play a crucial role in the areas of binge drinking and hazing.

Those who exhibit referent power do so because they appear as a role model, well-respected person, or someone members of this group strive to imitate (French & Raven, 1959). In the case of sorority chapter presidents, it is important to note referent power as it is, to researchers, the type of power leaders should strive for. The ability to lead a group solely because the members desire to be like the leader is difficult to achieve and may be hard to keep up if a reputation is tarnished. When a president of a nation is involved in a scandal or passes a law that no one likes, many followers lose faith in that leader and turn to anger and disobedience. This may be no different for a sorority chapter president.

There does not appear to be any recent research on these types of power in the current Greek setting, but as these five bases of power are still heavily referred to in research, a study linking these to sorority chapter presidents could be very insightful.

Gaps in Literature

As stated throughout this chapter, literature specifically on the experience of being a sorority chapter president is severely lacking and almost non-existent. Most current research is largely quantitative and serves to produce statistics and numbers without giving voice to chapter members on their experiences. While these leaders may contribute to those statistics in surveys or other methods, it is time for them to be

examined in a separate light in order to be understood in a new capacity. Though there is a gap in many areas of literature, I will focus on the gaps in leadership and experiential research in this section.

Most leadership research on Greek life thus far is also quantitative and speaks to leadership gains from general membership rather than the direct leadership experience of chapter presidents. While the leadership research by Dugan (2008) on Kouzes and Posner's five traits of leadership directly applies to both sorority and fraternity chapter presidents, it seems to be the only one that does so. In its uniqueness, it provided a valuable insight that serves as a model for those who are considering further research specifically on the leadership habits of sorority chapter presidents and provided some of the sole existing literature for this study. Using a model or theoretical framework like Dugan for future studies would contribute exponentially to research on these Greek leaders. This study purposely serves to highlight the specific experiences of women who serve as sorority chapter presidents and to provide a foundation for studying these women further in their leadership roles. It also brings to light the need to study fraternity chapter presidents as well and the importance of both in order to begin changing the negative aspects of Greek culture.

As with many research studies that revolve around an institutional framework and campus needs, many opt for a quantitative process rather than qualitative in order to provide information for end-of-the-year reports, quick facts for websites, and other statistical needs. While these are important, the need for qualitative studies on sorority chapter presidents is great considering the lack of existing studies. While some may exist on Greek life in general, conducting more of these can provide more in depth answers to

complicated questions that researchers seek. The quantitative studies on Greek life have provided a foundation for these qualitative studies to expand on and can help close the gap in literature on experiential research. This study hopes to do just that and give a voice to the women who serve as sorority chapter presidents.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

Most research on Greek life is conducted in the hopes of uncovering information on drinking, hazing and other high risk behaviors. Moreover, it is largely quantitative, leaving out the voice of the Greek student. My ultimate goal was to ensure that the voices of these women were heard as well as the meaning they assigned to being sorority chapter president. This study took place at Midwestern University (MU), a large, public, four-year institution. Rather than report statistics on drinking and GPA, I chose a qualitative, phenomenological approach that utilized a semi-structured interview process. This helped build rapport with participants and allow them to articulate the meaning of their experience as a sorority chapter president.

According to Denzin & Lincoln (2000), “qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them,” (p.3). This study attempts to unearth the experiences of these women outside of the realm of traditional Greek stereotypes and letting data emerge from only their voices. Phenomenological research strives for the meaning and perception of the experience of the participants (Mertens, 2000). Using a phenomenological approach in this study allowed for the opportunity to understand the core experiences that these women associate with their experience as a sorority chapter president.

Researcher Paradigm

This qualitative study began with the hope of unearthing the true impact and experience of being a sorority chapter president. Rather than conducting research to gain a specific answer, working from the constructivist paradigm “allows the concepts of importance in the study to emerge as they have been constructed by the participants,” (Mertens, 2010, p. 18). This was an especially important concept for me considering my background in Greek life. Mertens’s text also served as a reminder that “multiple realities exist that are time and context dependent,” (2010, p.226). This concept is important to note for each of these women’s stories. While these experiences give great insight to the life of sorority chapter presidents, the findings are not all-encompassing for all women in this leadership position. Conducting the study from a constructivist paradigm was a key way to accept my prior experiences or biases while allowing only the participant’s views came forward during the process.

Participants

Participants were recruited through criterion sampling and outreach to the campus department that contained contact information for all Greek students. In this case of criterion sampling, two criteria were set: (1) the participant must have been a sorority chapter president at MU within the last year and (2) the participant must be a current student at MU. After reaching out to the respective Greek department on campus, I was given the contact information for the sorority chapter presidents who had recently finished their term.

I hoped for a maximum of five participants or a minimum of three participants. Participants were given an incentive of a \$10 Target gift card for their time. I was given a list of fifteen women to contact from the department overseeing Greek life at MU. Only

three women volunteered and were all chosen to participate in the study. Because these women belong to a small group on campus and can be easily identified by certain qualities, I chose to describe them as a group only. Each of the women identify as White, 20-21 years old, originally from fairly large towns, leading a group of over 100 members, and holding various leadership positions across campus.

Research Site

This research was conducted at one large, public, four-year institution in the Midwest. To protect the identity of the institution, departments of the institution, and participants, the university will be referred to Midwest University (MU). MU has an undergraduate student population of about 20,000 and an overall population of 25,000 as a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) research based institution, and residential campus.

The Greek community at MU consists of almost 3,500 students and close to 50 chapters who are members of either the Interfraternity Council, Multicultural Greek council, National Pan-Hellenic Council, or the Panhellenic Council. Just under 15% of all undergraduate students at MU belong to a Greek chapter. Of the Greek chapters on campus, fifteen sorority chapter presidents were eligible to participate in this study.

Data Collection

The primary method of data collection in this study was through a one-on-one, in-person interview lasting between 30 and 40 minutes. This method was chosen over others in order to gain full voice of each of the participants and ensure that their stories were being told in full. The one-on-one interaction also allowed me to build rapport with each of the women and earn their trust with my past experience with sorority life. In addition,

the interviews were conducted in a private, soundproof room in the campus library upon each of their requests.

All three participants participated in one semi-structured interview with open ended questions. Operating from a constructive paradigm and phenomenological approach gave the freedom to start with basic questions and tailor following questions to each individual as the interview progressed. As Mertens notes in her text, “Researchers sometimes start with very broad questions and then allow other questions to emerge as the research is sensitized to the meanings that the participants bring to the situation,” (2010, p.270). Taking this approach allowed each of the participants to move the conversation in the direction of topics that meant the most to them, rather than myself. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed for use in Chapter 4. This allows the participants’ quotes to be directly in their words as opposed to being paraphrased.

Data Analysis

My data analysis began upon the completion of the first interview with the transcription of the recorded meeting. I opted to do the transcriptions myself, and found that the process was key in exploring my data more fully and to further understand the participants’ stories after their interviews. Hesse-Biber and Leavy support this idea in qualitative research with the following excerpt that describes my experience with transcribing.

Transcribing research data is interactive and engages the reader in the process of deep listening, analysis, and interpretation. Transcription is not a passive act, but instead provides the researcher with a valuable opportunity to actively engage with his or her research material right from the beginning of data collection. It also ensures that early on, the researcher is aware of his or her own impact on the data gathering process and he or she has an opportunity to connect with this data in a grounded

manner that provides for the possibility of enhancing the trustworthiness and validity of his or her data gathering techniques, (2006, p. 347).

Through this process, I was able to focus much more on the women's stories than any opinions I may have brought to the study. Transcribing at first seeming daunting, but it allowed me to focus on the voices of the participants and ensure their spoken words would transfer into writing with integrity.

