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## Sorority rituals : rites of passage and their impact on contemporary sorority women

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SORORITY RITUALS: RITES OF PASSAGE AND  
THEIR IMPACT ON CONTEMPORARY SORORITY WOMEN

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Educational Leadership, Research, and Counseling

by  
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B.A., Loyola University, 1987  
M.Ed., Our Lady of Holy Cross College, 1991  
May 2002

## DEDICATION

The journey toward the completion of my degree, including this dissertation, has been a very challenging one. As a first generation college student, I would have never imagined that I would be at this point in my academic career. My family has been such an important part of this goal. Although they may not have always understood what I was doing or what I was going through, their love, support, and belief in me helped me to know and to believe that I could accomplish not only this, but whatever I chose to do in this life. This dissertation is dedicated to my Mom and Dad who taught me from a very young age that reaching for your dreams was what life was all about; to my sister Suzette and my nieces Lindsey, Callie, and Emily, who were there to make me feel like whether or not I finished this dissertation, I was always going to be important to them; to my Paw Paw for supporting me and keeping me in line; and to my Maw Maw who, although she did not physically see me through this process, I often felt that she was watching over me. Thank you to all of you for without you, I would not be the person that I am today. Your love has truly been my inspiration.

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As stated earlier in the Dedication of this dissertation, the love and support of my family truly gave me the courage to complete this degree and for that I am very thankful.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iii
ABSTRACT .....	x
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION .....	1
Sororities and Ritual .....	4
Description of a Ritual Ceremony .....	6
Why Study Sororities and Ritual .....	7
Meaning of Ritual to Sororities .....	9
Back to the Roots of Sororities .....	11
Reflections from Those Affiliated with Greek Life .....	12
Purpose of the Study .....	14
Sections of the Study .....	15
Contribution of the Study to the Body of Research .....	16
Chapter Summaries .....	18
Operational Definitions .....	18
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	21
History and Need for Ritual .....	21
Ritual Ceremonies and Symbolism in Sororities .....	23
What is a Sorority? .....	23
Sorority Culture .....	26
Sorority Structure .....	27
History of the Sorority Movement .....	28
The National Panhellenic Conference .....	35
Sorority Terminology .....	38
What is Ritual? .....	39
Purpose of Ritual .....	40
Ritual as Performance .....	40
Ritual as a Rite of Passage .....	43
Living the Ritual .....	45
Value Congruence .....	49
Developmental Theory .....	49
Women's Developmental Theory .....	52
Sororities and Women's Development .....	54
Transitions as Rites of Passage .....	58
Group Dynamics .....	61
Summary .....	62

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY .....	64
Design .....	64
NPC Sororities Only Included in the Study .....	66
Role of the NPC Research Committee .....	67
Method .....	67
Participants .....	67
Interview Structure .....	69
Interview Questions .....	69
Interview Arrangement .....	70
Trustworthiness .....	71
Pilot Study .....	72
Data Analysis .....	74
Observation of Rituals .....	75
Challenges Faced During the Study .....	76
Limitations .....	77
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS .....	80
The Participants in the Study .....	80
Demographic Profile of the Participants .....	80
Dynamics of Focus Groups and Individual Interviews .....	84
Campus Descriptions .....	85
Ramapo College .....	86
University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) .....	86
University of Dayton (UD) .....	87
University of Southern Mississippi (USM) .....	87
University of South Alabama (USA) .....	87
Louisiana State University (LSU) .....	88
Florida State University (FSU) .....	88
Tulane University .....	89
Loyola University .....	89
Findings .....	90
Sorority Women’s Beliefs and Values .....	91
Previous Beliefs .....	91
Religious Beliefs .....	94
Sorority Women’s Perception of Ritual .....	95
Ritual as a Bonding Experience .....	95
Ritual as a Tradition .....	98
Ritual as a Required Activity .....	99
Women’s Development Within the Sorority Experience .....	101
Sorority Women’s Length of Membership .....	101
Sorority Women’s Level of Maturity .....	104
Sorority Women’s Level of Responsibility Within the Sorority .....	106
Ritual Ceremony and Behavior .....	107
Summary .....	111