After the transcription process, I read through each of the transcripts in full one time, highlighting common themes, emotions, and phrases from each of the women. The second time through the documents, using a different color, I highlighted each of these commonalities as they related to specific questions and topics to help in grouping them to themes and ensure that nothing was used out of context of what the participants were describing. These highlighted portions were all written on a separate piece of paper and then condensed into a one-word theme when possible. From there, the themes were tallied by number to show the most present and common themes numerically. Once several themes emerged and all sub-themes were categorized, I returned to the transcriptions to pull the supporting quotes surrounding the themes. Lastly, I compiled my themes, sub-themes, and quotes which will be summarized throughout Chapter 4.

Data Validation

In the constructivist paradigm, Mertens (2010) reminds us that credibility is comparable to the idea of validity in a qualitative study. The question of credibility is posed as, "Is there a correspondence between the way the respondents actually perceive social constructs and the way the researcher portrays their viewpoints?" (Mertens, 2010, p. 388). Researchers not only have the ability to make sure the participants' responses align with the findings, but a duty to ensure nothing less.

As the primary goal of this study was to ensure that the participants' experiences were accurately being portrayed, validating my data was extremely important. In doing so, member checks were a vital piece of my study. I chose to do this twice throughout the process to confirm that I was not getting off track as my study and writing progressed. After my data analysis, each women received an electronic copy of both the transcription of their interview and the themes and quotes I pulled from each. The women were given the option of feedback and freedom to ask me to change anything they feel did not represent their stories, and I met no resistance on any of my work at that point. The second member check occurred after the conclusion of writing Chapter 4 and 5 ensure that my findings aligned with their experiences. Again, I received no feedback to change my findings and continued my writing on the themes and sub-themes. With the steps taken, I am confident that the data reflect the views of the participants and gives an accurate depiction of their experiences as sorority chapter presidents.

Limitations

As perfection can never exist within a research study, there were several limitations throughout this process. While I was hoping for at least five participants, I was only able to secure three. Because the purpose of this study was to give a voice to these women, it did not hinder the results, but more participants usually allow for a wider variety of insight.

In addition to the small number of participants, another limitation lies in the fact that all three participants were White women who are part of traditionally White sororities. A point of view from a chapter president of a multicultural sorority may have resulted in different themes and challenges due to the variations in traditions and a

smaller number of women within those chapters. The participants also belonged to chapters with well-established, very respectable reputations on campus, and high GPAs. Presidents of new, emerging chapters as well as those with poor reputations and low GPAs may face more difficult challenges and have additional needs.

Time was a large limitation in this study as well. A more thorough study could have followed a sorority chapter president from the time they begin their term to when they end and have time to reflect on their experience. Multiple interviews could have elicited much more data on the challenges these women face as they go through them. Because the women were reflecting on these experiences, the initial emotion they would have had was difficult to gauge now that they were out of the position.

As a past sorority chapter president who had a combination of a positive and negative experience, I came in with the idea that these experiences would be similar to mine. To contradict my bias, I conducted member checks in order to ensure that the participants' voices were being heard throughout the findings and not my own.

Researcher and Reflexivity

With qualitative research comes the importance of reflexivity and acknowledgement of certain pieces of oneself that may play an important role in the research process. I cannot and will not deny that my prior life experiences and my identity led me to choose my topic as well as the type of institution I framed this project within. I identify as a female, White, Catholic, and from a lower middle working-class family. Currently, and hopefully not forever, I am a graduate student of a university in the Midwest where I was previously an undergraduate student as well as a sorority chapter

president. These pieces of my identity affect my everyday life and one can assume that they played a part throughout this project.

As this project unfolded, the fact that I served as a sorority chapter president during my undergraduate career was difficult to hide and impossible to ignore. I spent a full year of my life responsible for the actions and safety of 150+ women and often felt the brunt of blame when anything went wrong. During this year, I was also catapulted into the most rewarding and fulfilling leadership position of my life thus far. The experiences and learning moments from this time have shaped who I am and my decision to pursue a career in student affairs.

Those who know me understand that I am opinionated about most things, and Greek life is no exception. With that being said, I have purposefully removed myself from the Greek community for the past year-and-a-half, and let many biases subside as the people they are associated with left my life or the institution as well. I returned to the Greek community with this project and with further knowledge in the realm of student affairs that allows me to put my research participants' stories far ahead of my own.

I recognize that I have ideas and thoughts about the way Greek students, particularly sorority chapter women, are viewed because of my past experiences. However, these experiences also gave me a high level of relatability with these women and a method of building genuine trust as I collected data. My connection and personal interest that allowed me to collect data in this way could be perceived by some as potentially problematic, but I see it as a key way to produce meaningful and accurate work that highlights this student population to those looking for ways to understand their experience.

Chapter 4

Findings

This chapter will present the findings of this qualitative research study. As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study was to illuminate the experiences of serving as a sorority chapter president at a four-year, public institution and give voice to Greek student leaders who may possess the power to change negative stereotypes of the Greek community. Through a phenomenological lens and a semi-structured, face-to-face interview, I gathered data from three different women who completed their terms as sorority chapter presidents within the last two months. While each of these women possess a unique background, academic major, involvement on campus, and experience, three similar themes were observed. This chapter will explore the common themes that each woman exhibited in their interview.

The exploration of this student population began with one research question:

- What are the experiences of a sorority chapter president?

One broad question was asked in hopes of laying the foundation for further research on this population. The data gathered from three sorority chapter presidents brought forth four themes and insight to the experiences of a sorority chapter president. These four themes discuss why they took the position, positives and negatives of the job, how they were impacted as a leader, and their overall experience.

Overview of Themes

During the interviews conducted with the three participants, four main themes emerged. The first three themes each contain two sub-themes. The first theme is (1) service, as well as its two sub-themes, mentoring members and supporting members, that

shed light on why the women undertook the position. The second emerging theme, (2) development, walks us through the challenges and changes the women experienced throughout their term with its two sub-themes of leadership and support. The third theme of (3) relationships illuminates how the women's relationships changed throughout their year in the context of the two sub-themes: building new relationships and navigating existing relationships. The fourth and final theme was that each women had an (4) overall positive experience during their term. These themes and sub-themes are summarized below in Table 1 and explained in detail throughout the chapter.

Table 1. Overview of Themes

Theme	Sub-Theme 1	Sub-Theme 2
Service	Mentor members	Supporting members
Development	Leadership development	Support
Relationships	Building new relationships	Navigating existing relationships
Overall Positive Experience	N/A	N/A

Service

While a picture of a snobby, ditzy, blonde woman in the latest fashion often gets painted for sorority women, a very different and complex masterpiece was created through my interviews. Many students hold leadership positions in order to have a well-rounded resume, gain skills, or because they like to have an elite title. Each of the women in my study chose to run for an entirely different and perhaps unexpected reason. Each participant said they decided to run for president simply out of desire to serve their chapter and give back to the women within. Janelle states, "I never did the job to reap the

rewards or did it for myself, it was more that I was trying to serve [the chapter] and I hope that it's enough." Samantha supports this as well as she describes why she chose to run for chapter president.

Ultimately it came down to being able to give back to the organization that had given so much to me. My sorority is the reason I am involved in everything else I am involved in and the person that I am, so it was a way for me to dedicate [my time] back to all the women there. - Samantha

As Kara reflected on how she felt throughout her experience as a whole, she centered on feelings of "just wanting to serve others and wanting to make people feel cared for and as happy as possible and help them flourish."

While originally taking the position from a desire to serve, all three women carried this theme throughout their term and through their decision making processes. For young leaders it can often be easy to be wrapped up in the idea of having a leadership position and stray from the initial goal, but each of these women seemed to maintain the theme of service for their entire term.

Definitely, as far as thinking of myself as a leader, my biggest goal was that I would be effective and that I would make change and all of these things, but never at the expense of the house knowing that I cared about them. So you can call that servant leadership, you can call that whatever you want, but I think I was more concerned about them individually than my position as president. – Kara

Servant leadership may not directly come to mind when thinking about sororities, but it was a driving force for each of these women. So driving, in fact, that Kara was hesitant to acknowledge that she became a servant leader throughout the process. The idea of taking the position for the title, power, as a resume booster, or to be well-known on campus was never shared in any of the interviews. In fact, Janelle was opposed to even recognizing the title for herself.

For the longest time I did not feel comfortable saying that I was the president. I just, I don't...I wasn't about the title, I wasn't about anything like that, I was more, "I am here to serve you however I can.

Mentoring. In addition to serving the chapter and organization as a whole, the women used this position to act as mentors and role models to women within the chapter. Specifically, each woman talked about the position of sorority chapter president as an opportunity to impact new members and younger women in the chapter rather than an opportunity to have power over them.

I know every new member and being able to be like a...a role model to them and a positive influence on them and knowing that I have that ability has been a really, really cool positive. And I've got to meet so many of these younger members, sophomores too, and I've been able to have an impact on them whether it's just advice or conversation or class or random things that they come to me for help. I think that's been a really cool role to play – knowing that I've been able to help out so many of these younger girls. – Samantha

I can't ask you for something that I wouldn't do myself. So I can't ask you to have good social behavior if I can't have good social behavior. So it was always like a practice what you preach type of thing. Like I mentioned, they're looking to me to set the example, so I'm making sure I set the right example. - Janelle

These women reported wanting to set powerful examples and have a positive impact among their peers through their actions within the house and their involvement in other campus organizations, yet we often only hear about general chapter members and the rules they break. Disciplining members of the chapter was a common topic and plays a part in each of the themes. Rather than seeing it as a negative, the complex forms of discipline set these presidents up for another chance to mentor and support the women of their chapter.

Support. While all three women used this opportunity to serve and mentor women throughout the chapter, they also each touched on supporting members

who often end up as the women in the aforementioned newspaper headlines. The topic of becoming a disciplinarian, or “the bad guy” as they often referred to it, was a prominent piece of their experience as president.

Discipline on college campuses can be harsh. A student may be kicked out of the institution for cheating or failed by an instructor for missing too many classes with little to no developmental and aiding structures in place. While Greek life can also be known for handling discipline with severe punishments like kicking members out of the chapter or even removing a chapter from campus, Kara talks about having to utilize a much more developmental and empathic form of discipline that she wished she would have been prepared to handle.

I would say growing up, and even now, I haven't been through very many traumatic things in life and you see people's brokenness. Just whether it's through something disciplinary that you're dealing with, something much deeper rooted than getting drunk that night or something like that. And I wish I would have, and I don't know if there's a way to be prepared in that sense, but being more prepared for...to see what people are going through and to respond well to that and to help them in that process when you haven't experienced the same thing. Whether that's depression or self-destruction in a lot of ways. Whether it's eating disorders or drinking or just mentally some girls are just...things have affected them in ways that no one knows about and they don't come out until something bad happens. So that was overwhelming I think to care so much and want to help so much, even if you're getting them in trouble or disciplining them or something, but to see like wow...like that night isn't the issue. They're going through this and this is their life. – Kara

As president, Kara felt an overwhelming responsibility to not just discipline these women but to find the empathy to understand that a deeper cause may be at fault and that simply fining a member would have no effect on their behavior. Janelle refrained from going into detail on specific experiences, but clearly realized the impact she was able to have on chapter members because of her position and took it upon herself to use it positively for

support rather than negatively just for discipline. Samantha spoke of the positive opportunities to support members in general and coming to the realization that she could make being president positive by reaching out and supporting others in even the simplest ways.

I think serving as the president, you are very instrumental in a lot of, a lot of people's lives, more so than you probably even realize. Simple things like saying 'hi' to a sophomore and I'm the president of the sorority, I know that has some type of value to them. You know, after serving on our standards committee and everything like that, girls go through a lot of different things. You hear about a lot of different situations and hardships and all of that, so just being that support that they need and that they're seeking is really cool. - Janelle

I was able to impact people and that was one of the biggest things I learned about myself. Like, I have the ability to be a leader and the ability to have a positive impact on people and this position. Being the president, I was able to reach out and support so many girls and have a presence in so many peoples' lives that it was more...like I was given the opportunity to be president. -Samantha

Using their position to support women in the chapter rather than solely for punishment, these women ended their term feeling as though they mentored and supported multiple women. None of the women spoke of prior experience in serving as a mentor, so whether they learned that skill as they went or had it before their term is unknown.

Development

Just as sorority chapter presidents are helping chapter members through a crucial time of development, Samantha, Kara, and Janelle each recognized their own development throughout their term as president and expressed the difficulties they encountered. While all three women spoke of significant challenges during their term, their time of reflection allowed them to see how these challenges developed them as

leaders and as people in general. The largest pieces of their development centered on leadership and the support they received.

Leadership. While already touching on the aspect of servant leadership, a self-assessed gain in leadership was stated from all three women. Each woman spoke of the positive impact of their experience on their ability to be a leader as well as how they see themselves as a leader. Samantha describes the confidence and ability serving as president gave her compared to her prior leadership experiences.

I always used to describe myself as a quiet leader. Not that I'm a quiet person, but I'm not the first to stand up and voice my opinion and all that stuff and have to be a leader type thing, you know? Before [being president] I was very comfortable being a solid member of the group and a good team member and stepping up when it was time to be a leader, but not necessarily taking the reins and I think that like you kind of said, the confidence of being president and just getting that kind of experience makes you more confident and kind of changes it. – Samantha

Samantha mentioned that she had several leadership positions at the same time that she was president, as well as the other two women, and felt catapulted into leadership in many different areas at one time. Janelle even mentioned that serving as a leader in another organization simultaneously may have changed the way women in the house saw her. Each woman did mention, however, that serving as a sorority chapter president was by far the toughest and most taxing. It is noteworthy to point out that women serving as chapter presidents may be serving in a multitude of leadership positions, serving as a catalyst for an even greater change in leadership ability than if only serving in one role. Janelle describes her experience as very similar to Samantha's.

I think that I can't go through...all of the experiences I did and not come out as a better leader, more...I think experience speaks volumes. You're able to take new situations and compare it to your past and so with that, going through all the different ups and downs, I am definitely a much stronger leader. And it wasn't that I was a bad leader, but I definitely

think it was something that got better as time when on. And looking back, if I think myself a year ago, and who I am now, I think that's definitely improved. – Janelle

In addition to enhancing leadership ability, serving as a sorority chapter president may also have a distinct effect on women who already feel they have a strong affinity for leading a large group. Kara felt as though her servant leadership-based approach worked well within her chapter and reaffirmed her leadership style in that setting.

It definitely affirmed me in that I was an effective leader. I don't think there's many other roles that you could take that could tell you if you're a good leader or not. You definitely see the results of your leadership. I really appreciated it and in the best way it provided confidence and just...you know, my leadership approach worked. Which I am so thankful for...I don't know what I would have done. And that's not to say I was the best leader or anything of that, but for that time, that year, those people – it worked out well. - Kara

Whether this affirmation produces a more successful leader after her presidency is unknown and could be studied in greater depth. In addition, Kara stated, "I definitely learned a lot about myself and about the way I lead." Kara appears to have a much more confident sense of her leadership with more affirmation than change during the process of being president.

Samantha explained her leadership development outside of just her role as president. She was able to articulate how she was able to use what she learned about leadership through her term and apply it to non-sorority settings.