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS	112
Summary of the Study .....	112
Discussion of Common Themes .....	113
Sorority Women’s Beliefs and Values .....	113
Sorority Women’s Perception of Ritual .....	115
Women’s Development Within the Sorority Experience .....	116
Ritual Ceremony and Behavior .....	119
Summary .....	121
Sorority Women’s Beliefs and Values .....	121
Sorority Women’s Perception of Ritual .....	122
Women’s Development Within the Sorority Experience .....	122
Ritual Ceremony and Behavior .....	123
Recommendations for Future Research .....	123
Implications for Practice .....	125
Undergraduate Sorority Women .....	125
Sorority Advisors and Alumnae .....	125
National Sororities .....	126
University Administrators .....	126
Summary .....	129
REFERENCES .....	132
APPENDIXES	
A CONSENT FORM .....	141
B PROFILE QUESTIONS .....	143
C INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....	145
D LETTER TO THE GREEK ADVISOR OR UNIVERSITY OFFICIAL .....	149
E NATIONAL PANHELLENIC CONFERENCE CORRESPONDENCE .....	151
F LSU IRB (INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FORM) .....	160
VITA .....	163

## ABSTRACT

Very little research has been conducted to assess the effects of sorority membership on undergraduate sorority women. While there have been numerous studies conducted concerning fraternity men, there has been limited research concerning sorority women only and no studies that explore the effects of ritual on the sorority experience.

Does ritual have an impact on the values and behavior of contemporary sorority women? Addressing this question requires an in-depth understanding of the role of the sorority experience and examination of the experience to determine if it provides to its membership what it is intended to provide.

Based on research conducted through in-depth interviews, this study examined the effects of sorority ritual on the values and behavior of contemporary sorority women. Women's development theory guided this research. Undergraduate sorority women's perceptions of the ritual on the sorority experience were explored through an analysis of their thoughts and feelings about ritual.

The voices of the sorority women reveal that ritual is not something that is understood by all of the members of the sorority. Many of the participants in the study indicated that the sorority did not define their values, however, they did seek the sorority that seem to reflect their value system.

A number of recommendations are offered to improve how the role of ritual can improve the sorority experience.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Each year thousands of young women and men seek membership in Greek letter sororities and fraternities on college campuses throughout the United States and Canada. These memberships are often appealing because of their legendary commitments to friendship, sisterhood, brotherhood, and loyalty. Whipple (1998) states, "Greek letter organizations have prospered for many years, largely because of their capacity to unite students in friendship and shared purpose. Being affiliated with a [sorority] means belonging to a group of ['sisters'] who care about one another" (p. 1). These bonds of sisterhood are often formed through friendship and may be maintained through ritual ceremonies that build the foundations of a sorority.

Today, institutions of higher learning must justify all facets of campus life. These include curriculum development, the physical environment, student involvement in extracurricular activities and the effects that involvement has on student learning. One area that has become a focus of much discussion and debate on many campuses is the impact of Greek life and the value that involvement in sororities and fraternities has in the development of students and the campus culture (Shaffer & Kuh, 1983; Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2001). "Social fraternities and sororities are a very visible, and often controversial, aspect of undergraduate life" (Pascarella, et al., 2001, p. 280). Whipple (1998) states:

As college and university leaders question the value of Greek membership, the message to Greek letter organizations is clear: if they want to be taken seriously as active partners in students' education, their current practices must change (p. 1).

So that host institutions, non-members, campus community members and others will value fraternities and sororities as groups that enhance the educational environment, Greek letter organizations must be consistent with following their stated purpose and mission. This can be accomplished by integrating the purpose and mission into all aspects of Greek life.

From a scholarly standpoint, studies show that both sororities and fraternities can have powerful impacts on student satisfaction and success (Astin, 1975; Pennington, Zvonkovic, &

Wilson, 1989; Pike & Askew, 1989). Studies by Pennington, Zvonkovic and Wilson (1989) and Pike and Askew (1990) have linked Greek affiliation with increased levels of satisfaction with college. Pike and Askew (1990) also found that students who are affiliated with fraternities and sororities have an increased ability to function in groups. Astin (1975) studied fraternities and sororities and found that members of these organizations continued persistence in college and had a higher probability of subsequent degree completion than did those who were non-members.