It gave me a real, genuine perspective on leadership and more of like, your life is leadership and not just, I go to this meeting for two hours and I'm the president and I lead it...but it's way more than that...I learned more about like, living your life as a leader rather than just living your leadership position. And then realizing that there is a way to be a leader in all aspects of life, even if it's more personal and not formal. - Samantha

These women clearly showed multiple types of leadership development and affirmation through their role as sorority chapter president. While two entered the position at a seemingly lower level of leadership experience and developed into confident leaders, one entered as a fairly confident leader and was affirmed in her style and ability to be an effective leader.

Support. Sanford's theory of Challenge and Support has shown professionals the importance of the balance of challenge and support in collegiate students' lives for many years. These women were no exception to this well-known theory. Each of these women reported that a positive support system was key in flourishing in this position, regardless of where the support came from. These women provided an insight to the support they had received from within the chapter, outside of the chapter, from the institution, and the type of support they wish they would have received.

Support for these women was necessary for multiple reasons. While Samantha, Janelle, and Kara all had very different experiences, they described the same type of issues that required support from others. The responsibility and stress that came along with being in charge of an entire chapter, disciplining members, and being drained emotionally and mentally from the position gives great insight to the challenges of this position.

In some ways it was good, but just being responsible for 150 women was extremely stressful. I am kind of a worry-wart in general and so I think...when I think about the whole year I think honestly it was the most draining just mentally and emotionally because even if I wasn't actually doing something that I need to be doing, I was thinking about it. Or I was...it was just taxing. It's exhausting. You're always thinking about what you need to do next or Friday night rolls comes along and you're just praying that everyone is surviving and ok and you know, it's...you kind of

laugh about it but serious things have happened this year and that was one of the biggest reliefs when I was done. Just...I'm not you know, the sole person responsible for making sure that everyone is ok. That is just exhausting. – Kara

It can be very draining with all of the emails and with all of the text messages or issues...it's very time consuming. Very time consuming. With all of my involvement throughout college, I have never held a job because literally my job has been my involvement. I would have anywhere from 8-10 hours each week where I was just solely working on sorority stuff and a lot of that was meetings. So that doesn't even include emailing and it constantly being on your mind. So it can get really draining. – Janelle

Kara and Janelle attest to how emotionally draining and time consuming serving as a sorority chapter president can be. From an outside perspective, it may be difficult to see in interactions with these leaders. Each women talked about how they felt unable to seek support from people in their lives because of strict confidentiality rules when it came to disciplinary actions or other members' privacy. They felt the need to hide what was going on within the chapter and how stressed they may have felt. Disciplinary actions were also a prominent role of this stress for Samantha. She acknowledges not only the difficulty of punishing her friends and peers, but also gives insight to how she felt other members in the chapter viewed her because of this duty she had to perform.

It's so easy to place blame on yourself and internalize that. So that was kind of one of the harder things personally. And I think in general everyone could agree to having to have difficult conversations with your friends or give a standards hearing or executive hearing to friends and people not necessarily understanding the difference between president Samantha and like, your sister Samantha and where the line is. – Samantha

These excerpts from their interviews show that just because these women are successful leaders, they face significant challenges in this position and need the appropriate balance of emotional support to thrive as president.

One specific area of support that each participant mentioned was dealing with senior members who were above them in age but not in a leadership position. Janelle states, “The hardest part was probably the first semester when you have the seniors who are older than you. And really, the first semester is so difficult because unless you have a supportive senior class who’s going to work with you, it’s hard to try and get in there and make changes.” Not receiving support from older members made it difficult for the rest of the house to follow suit. Samantha also describes working with the second semester seniors as the hardest part of her term as president.

I knew that it was always hard with second semester seniors, but last semester’s class was very stubborn. We had [alcohol issues] at a social event and at the venue I knew seniors were saying they hated me. And so in my first term, that was like really...really hard for me to take. And then also knowing that I had to punish these seniors who I used to look up to, you know? And then instances like this happen, and that was the one hard, hard thing for me. And I think, too, that since it was the beginning of my term also made it a little more difficult because you’re like, ‘I’m trying to do the best that I can!’ And you know, having people say, ‘well you’re not doing good,’ was...it was hard. – Samantha

This power struggle proved to be a struggle for each of the women and halted improvement in many areas in their first term. This uncooperative atmosphere left a feeling of little productivity and advancement until these seniors graduated and left the institution.

As far as institutional support goes, each of the three women stated that they could have been more supported at MU. Communication was the biggest concern for the women and they wanted more contact from staff from the department who oversaw the Greek community. Each of them stressed that while they were sure help would be given if they reached out to the department, they wanted more. The women craved structure, one-on-one face time with the director and supplementary staff, transparency, and

effective monthly meetings. A personal source of support for two of the participants were other women currently serving as presidents of their chapter. The department did facilitate helpful meetings and roundtables for collaboration between presidents, which allowed the women to seek support in other students going through similar issues.

They started doing round tables for presidents and then this semester they're doing them for a lot of officers, but I think that is the single most beneficial thing they did for me personally in my leadership role. Being able to talk about things that were going on with the department staff and other presidents in a relaxed setting and opening up those lines of communication, because that's something that's hard when you're in charge of thousands of students – it's easy to get lost in the shuffle. Setting aside that time for those intentional conversations was so awesome. - Samantha

Two of the three women recounted that a prominent source of support for them was a past president from their chapter. All three women stated that it was hard to find someone who could relate to the challenges and emotions they were feeling, and the past president was often the only one who understood. Janelle states, “Being able to reach out to those people – the past president, thinking that this is really hard and then her being able to understand me and she's like, ‘I know what you're going through. It's ok.’” Kara supports this saying, “She could really relate, you know? I think that was really hard for most people. They just don't understand. Everyone knows you're busy but they don't see half of what you do. So that's just really exhausting.”

Samantha focused primarily on finding the support from another person who could relate and turned to a friend on her executive team.

I found there was one person on my exec team that was like, my partner. Her and I from the beginning had both been very passionate and we knew that we had each other's backs on a lot of things. So, she was definitely the one that I would turn to, because she was on exec, so she knew everything that was happening. And at the same time, we were friends outside of it. I'd feel bad unloading things about exec to someone

[outside of it] because I shouldn't tell them or because they don't want to hear it. And I found that my friends that weren't on exec wanted to be there for me, but a lot of times they just didn't understand everything that was going on. – Samantha

Similarly, Kara also talks about the support that comes from a well-structured executive team that understands how to work together. She recognizes that some chapters have executive teams that struggle to work well together and was thankful for her team. In regards to her team she stated:

I was so supported and I didn't have to micromanage and I didn't have to worry about other things and I was just very well supported with the year as a whole and it made my job easy. I didn't have to worry about people I shouldn't have to worry about.

Samantha touched on the value she found in the support of alumni members of her chapter and those she came into contact with at conferences and conventions. Utilizing the experience of these past members gave her ideas of how to address problems similar to those that have already occurred and seek out advice from chapters around the country.

Each of the women had an extensive support network and reached out to multiple people both inside and outside of the chapter when needing to relieve the stress. These people included best friends within the chapter, someone outside of the Greek community, and family members who were ever further removed.

Oftentimes I needed a friend not even in the house that just wasn't on exec or anything where I could just get away from everything sorority related and just have a relief of, 'hey, I don't want to talk about anything sorority, anything...any of that. Can you please give me some time to do something else with me?' So kind of needing a release completely outside of things. - Kara

As another type of outside release, Janelle relied on times where she could be alone. As a self-described introvert, she had to make time away from the chapter to be successful.

She admitted it was hard to find that time within the house and usually ended up needing a change of location sometimes even off-campus.

I had to find time where I would just 'be'. Whether I go to a coffee shop and just sit and read and work on stuff, I need that time just to myself to decompress and I knew that if I didn't have that time I wasn't going to serve the chapter well. So it was kind of like this catch-22 where I have to make the time to do this so I can be at my best, because without it I'm not. It's literally all about balance. Completely.

Relationships

Many students join Greek life in order to find a community to be a part of and make lasting friendships throughout the collegiate experience. Each of the participants described themselves as highly relational and holding interactions with all members as extremely important. Taking responsibility for 150 women also allowed these women to form individual relationships far beyond the typical general member, many with members they would not have come into contact with otherwise. Conversely, serving as president put high strain on some previously existing relationships and even severed a few. Two primary relationship sub-themes that will be discussed are building new relationships and navigating existing relationships

Building new relationships. Mentoring younger members was already clearly a priority to each of the participants, but so was making lasting relationships. Even more interesting was that none of them expected to find lasting relationships in some of these places. Many of these relationships came through other members who took on leadership positions and had continuous, direct contact with the presidents. Kara indicated, "We had

some – and this was kind of rare – younger girls on our exec team. Just girls that I wouldn't have gotten the chance to get to know as well and stuff...I built relationships that I never would have had the opportunity to build had I not been in that position.”

Janelle also appreciated the opportunity to not just work with other officers, but focus on developing a real relationship with them. “It was really cool to mentor other officers and other chapter members – building those relationships. Love and appreciation [for members] grows throughout time and so being able to develop that closely with different officers that you work so closely with all the time...that was really, really wonderful.”

Taking it a step further, Samantha made a point to form intentional relationships with younger members in the chapter. She saw being president as an opportunity to invest in these younger members rather than viewing it as her job to get to know them. “I think the coolest part for me was this, with all the new members. Seniors still come up to me (laughter) and they're like, ‘Do you know all of the new members?’ And I'm like, ‘Yes! They're my friends!’ I know every new member.” From these intentional relationships, Samantha insists that she grew in friendships with people she never thought she would be friends with, especially younger chapter members who did not hold leadership positions.

Navigating existing relationships. The participants gave a wealth of insight on how this position affected some of their existing relationships. Some were affected positively, some negatively, and some with a balance of each. Many of the difficulties stemmed from lack of time to put into relationships, making tough decisions involving close friends, and the changed perspective of the president once in the role. Samantha felt the struggle of time management and relatability when it came to her relationships.

I found that my friends that weren't on exec, they wanted to be there for me, but a lot of time they just didn't understand everything that was going

on, and not like they ever got upset with me, but also, being president, a lot of my time was taken and I didn't have as much time to give to my friendships. You know, not that I lost friends, but you don't have that time to hang out and talk for hours on a random night or things like that. – Samantha

Samantha recognized that “sometimes you're making decisions that not everyone understands. I knew people might not like me as much anymore and that was hard.” It can be typical for those in leadership positions to be ridiculed for decisions they make, and these women were no exception. While she insists that she had an overall positive experience as president, Samantha says that the few hard things were very personal. “In general, there wasn't a lot of hard...but when it came it was personal and those ‘ouch’ type of things.”

Kara described experiencing a shift in the way her existing friends saw her and how they approached her about various topics.

I don't think that I, you know, in the process...ruined any relationships or anything like that, but my relationships definitely changed. Especially with close friends and stuff. I had a few friends who it was very hard for them to find the balance of, ok, now that Kara's president, like, can I tell her the same things or can I do the same things around her and all of that. So I definitely had people, um, just treat me a little different and be more on edge around me and stuff. – Kara

She describes, in a very light-hearted fashion, a brief story about a friend that gives an overview of how some friends acted very differently around her once she took the position.

I had a friend that one night after dinner...I had wanted to talk to her about plans that we had completely outside of sorority, and was like, ‘Hey, can I talk to you after meeting?’ And she was like, ‘Sure...’ And we went into the other room and she says, ‘So am I in trouble?’ And I was like, ‘No! I just wanted to see if you wanted to hang out.’ (laughter) – Kara

Kara said that this was common among her interactions with her friends and that it was hard to manage all the different identities she possessed (e.g., president, student, Christian, etc.). She promised herself that she would not let the identity of chapter president consume her, and while it was hard, felt that she was able to keep a balance of her faith and values throughout the process as well.

Janelle highlighted a few close friendships that made her experience slightly more difficult than Samantha's or Kara's. Two of Janelle's close friends also held leadership positions during her term. She sheds light on the difficulty of accepting their criticisms and separating issues dealing with sorority and issues dealing with their friendship.

With my closest friends, it was difficult at times because they felt I wasn't doing my best or what they thought was my best that I could be doing. That's kind of...it's an interesting dynamic when it's someone that's your close friend and then you're so close in the sorority and you position that it's...it's hard to separate the two. And so it was a fine balance of...I guess opening that communication where you have to be really honest and say, 'this isn't going well; you need to fix it,' so you can still interact as friends. – Janelle

She also admits that she did experience a few ruined relationships during her presidency. She particularly talks about an officer and close friend who was not performing well and navigating how to tackle the situation. "It was this hard balancing act because I did not believe that she was performing well and neither did the rest of the chapter, but she was my friend. So it was a really hard balance." Conversely, she also shows how criticism from a close friend strengthened their existing relationship and motivated her to perform at a higher level.

We were both getting ready for recruitment and always talking about things all the time where she's like, 'I just know you can do better for our chapter.' And it was like this really hard conversation because to me, all I was hearing was 'you suck. You didn't do good enough. I'm disappointed

in you,' type of thing. And now, I mean now that time has passed, I see it as a wonderful thing because...most people don't have those conversations. Um, but just being conscious of how she was perceiving me and how that I could be performing, it definitely helped in the fall semester and it helped us in our relationship. I think that we grew even closer in our friendship, which was really cool.

Positive Overall Experience & Impact

As the first three themes demonstrate, the presidents experienced and a balance of both positive and negative situations and emotions throughout their term. When asked to describe their overall experience and impact of being a sorority chapter president, all three women centered on the fact that while it was difficult at times, the positives greatly outweighed the negatives. A humbling and positive overall experience and impact was central in the participants' responses.

Janelle brought the conversation back around to service again as she tried to summarize what her experience meant to her.

I just, I think that...going through being a president is different for everyone. There's struggles for everyone, there's victories for everyone. Um, but at the end of the day it's the understanding that you took your year to serve your chapter and that in and of itself is really cool. – Janelle

She acknowledges that each woman will have a different experience in the position, even if it is within the same chapter. Out of the three women, Janelle seemed to have the most difficulty with relationships being affected by her position. Even while she may have lost close friends throughout the year, she still noted that she gained lifelong experience and can appreciate it as she moves forward.

The overall impact for me was...it's very humbling. Just like a big impact I guess and probably with time, and as time keeps passing it'll seem like...I think I will appreciate it in different ways. I don't know...I don't know, it was fun, it was exciting, it was a challenge, it was uplifting, it was draining...there are so many emotions that go into it. So many different experiences. It definitely gave me a lot of life experiences like I

mentioned that I think will definitely help me in my career and my life and relationships with different people. I hope that I left a mark on the girls that are currently in the house, whether it be small or large...left some type of legacy there. – Janelle

Kara, who was challenged most with making changes within the chapter to adhere to national policies, responded with only positivity and laughter when asked about her overall experience. She also brings the conversation back to her passion for caring about the women in the chapter and how it increased that feeling. Like the other two women, she admits that she would do the whole process again if the opportunity presented itself.

I would do it again in a heartbeat...I think as a whole, it just enhanced my love and heart for others. Especially those that I care about and was close to. It only increased that. Yeah. Exhausting, draining, all those things, but I'd do it again just because of that second statement. With that, growing to care about those girls tenfold made it worth it I guess. It sucked, but it was worth it, how about that? (laughter) – Kara

Speaking again to the driving factor of wanting to serve the chapter, Kara insisted that being able to care for the chapter members through her presidential service made the difficulties she encountered well worth it.