Although sororities have been a part of the college campus environment for more than 150 years, the future of Greek life is being challenged today more than ever before. Some college administrators, faculty members, community members, parents and even students argue against a need in higher education for single sex organizations such as sororities. Studies have been conducted that membership in Greek letter organizations have been linked with increased levels of alcohol consumption (Tampke, 1990; Wechsler, Kuh, & Davenport, 1996), high levels of academic cheating behavior (Kirkvliet, 1994; McCabe & Bowers, 1996), lower levels of principled moral reasoning (Sanders, 1990, Kilgannon & Erwin, 1992) and negative effects of Greek affiliation on standardized measures of cognitive development during the first year of college (Pascarella, Edison, Whitt, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996). Heida (1990) presents a very realistic challenge facing Greek communities today:

Over the past decade, campuses have studied and continue to study the future of Greek organizations and expectations for individuals and chapters. Colby College was one of the first to withdraw recognition for fraternity and sorority chapters based on the college's assessment that they were not conducive to a positive educational experience. Many other campuses have reviewed their situations and have chosen to retain Greek organizations but developed standards of operation and behavior, as well as relationship statements between the national organization and the campus (p. 3).

In the past decade, a number of campuses have decided to eliminate their Greek communities all together. Those who foster the continuation of sororities believe that they can significantly contribute to student development as well as provide leadership opportunities for women (Astin, 1984; Pace 1984; National Panhellenic Conference, 2001). The National Panhellenic Conference's publication, 100 years of the National Panhellenic, states:

The member groups of the National Panhellenic Conference will continue to add value to the university experience, compliment the mission of the academic community, graduate alumnae who work to improve their communities, welcome new members, advance ideas for service to the college and community at large, and make other substantial contributions to our society which meet the needs of the twenty first century (p. 12).

Many colleges continue to see the benefits of the sorority experience for their undergraduate women and have begun movements to evaluate Greek life as well as to develop new initiatives in an attempt to sustain Greek letter organizations.

Women's "secret societies," today referred to as sororities, have been in existence since 1851 (Owen, 1991). Sororities were founded to address the need of young women to develop friendships with other young college women. At the time these groups were founded, women either attended all women's colleges, or normal schools as they were called, which primarily prepared them to be teachers or nurses, or they attended primarily men's colleges or universities where they were definitely the minority. In the book In the Company of Educated Women, Barbara M. Solomon (1985) describes the growth of sororities:

The growth of sororities over the period illustrates well the mixed purposes and results of organized social groups. Sororities were originally founded as secret societies to affirm the ties of friendship. Gradually, however, they took over public functions, and, to varying extents, became influential forces on many campuses...In addition, especially at coeducation schools, they provided institutional group support for young women (p.107).

Female students' need to bond with other women of common beliefs was very important to them. As such, ritual became a way for sororities to keep their vision consistent and to pass their beliefs on to future generations.

It is important to note that most of the literature presents views on both sororities and fraternities when discussing various topics. However, in this research, I focused solely on sororities because of the differences within the structure of organizations and to specifically

research women from a development, theoretical perspective. In studying only sorority women, several limitations evolved. One of the challenges faced in composing chapters one and two was the limited research available on sororities. Scholarly research is limited as it relates to sororities and studies conducted on fraternities are not equally applicable to sororities. Another challenge faced was the lack of information that discussed ritual and sororities. The lack of existing scholarly research underscores the importance of conducting research on this topic. This study incorporates scholarly research conducted in the areas of sororities, ritual, rites of passage, and women's development.

### Sororities and Ritual

Rituals within the sorority world are rites of passages through formalized ceremonies that were developed at a time when ceremonial transitions were a way of life. Ritual was intentionally developed to be a part of sororities. At different stages in their growth process, young women knew that there would be various expectations of them. Whether it was turning eighteen years old, getting married, receiving a religious rite of passage, or having to take responsibility for one's family, one knew that growing up was part of a transition, whether ceremonial or not (Rayburn, 1999). Founders of sororities, many modeling their organizations on the men's fraternities that preceded them, recognized the need for ritual ceremonies that would mark transitions through one's growth in the organization.

The vision of founding members of sororities was possibly far beyond their own understanding. At the time when the founders were attending colleges and universities, women were very limited as to the educational opportunities that were afforded them. A national officer of Sigma Sigma Sigma Sorority stated that "sorority rituals may have been written more for the

hopes of the founders rather than their reality" (B.A. Deines, personal communication, April 2, 1999). The following excerpt provides an excellent example of the intent of sorority rituals:

The symbolism of Phi Mu is a heritage from our Founders, and has been the source of inspiration to all succeeding initiates. It takes for granted allegiance to lofty ideals, it stimulates worthy and purposeful achievement, and in the personal equation, it challenges the best in all of us (Lamb, 1982, p. 222).