Samantha gave the most positive response out of the three women. Earlier in the interview, she stated that positivity is her number one strength, which may be an attributing factor to how she sees her experience. Samantha equates her time as president to fun and that it made her extremely happy. Like Kara, she explains that the difficulties were far outweighed by the benefits.

I just...it just makes me so happy. Like, it was so fun! I was awesome and the best thing of my life so far and I think, looking back, I realize that it did take up so much time and energy and effort, but I think that it was so worth it. Like, I would do it over and over again...ok, I don't know if I would do it over and over...(laughter), but I would do that over time and time again. I do not regret my decision in the least. And like I said, I think

I was able to impact people and that's one of the biggest things that I learned about myself... And I learned so much about myself and I grew as a leaders and I made so many new friends and...it's awesome. I love it. I would tell anyone, well not anyone...it does take a certain type of person to do it, but yeah. It was great, wonderful, every positive adjective. - Samantha

Interestingly, Samantha notes that it does take a certain type of person to do it, but does not explain what type of person it would take. Describing herself as a positive person may be very telling to at least one trait that would be helpful to possess to be a successful president.

Conclusion

The four themes and six sub-themes that emerged from the gathered data give us an insight into what these women experienced throughout their term as a sorority chapter president. Chapter five will discuss the implications of these findings and suggest further research and practices to better support this small but important population found on many campuses.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Introduction

The stories of the three sorority chapter presidents at MU show the world of higher education that there is more to their job than deciding on the t-shirt design for recruitment. These women's voices show us everything that has been overlooked about them in the past: their challenges in relationships, time management, disciplinary actions, legal constraints, and their development as leaders as well as their successes in mentoring and supporting the women they serve and care for. Until now, presidents have been lumped in with general members for numerous quantitative studies and are rarely studied as individuals, leaving their experiences and needs largely unknown. With criticisms and complaints of Greek students and negative trends like alcohol consumption and hazing littering the media, it has never been more important to understand the experiences of these students. Sorority chapter presidents may offer significant insights into sparking change within their chapter, their campus, and the Greek community nationwide. Providing the opportunity for their voices to be heard could create new knowledge to the needs of these women, how the Greek community is led, and how negative stereotypes begin. In this chapter, I will discuss the significance of the findings as well as implications for future practice and recommendations for further research.

Summary of Themes

The four common themes of *service, development, relationships, and a positive overall experience* found through the interviews gave insight to why these women

decided to take on the role of sorority chapter president, the challenges they encountered, and how they were perceived by women in the chapter. *Mentoring members* and *supporting members* were a supporting sub-theme of service and why they chose to run for president. Development was attributed to the two areas of their *leadership* and they *support* they received in order to counter their challenges, whether adequate or inadequate. The participants spoke to the prominent role of *building new relationships* and *navigating existing relationships* throughout their term. The primary findings are listed below:

- The sorority chapter presidents all chose to occupy the position with the hopes of serving their chapter and national/international organization and to give back what it had given to them.
- The sorority chapter presidents served as mentors to younger chapter members and liked the idea that they could impact other women in their position.
- The sorority chapter presidents served as an emotional support for women who are experiencing distress in their lives or forcing disciplinary action, rather than using their role strictly for punishment.
- The sorority chapter presidents exhibited stronger confidence in their leadership ability after holding this position, affirmation in their leadership styles, and an appreciation for a large leadership position.
- The sorority chapter presidents experienced multiple leadership positions on campus at one time, which may skew the amount of leadership development attained.

- The sorority chapter presidents experienced challenges in mental and emotional exhaustion, time management difficulties, disciplining friends and peers, being responsible for 150 women, and experiencing a power struggle with second-semester seniors.
- The sorority chapter presidents wanted more institutional support and required a strong personal support system to succeed.
- The sorority chapter presidents recognized that the position provided them the opportunity to make relationships they never would have made, as well as cause issues and possibly even sever existing relationships within the chapter.
- The sorority chapter presidents noted that while there were difficulties in the position, it was well worth it and positive experience with many personal gains.

Discussion and Relevance of Themes

The lack of previous research on sorority chapter presidents leaves us only a few themes or sub-themes that connect to literature and with several that can be considered new and emerging data.

Service. It may come as a surprise to some that the three participants originally chose to occupy the position with the intent of serving their chapter and national/international organization. Their interest was not in obtaining the role to have the title, but instead to give back to the members who had given them so much by being the primary person who mentored and supported them. Each woman's answer circled back to

making a positive impact on the women within the chapter and seemingly taking steps to changing the culture. For some, this thought may shatter the stereotype they hold of a sorority woman, especially of presidents. With that being said, there is still an interesting disconnect between these women who appear to be distinctively service oriented and other members who end up in news stories in the media.

This brings the idea of culture, as referenced by the existing literature in Chapter 2, back into the conversation. Referring back to Schein's (1985) definition of organizational culture now that we have a vantage point of a sorority chapter president, it may form a different meaning.

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (p. 17).

Now seeing that each of the women had a strong belief in service, mentoring, and support, it makes it difficult to understand how chapters tend to move in the opposite direction. Schein (1985) writes about organizational culture with the belief that a real leader's talent and what makes them unique is solely how they create, manage, and work with culture. While these women prove to be outstanding leaders in their own light, none of them mention anything about working with the culture of the organization. For the most part, it seems they accept that the culture of Greek life remains as is and they work with people individually but not always with the chapter as a whole. These three women placed high importance on making change within members one-on-one and starting from the inside out. This could be due to the fact that each referred to themselves as highly relational, and not necessarily as thinking about the big picture. The idea of

organizational culture does not seem to be on their radar. If it were, sorority chapter presidents could potentially use their relational skills within a model for change and be a key factor in change across a chapter or even an entire campus.

Though service was clearly a strong theme, all three women spoke to the time-consuming nature that serving as president has. Coupled with their own development, challenges, and need for support, it seems that a year is nowhere near long enough to establish a change in organizational culture. Janelle acknowledges that very little change can be made in the first semester with a difficult senior class, and by the time October rolls around next semester the entire chapter is already moved on to who will be the next president. It seems to be a lot to ask of someone at the age of 20 or 21: can one student possibly try to change the culture of a group of their peers while managing coursework, a job, and other extra-curricular activities? This short amount of time for a term and competing responsibilities could be a significant factor in why there has not been a shift in sorority or Greek life culture for so long.

Development. These women demonstrated clear changes from the beginning of their term to its commencement. Each woman articulated distinct improvements in their leadership ability, citing that they were more confident, vocal, and affirmed leaders at the end of their year as president. Even more interestingly, they were all abundantly thankful that they had been given this daunting task and were appreciative that they had been elected to the position by their peers.

In addition to being a major part of development during their term, leadership can be connected with much of the existing research on Greek leadership and leadership in general. This study finds truth in Dugan's writing on Kouzes & Posner's (1987) five best

practices of leaders. Dugan found that challenging the process came more easily to sorority presidents, although they underrated their ability to do so (2008). While unable to explain situations thoroughly due to confidentiality, Kara explained having to make severe changes to the way their chapter was run after difficult situations arrived. In challenging the process this way, she still added that she could only hope that she did things correctly and served as best as she could. This could be related to a factor of the common humility in not only Kara, but each of these women. Modeling the way was even more apparent for each of these women. They each expressed being not only strong in their values, but embracing the opportunity to become role models for other chapter members.

Tenants of French & Raven's (1959) Five Bases of Power were articulated throughout the participants' experiences in the interviews. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the title of president gives these women legitimate power but that does not mean their power will always be respected. Each of the women noted that they seemed to have legitimate power with younger members and that their title elicited power very easily for them. However, this was not the case for older members, particularly second-semester seniors. All participants described this group of women to be particularly troublesome and not acknowledging their title of president as having legitimate power over them. This could be because they see their age and senior status as a higher legitimate power or because they have previously held an executive role or even the role of president. Either way, if presidents are not supported in their decisions against this group, changing anything within the chapter could be nearly impossible.

Other than women knowing that they were subject to executive hearings and possible punishment, coercive power did not appear to be used by any of the women. On the contrary, these presidents steered towards supporting women before coercing them into good behavior with harsh punishment. As referred to in the limitations section of this study, this could be very different within a chapter who is struggling to maintain good standing with the institution or their national organization. Oppositely of coercive power, all three women seemed to strive to lead with referent power. As described in Chapter 4, each of the women worked to be a role model and impact other members of the chapter in a positive way. Janelle especially touched on the fact that she felt pressure to maintain a perfect social image. While she did not say that she faltered, it may happen for many women in this position. What happens when this woman, the face of the chapter, makes a mistake and falls off of the pedestal the women who follow her have put her on? Referent power can be abolished with large a mistake and chapter presidents may need support in these instances regardless of the situation.

The hierarchical organization within each president's chapter was varied, but an important part of their experience. Kara especially emphasized the importance of their executive structure and the fact that each officer knew and completed the role she was being asked to portray. Janelle, conversely, gave examples of what happens when that hierarchy isn't effective. Whether it was an officer not fulfilling her duties or seniors who were part of the general membership causing problems, it was easy to see that the structure of hierarchy was both important and necessary for proper function. The hierarchy does, however, influence a power struggle between the president and members who wish to defy authority.

Also intertwined with development was the concept of support. Some professionals may see it as outdated, but Sanford's theory of Challenge and Support rings true for sorority chapter presidents. These women were constantly experiencing challenges in this leadership position from not just members of an organization, but members who were also their peers and close friends. Though outside parties may not see it, sorority chapter presidents are faced with a highly critical and stressful environment. On a daily basis, they may be dealing with alcohol infractions, terminating a woman's membership, disciplinary hearings, members who are insubordinate, executing chapter events, legal action against them, members seeking emotional support, appeasing local alumni, or even discipline from their national/international headquarters. On top of that, presidents are unable to disclose any of this due to confidentiality reasons, and must find strategic ways to be supported.

Like other students who experience stressors in college, the presidents turned to best friends and family members when they needed to vent. Uniquely, sorority chapter presidents cannot just complain to anyone because of confidentiality restraints. If their best friend does not hold an executive position, unloading the situation and their feelings about it is off limits. In addition, this pushes the women to finding members outside of the Greek community they can seek solace in and also leaves them feeling isolated; no one else is allowed to know what they are feeling. Because of this, their relationships suffer and they are forced to form new relationships with members they can share confidential details with. Within their peers, the balance of challenge and support was difficult to make a reality.

In addition to the difficulty of finding peers to seek support from, the sorority chapter presidents at MU felt that some of their challenges would have been eased with a higher amount of support from the Greek department's professional staff. As stated in Chapter 4, they felt as though if they would have reached out in need they would have been supported, but all three women feel as though they should not have been the ones to reach out. In thinking about their challenges mentioned above combined with being a full-time student, where should these leaders find time to reach out to yet another branch of support? Especially to a branch they may never have even met face to face? When thinking about the overall direction of Greek life and the various negative stereotypes that surround it, sorority chapter presidents who are so willing to serve are an invaluable resource for institutional professionals to utilizing in revamping the culture of Greek life.

Relationships. Being in charge of over 150 peers and friends may provide a developmental leadership opportunity, but it can also bring with it many changes in relationships. Remembering the extent to which these women care about service, mentoring, and supporting fellow chapter members, it is only fitting that sorority chapter presidents would create new and lasting friendships because of their position. While not a mind-blowing finding, it does remind us that the community of the sorority is still increasingly important as the women grow in age throughout the chapter, and that even the leader's friend group can change over time.

As a natural result of their leadership position, all three of the women reported losses or changes in their existing relationships throughout their presidency. Considering the challenges of disciplining long-time friends and sisters, this is not hard to imagine. Each of the women described themselves as very relational, but still seemed to lose very

close friendships within the chapter. Because of the small sample size, it is difficult to tell if this is due to the position of sorority chapter president or to the personal leadership style of each of the women. In most cases, one could argue that it is a risk for anyone leading a group of peers and friends. While no literature was found on the result of close friendships after a large leadership obligation, there certainly could be studies that help answer this question in relation to sorority chapter presidents.

Positive Overall Experience. Even with the amount of challenges and relationship losses, it was unanimous between the participants that their experience as a sorority chapter president was still overwhelmingly positive. This may be due to the fact that they were given almost two months to reflect on the experience and have had the opportunity to see how it has impacted their leadership ability and skill in overcoming challenges.

Most importantly, this leads back to their extreme desire to serve the women of their chapter and their organization as a whole. If not in it for the service, these women would have been easily deterred from continuing the position early on when they first began experiencing intense situations and challenges that come with the title. Rather than quitting and becoming discouraged, all three women said these challenges and victories within their term left them humbled and appreciative for the leadership opportunity they had been given. This certainly breaks many of the negative stereotypes held of sorority women and gives us the opportunity to see that sorority chapter presidents are remarkable women with much to offer the Greek community who is so desperately in need of change.

Implications for Future Practice

This qualitative research study explored the experiences of sorority chapter presidents and through the telling of their stories in the interview process. As a result, the following points are strongly suggested implications for Midwestern University, other institutions with similar Greek communities, as well as national/international Greek organizations.

The sorority chapter presidents at MU described one of their largest challenges as knowing how to support chapter members who were going through a personal crisis. As the president, they were often sought out by women who needed help with alcohol issues, family problems, financial struggles, and even mental health problems. Whether initiated by the institution or national board, training incoming chapter presidents with basic counseling skills and active listening skills to use in sensitive situations with chapter members would increase their confidence in dealing with these issues and create a proactive approach to disciplinary matters. It should be noted that these women are by no means expected to become counselors and should not take potentially dangerous situations into their own hands, but rather be trained on how to react to these situations when they arise and equip them with proper resources.

The sorority chapter presidents noted that a key aspect of making it through challenges was an extensive and strong support system. While each participant seemed to have a well-formed personal support system, they each expressed a need for more institutional support. The department overseeing Greek chapters at MU is strongly encouraged to re-evaluate existing programs currently in place for sorority chapter presidents and seek input from these women to update programs for efficiency. Additionally, providing a platform for chapter presidents to voice their opinion and

discuss challenges for the Greek community on campus with staff members and fellow presidents is highly recommended.

The sorority chapter presidents each exhibited a strong inclination to service and mentoring chapter members. While chapters often have their own philanthropic causes they are responsible for, it may be beneficial to let sorority chapter presidents work together to find a way to serve the Greek community as a whole on their campus. This could take a variety of forms, but no matter the form it would give general members of the Greek community an idea of how they should be serving as well. Collaboration between all councils would be highly encouraged for this project.

The sorority chapter presidents each expressed difficulties with time management and emotional stress. While personal and institutional support systems have already been addressed, systems to help with time management and counteract emotional drain could be implemented. If a counseling center exists at the institution, a monthly session may be useful in making meaning of their presidential experience as well as debriefing the term in its entirety upon completion. For time management, checking in with a chapter advisor or staff member of the overseeing Greek department to help structure responsibilities on a monthly basis may prevent burn-out for these women as well as assist or affirm their leadership style. A past president or alumni member could also serve as a mentor to the current president to offer advice and be a sounding board for confidential issues.