One of the most effective descriptions of why and how rituals developed in sororities comes from the Alpha Delta Pi History Workshop I written by Hensil (1994) that states:

A strong foundation for the Alpha Delta Pi sisterhood was laid in the 1850's. Our Motto, Constitution and Bylaws and Ritual have withstood the test of time. There have been slight modifications to reflect change in terminology and social pressures of the day. The ritual has gone through slight revisions, becoming more elaborate in the 1880's. The secret societies, inspired by the Greeks, derived much of the essential elements of their rituals from Greece, Roman literature, and Christian scriptures.

In the 1880's, the era of romantic preoccupation with the exotic, sorority rituals began to stress mystery and theatrics in presentation. When the exotic became passé, ritual again began to concentrate on the ideals of knowledge, love, loyalty and truth. The basic components of Alpha Delta Pi Ritual remain unchanged. The ideals remain unchanged (p. 4).

Driver (1991) writes, "ritual is moral territory, sometimes secular, sometimes religious, that has been staked out. Ritual marks the boundary at which wilderness, moral desert, or profane life stop" (p. 47). Whether referred to as rituals, rites of passage, or pathways, research indicates a need for ceremonies or life changing events that transition people from one phase in their lives to another (Driver, 1991; Nuwer, 1999; Turner, 1969).

Driver (1991) states, "we need rituals to give stability to our behaviors and to serve as vehicles of communication" (p. 23). He makes two specific points as it relates to ritual and behavior. He explains:

Not only are rituals behaviors, since they are patterned and repetitive, they can be employed as signaling devices, an important enough point in itself. Equally if not more significant is that ritualizations can be used to store and transmit information, across time and across generations (p. 26).

If this is so, then rituals may be a key factor as to why sororities have lasted through time. Driver's description of rituals also helps to put into perspective the importance of ritual ceremonies to sororities as well as to the university.

### Description of a Ritual Ceremony

Before I continue explaining what this study will add to the academic body of literature, I feel that it is important for a description of a ritual ceremony to be presented. I developed this description to give a frame of reference as what is meant by a ritual ceremony in the context of sororities and it does not reference any particular organization:

Typically, a ritual ceremony was written by the founders or the early members of the sorority or by a third party, often times a man, who was affiliated with a men's fraternity. The ceremony would most likely include ritual equipment that is comprised of items that have some significance or meaning for the sorority. The ritual items may be symbols such as flowers, jewels, or even something reflected in ancient Greek mythology or even reference to Greek gods. Reference may be made to religious symbols and writings. Some groups reference the death and rebirth process. An explanation of the meaning behind certain words, phrases, mottoes used by the organization may be explained as well as a description of the meaning of the coat of arms or crest of the organization. The ceremony may include special clothing, candles, an altar or table, a ritual book, etc. The sorority may have a ceremony that includes two or more different parts. The major components of most rituals would be making some sort of promises to the ideals of the sorority and having the secrets of the sorority revealed to them. The member is also moved from the new member/pledging phase into initiated member status. The members take an oath to keep the ceremony secret for it contains the secrets of that particular sorority.

One of the primary rituals that take place within the sorority structure is the initiation ceremony during which time a person becomes a full member of the organization. Initiation rituals vary from organization to organization. If an organization was founded on a specific set of values and standards or a belief, their rituals will reflect that belief, value, standard, etc. If they are founded on a particular religious belief, they may also reflect those beliefs. The ceremony will include promises, or an oath, and will at some point reveal the secrets of that organization. The symbols of the ritual are tied to the historical founding of a particular organization. When the

ceremony is complete, that person is then a fully initiated member who is then allowed to wear the badge of the sorority as well as is afforded all rights and privileges of the sorority.