The sorority chapter presidents seemed to have difficulty incorporating a type of cultural change within their chapters. Using social change theories, a collaboration with either chapter advisors or campus constituents on formulating a strategic plan tailored

each year for each president could be beneficial in tackling the issue of why organizational change is so difficult for a sorority chapter president to initiate.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study served to provide a base of knowledge about sorority chapter presidents, and these shared experiences give merit to the benefits of pursuing further research on these women. As these women reflected on their time serving as president, they bring valuable insight to issues within the Greek community that they may play a hand in solving. While there are multiple existing research studies on students within the Greek system, many are quantitative and focus primarily on alcohol use, hazing, or GPAs. A few positive studies have been conducted on the leadership gains of chapter members as a whole, but very rarely are the leaders of these organizations addressed individually.

While the existing research is limited, this study confirms the difficulties associated with navigating organizational culture and different forms of power. The experiences of these three women give a phenomenal insight to the world of Greek leadership, but they also only present a very small side. All three women are White and members of traditionally White sororities with respectable reputations on their campus. More information and experiences are needed from chapter presidents who belong to multicultural organizations as well as chapters who are struggling to rebuild their reputation or standing with an institution. Presidents of multicultural organizations typically have different rituals, initiations, and culture dynamics than traditionally White sororities and could present an entire new set of experiences and needs than the women interviewed in this study. Similarly, chapters attempting to rebuild a reputation or remain

in good standing with their institution may also have additional needs and require extensive outreach or leadership training in order to be successful.

As the women reflected on their experience, they were able to pull the positives forward much more clearly than the negatives. If a president had been interviewed throughout her term, it may have been more telling to emotions felt in difficult times. A research design with multiple interviews as well as an interview upon completion for reflection and debrief would allow for a more thorough and complex study.

Due to this study having only one broad research question and hoping to serve as a base to future research, it would be useful for each theme found to be studied in depth. Studies on the specific leadership development of sorority chapter presidents grounded in leadership theory would be particularly helpful for chapter advisors and professional staff. Practices that best support these women can be studied and assessed to be sure that institutions are doing what they can for the leaders of the Greek communities on their campuses.

Conclusion

Sunday morning light breaks on the same Midwestern college town. The Friday night plans have been had, trouble was caused, and the toilet paper from the fraternity house down the street has already been cleared from the lawn and trees. The scene is quiet.

In the same old Greek house, the window to a third story room remains open. *Beep, beep, beep*, goes the sound of the alarm from across the room. She groans amid the light shining in her face, even more unpleasant than the incessant beeping. After being awoken at one in the morning by a knock on her door, the prospect of waking up now

was difficult. Even so, she rolls over, sits up in her lofted bed, and after a few seconds heads down the ladder that could really use a repair. *Better add that to the things on my list*, she thinks with a sigh. She shakes her head and moves toward the door to make her way down for a quick breakfast before starting on the bulk of emails in her inbox. Two feet away from the door, she stops. Lying on the floor is a small, rectangular piece of notebook paper that had obviously been slipped under door while she slept. *Uh-oh*, she thinks as she immediately assumes the worst. *I don't think I can handle this for much longer*, she tells herself. With shaking hands, she reaches down and grabs the note. Instead of the anger she anticipated, a slow smile creeps across her face as she recognizes the curly handwriting of the crying sister from the night before: *Hey! I just wanted to say thank you for letting me cry to you the other night. You always make time to listen to me, no matter how busy you are. You really are doing a wonderful job as president and I am so glad to call you a friend. See you at meeting tomorrow!*

Still looking at the note and still smiling, she moves to the closet and pulls out a shoebox decorated with paint, pictures of her closest friends, and her sorority's letters across the top. She carefully removes the lid and places the note amongst a multitude of others. With the smile still on her face, she replaces the lid and tucks the box securely back in its place at the top of her closet. She takes a deep breath, continues on her route to breakfast, and thinks, *I guess I can handle this for a while longer.*

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Appendix A
Recruitment Email

Sorority Chapter Presidents:

I hope that you are all doing well as you come to the end of your term as presidents. I am emailing you to invite you to participate in a research study that one of my graduate students is conducting for the completion of her graduate program.

The research study is a qualitative study on the experiences of sorority chapter presidents and the impact that this leadership position has on the individual. The purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences of a sorority chapter president and how students in this position can be better supported by staff of the institution they are a part of. This will also give you a chance to reflect on your term as president as it comes to a close and anonymously share your experiences.

Should you choose to participate, you would need to send an email to Kim Schumacher at kschumacher7@unl.edu with your name, phone number, and general hours of availability during the next two weeks. She will meet with you for 45-60 minutes at a quiet, private location of your convenience. Five participants will be interviewed on a first-response basis. These five participants will receive a \$10 Target gift card for their time.

There are no known risks to participating in this research project. Your confidentiality, as well as that of your chapter, will be maintained at all times. Participants will be identified with a pseudonym, and all information will be kept under password protection at all times.

You are free to decide to not participate in this study. Your relationship with the researchers and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln will not be affected in any way if you choose to not participate. You may also withdraw from the study at any time without repercussion.

If you are interested, please email Kim Schumacher as directed above. Feel free to include any questions, comments, or concerns you may have along with your response. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Kim Schumacher

Appendix B
Consent Form



Title: Sorority Chapter Presidents: The Experience of Being a Leader in the Greek System

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of sorority chapter presidents and the impact of serving as a leader in the Greek community on traditionally-aged college students holding this position at a public, four-year institution. You are invited to participate in this study because you currently are or have served as a sorority chapter president within the last semester.

Procedures:

Participation in this study will require approximately one hour of your time. In the interview, you will be asked questions about your experience as a sorority chapter president, leading a group of your peers, the positives and negatives about serving as a chapter president, and how the position has impacted you overall as an individual. The interview will be audio recorded and conducted in a quiet, private space at your convenience.

Benefits:

This study will give you the opportunity to reflect on your unique experiences as a sorority chapter president and how it has impacted you as an individual. This may allow you to make greater meaning of your time as president and to share your experience anonymously for the benefit of other chapters, national organizations, and student affairs professionals who may be able to offer additional support to others undergoing presidency. You will have an opportunity to discuss an area of your collegiate experience that is often unheard by peers, faculty, and staff due to confidentiality reasons.

Risks and/or Discomforts:

There are no known risks.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained during this study which could identify you or your chapter affiliation will be kept confidential. The data will be stored in a password protected computer, in the possession of the primary researcher, and in a password protected storage database. The data will only be seen by the principal investigators during the study and will be discarded after the study report is finalized in May 2015. Pseudonyms will be used in place of your name and your chapter affiliation throughout the written report. The information obtained in this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at professional conferences, but the data will be unidentifiable.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask any questions concerning this research by contacting one of the investigators listed below. If you would like to speak to someone else, please contact Research Compliance Services Office at (402) 472-6965 or irb@unl.edu.

Freedom to Withdraw:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or in any way receive a penalty of loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented.

Signature of Participant:

Signature of Research Participant

Date

By checking this box, I agree to have my interviews with the researcher be audio recorded.

Name and Phone Number of Investigators:

Kimberly Schumacher, Graduate Assistant, Primary. Kschumacher7@unl.edu or (402) 920-2000

Deb Mullen, Ph.D., Associate Dean of Education and Human Sciences and Research Advisor.

Dmullen1@unl.edu or (402) 472-5426

Appendix C
Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

1. How would you describe your experience of being a sorority president?
2. Why did you decide to run for president of your sorority?
3. Can you tell me about some of the positives of the job?
4. Can you tell me some of the negatives of the job?
5. Who did you look to for support?
6. What was it been like to be in charge of such a large group of peers and friends?
7. How would you describe your leadership style/ability before and after being president?
8. How has this position impacted your leadership style and ability?
9. What are some things you wish you knew before you started or wish you had been trained on?
10. What was the overall impact serving as a sorority chapter president had on you?