### Why Study Sororities and Ritual?

Through my years as a Greek Advisor, several men and women began to challenge me to look further into the impact of Greek life on students and why it has lasted for more than 200 years. I then became interested in the values, beliefs, and ritual ceremonies and what this meant to Greek life. These men and women have educated students on the benefits and occasional dangers of their sorority or fraternity experience. In their presentations and writings, each of them encourages Greek letter groups to focus on their foundations and live up to their ideals. I reference these individuals to explain how I first became interested in the topic of sorority rituals and why I chose this topic for my dissertation. The following list of these men and women explain their involvement with fraternities and sororities: Eileen Stevens, the founder of CHUCK (Committee to Halt Useless College Killings), has been responsible for the attention and change in legislation as it relates to hazing which has influenced hazing laws to be established in more than 40 states (Nuwer, 2000); Maureen Syring is past national president of Delta Gamma Fraternity and a retired national speaker who promoted the concept of values based sorority and fraternity experiences; Jonathan Brant is a member of Beta Theta Pi Fraternity and Past Executive Director of the North American Interfraternity Conference who led the way for programming for undergraduate sorority and fraternity members during his time at the NIC with the implementation of programs such as the Undergraduate Interfraternity Institute and various other programs that are still used on college campuses today; Dave Westhol is the Executive Director of Theta Chi Fraternity and famous for his program "Hazing on Trial" which has challenged students across the country to evaluate their practices and to see not only the legalities of hazing, but the effects as well; and Ed King is a member of Sigma Chi Fraternity and the presenter of a program that was the first of its kind to really challenge fraternity men and sorority women to live their ritual. These people question the practices of contemporary Greek life and

challenge those who work with members of fraternities and sororities to examine their current methods, policies, and practices as it relates to Greek life. Because of them and many others, Greek life began changing during the early to mid 1990s and their influence continues today. Unfortunately for purposes of this study, none of these people have published scholarly works relating to fraternities and sororities. Their expertise comes from years of experience in Greek life and daily interactions with college students, national officers of fraternities and sororities, campus administrators and educators, fraternal law experts, and various types of risk management experts, including lawyers and insurance professionals.

All of the men and women mentioned above have influenced my understanding of ritual in Greek life, but Ed King's influence has had a profound effect on my interest in this area. Since first seeing his program in the early 1990s, I have conducted research, presented programs, and decided to become educated on the topic of ritual as a part of my role as a Greek advisor and national officer for my sorority. I began to believe that if undergraduate members of sororities understood ritual and the importance of performance of the ceremonies, they would also understand how ritual could be transferred to living their lives. It may be that if they understood the ritual, instead of the plethora of manuals that they receive from their national organizations, the ritual book may be the only "manual" or one of the few manuals that they would need to guide their chapters and their lives. In other words, I postulated, the ritual would be their map, or guide, as to the way that their founders intended for them to model their lives.

I believe that a direct relationship should exist between what is experienced through the ritual ceremony and the behavior of sorority women. Yet, I have found no research that characterizes the nature of that relationship. For these reasons and many more, I decided to study ritual experiences in sororities in greater depth.

Although fraternities have been mentioned at various points in this document, for the purpose of this study, the focus and reference to Greek life will be sororities. Although sororities and fraternities may have some similarities, documented differences such as academic averages, hazing and alcohol abuse, and various rules of conduct exist (Whipple, 1998). Each year, almost

80,000 women join sororities. On most college campuses, sororities are the largest women's organizations and offer one of the few opportunities that women have to govern themselves. "The National Panhellenic Conference enters its second century with a membership of twenty-six women's fraternities that represent a total of 3.5 million initiated women. These NPC member fraternities have installed more than 2,900 collegiate chapters, which are located at 630 college and university campuses" (National Panhellenic Conference, 2001, p. 5). It is my hope that scholarly research on the impact of sorority ritual on the behavior of college women will lead to an increase in understanding their perspective and providing resources that will assist their development.

### Meaning of Rituals to Sororities

If ritual is an important aspect of sororities, it is key to examine the concept of ritual and what it means to sororities. Since the focus of this study is Greek letter sororities, it is important to understand the meaning of ritual in the "Greek" context. Driver (1991) states:

Ritual belongs to what the ancient Greeks would have called *techne*, the root of our words technical, technique, and technology. Ritual is a sort of technology because it is a method (a time-honored one) for accomplishing something in the real world. The *techne* of ritual, however, is utterly different from modern technology. Its field of action is not an objectified physical world, but a divine, human, animal, or vegetative cosmos of mores, moralities, and mutual relationships (p. 47).

It could be argued that rituals in sororities were established as a way to keep everyone the same and, in some respects, this could be true. Nuwer (1999) explains:

Early female societies served a fairly defined purpose. They provided members with a sense of identity. In each other's company, members could talk and laugh with little restraint, discussing books and poems, reading their own essays and poetry, and building a support group. They shared secrets and ideas. And like other fraternal groups, sororities created elaborate rituals, designed badges, and shared secret phrases (p. 149).

In addition to the advantages realized by sorority members, the parents of college women also realized the benefits of sorority life. Nuwer (1999) also discusses why the popularity of sororities was important to parents during the formative years of the sororities:

The rise in popularity of sororities can be traced to protective parents' deductions that sorority-house life provided a better moral atmosphere for the female undergraduate than did the average rooming house. Most female undergraduates were sexually inexperienced, and their professors, who also acted as chaperones, made sure that they would remain that way while they are in school (p. 149).

These statements reflect the culture that surrounded the early founding of the sororities. Rituals were written for sororities to establish specific standards and expectations that would encourage the development of strong women with clear values. The concepts of truth, justice, love and honor are several examples of the shared values and beliefs that were encouraged among sorority women by most of the national sororities. "Women joining these first Greek-letter societies were reminded not to disgrace themselves, lest they bring shame on their sorority" (Nuwer, 1999, p. 150). The national sororities encourage sorority women to represent themselves and their organizations in a way that will reflect positively on them as young women and on their sororities.

The purposes for which sororities were originally founded hold true today, although the challenges that confront sorority women may be different from those challenges of early sorority women, or at least recognized as different. The founding principles of the groups are still apparent although the issues faced today vary from those faced in the past:

Today, literature distributed by the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) and by many national sororities trumpets the advantages of diversity. Some sorority members embrace many of the beliefs associated with the feminist movement. Sororities today are committed to supporting 'awareness and education' about societal problems, women's

issues, and topics ...that formerly would have been avoided as taboo, according to Marilyn Bullock, national vice president of Kappa Kappa Gamma (Nuwer, 1999, p. 151).

The role of ritual in today's sorority experience must be examined in the context of the founding and purpose of these organizations. The concepts explained in the ritual and taught to generations of women must be assessed to determine if they are lofty ideals with no basis in daily life or if they remain pertinent to today's college women. This research has been guided by the question as to whether sorority rituals have an impact on the behavior and values of contemporary sorority women.

### Back to the Roots of Sororities

Administrators, parents, other non-affiliated students, and the public question the value of membership in Greek letter organizations often. Each year, institutions across the United States question and evaluate the effectiveness of Greek letter organizations in assisting with the promotion of the college or university's mission and purpose. A few of the many recent examples of this questioning by universities are: Santa Clara University has decided to end its fraternity and sorority system over the next two years (Kellogg, 2001) and Alfred University's Board of Trustees establish a task force and question the future of the Greek system on campus (Alfred University Press Release, Feb., 2002). Members of higher education list serves such as the Association of Fraternity Advisors (AFA), the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) receive articles that discuss campuses and the status of fraternities and sororities on those campuses. In addressing these and other concerns, many leaders of national sororities have verbally commented that going back to the ritual is one way to educate sorority members as to the original intent and expectations of sororities. The basic concept of "going back to our roots" is intended

to bring women back to the concept that sororities were established as an intellectual outlet and for an opportunity to share their common feelings, ideas and beliefs, thereby enriching their personal lives as well as developing bonds of sisterhood and friendship. Ford (1999) describes a back to basics philosophy that he believes to be taking hold and emerging as the forefront for the future model of chapters present on campuses throughout the country. "In the highly litigious society of the 90s, the 'back to basic' concept will only be of benefit. Living the sum and substance of the ritual . . . will serve everybody well" (Ford, 1999, pp. 12-13). Ritual was designed to be shared and as an avenue for those concepts to be passed on from generation to generation.

#### Reflections from Those Affiliated with Greek Life

Throughout the past several years, I have had students who have said that ritual is not performed correctly in their chapter and have no meaning in their chapter experience. They want it to be different but do not know how to achieve that. Others have told me that ritual is very important in their chapter and they share ideas as to why it is important to them. In an edition of the Alpha Sigma Alpha national magazine, the national sorority president wrote that her sorority needed to focus on going back to the ritual. Kilgannon (1999) states in her National President's message:

Our values provide us with direction. They are our guiding principles that keep us from straying when faced with difficult choices throughout life. We develop our value system based on a variety of influences throughout our lives. Our families and friends were probably the biggest influence in helping us determine the values we live by. Our faith may have had an influence as well as our communities, our teachers and our work experiences. Significant life experiences also may have influenced what we determined to be our guiding principles. Alpha Sigma Alpha also has guiding principles. As an organization, we clearly articulate our values through our ritual. Of all the documents, handbooks, policies and procedures, nothing replaces 'The Ritual of Alpha Sigma Alpha'. In fact, we could toss all of those other items out an open window and we would never lose our way. The ritual is the compass for Alpha Sigma Alpha and its members. But

when do we use it? How do we use it? Is it a living document? Do we incorporate it into our daily lives? Do we review the ceremonies after we perform them so we all are absorbing what is said? Or do we keep it locked up in the closet only to dust it off a couple of times a year? Do we conduct our services with the reverence they demand? Or do we squeeze them in late at night so that few make the time for appropriate preparation and reflection? Nationwide there is a call to 'get back to the basics'. Our reaction to violence and lapses in moral character demands that we do so. Greeks in particular come under fire because we sometimes seem to stray from our values. We now must put a stop to that and get back to our basics: 'The Ritual of Alpha Sigma Alpha' (p. 2).

These examples encouraged me to pursue my belief that research on the effects of ritual is important in the sorority community. I began searching for research that had been conducted about this topic, and found no prior studies that evaluated the effects of the ritual ceremonies on the behavior and values of students. One study had examined organizational induction and its impact on individual values, but had examined only fraternity men and not sorority women (Rayburn, 1993). In studying student development theories and the differences in that development as it relates to women, I decided to that I would focus on women only for this study. As stated in much of the literature concerning women's development, the voice women is different than that of men. Theories by Carol Gilligan, Margaret Belenky, Eisenhart and others indicate that women value the approval of others (Gilligan, 1977), can strengthen themselves through the empowerment of others (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, 1997), and women acquire a peer group culture that draws on what was already known (Eisenhart, 1990). This development is different from men who value justice and think in terms of right and wrong as opposed to compromise and resolution (Gilligan, 1977).

I believe that if more programs and discussions placed ritual at the core of sororities from the undergraduate perspective, many of the challenges that are faced today would not be part of the sorority experience. Indications are that much could be accomplished if ritual was being taught and research was being conducted about the impact of sorority rituals on behavior and

values. If sororities are to be value-based organizations in the eyes of undergraduate members, they need to teach their members how to apply it to their everyday lives.

### Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate and explain the ways in which sorority rituals impact the values and behaviors of contemporary sorority women. In this research, I have asked sorority women for their thoughts concerning ritual in an attempt to discern the role that sorority rituals have on members' lives. The research question that has guided this study is: Do sorority rituals have an impact on the behavior and values of contemporary sorority women? I have focused only on the way that undergraduate sorority women interpret the role of ritual in their lives, specifically as it relates to values and behaviors. I have not learned what is said and done specifically during the ceremony; rather I focused on members' opinions of what their rituals mean to them.

In this research I have investigated the development of young women who have joined sororities to better understand the relationship, if any, between their values and choices and the role of ritual in their lives. By studying the relationship between values and behavior of sorority women and the role of ritual, I have gained knowledge specific to sororities and hope to provide useful information for other researchers and scholars, the national sororities, advisors, university administrators, parents, and sorority members.

This research was motivated by the need for scholarly analysis of the role of rituals in the lives of sorority. Currently, no research has been conducted to evaluate the role of ritual as it relates to sorority women. It is hoped that this research will encourage future researchers to consider similar studies concerning the intent and purpose of sororities and sorority rituals. I would like to provide a research foundation that challenges scholars to evaluate the impact that

the sorority experience has on the development of young women and the effects that ritual has on that process. The possibility that ritual can have an effect on this process could have a significant impact on the way that sororities are making decisions about their practice. If ritual does in fact have an effect on the values and behavior of sorority women, ritual may provide an educational avenue for positive changes within the sorority system. If researchers can evaluate these organizations in cooperation with the sorority community, more information could assist sororities in the educational process of their members. This research can be a starting point for studies to be conducted that will create a base of scholarly literature about the effects of the sorority experience in general.

### Sections of the Study

Throughout this study, ritual is referred to in the singular sense because that is the language that is typically used by sorority members to describe their ceremonies in general. Although other ritual ceremonies are used in Greek life, the reference is most often to the initiation ceremony. Rayburn (1993) states "initiation rituals transform non-members into members granting them special privileges, knowledge, and abilities denied to non-members" (p. 12). He further explains, "initiation rituals are intended to transform a nonmember into a member in such a way as to evoke a strong level of commitment and loyalty from the individual toward the group" (p. 13). To examine the effects that rituals have on individual and group values and behaviors, this study has included a review of literature that encompasses research on the role of rituals (or rites of passage) in various cultures and the effects of rituals on shared cultures. For the purpose of this study, my assumption is that a sorority is a shared culture with group dynamics that are part of that experience and culture. The review of literature focuses on sorority rituals as examples of rituals designed to impact values and behavior. Also included in the review

of literature is information to clarify how sororities evolved and to explain the role of rituals in sororities.

Another component of this study is the period of adolescence and the process of development from adolescence to adulthood, involving multiple dimensions. This is important to consider due to the nature of sororities and the time frame in which most young women become a part of these groups. Although some campuses may have seen a slight increase in non-traditional students becoming involved in extracurricular activities, sorority women, in most cases, continue to be between the ages of 18-22. Women's development will be addressed in chapter three of this study.

#### Contribution of the Study to the Body of Research

Throughout my research, I found that while scholars and practitioners have investigated hazing (Nuwer, 1999), alcohol use, peer pressure, and psychosocial development (Pascarella, Edison, Whitt, Nora, Hagedorn & Terenzini, 1996) as they relate to sorority culture, but none have investigated the relationship between sorority ritual and individuals' values and behaviors. Are these organizations and their members simply "going through the motions?" Do those participating in ritual ceremonies believe that ritual can be applicable in their daily lives as contemporary women? What is the relationship of ritual and how is it developed through these organizations? If those working with sororities, whether student affairs professionals, sorority national staff, or volunteer national officers and advisors, are going to make purposeful changes to the sorority experience as a whole, they must clearly understand the impact that the undergraduate sorority experience has on these women. The intent of this study has been to provide information that will begin to establish a better understanding of how sorority rituals can be utilized today and beyond.

The lack of information concerning sororities is due in part to the fact that the National Panhellenic Conference requires that anyone who would like to involve undergraduate members of the 26 NPC sororities in a study must have that study approved by the NPC Research Committee. This process evolved in part due to the concern by NPC that researchers would primarily seek or report only the negative aspects of sorority life and would not provide accurate findings because of the negative publicity that sororities receive often times in conjunction with fraternity references. This requirement establishes yet another factor that may deter researchers from studying sororities if they have to do so within the guidelines of NPC. My intent was to follow the guidelines as established by the NPC process and yet to stay true to my objectives as a researcher. My intent was to create a foundation of literature and to conduct a study that would provide future opportunities for research concerning sororities and that in doing so, that the dialogue for future studies could be encouraged in cooperation with NPC.

The results of this study were in no way censored by the researcher, the NPC Research Committee, or the individual national sororities. To overcome the challenges of lack of scholarly research and approval by the NPC Research Committee, I had to pursue alternate methods of obtaining information. I spent a great deal of time speaking with various national officers, ritual specialists, and older women who have been involved with sororities since the 1930s and 1940s. The national sororities were assured that their right of secrecy would not be threatened by the research. This has allowed the rituals to be studied in concept rather than in actual action. Other sources of information, including sororities' national magazines, history books, and workshops, were used in order to present a historical perspective of their organizations. By going beyond the basic research methods in this manner, it is hoped that this study will provide a context for

understanding sororities. I believe that this research will ultimately change the way sororities educate their members and enhance the overall sorority experience.

### Chapter Summaries

Following this introduction, chapter two presents a review of literature on the development of the sorority movement and the nature of sororities. This chapter also presents explanations of rituals and rites of passage and their role in various cultures, specifically to what their significance is within the sorority culture. Also presented are theories concerning adolescence to adulthood development, as well as student development theory as it relates to women specifically. These theories have been integrated as they relate to the sorority environment. The third chapter describes the methodology I used for this study. It explains parameters for the interview process and procedures. The methodology chapter describes the type of research that was conducted as well as the interview questions that were used for the study. The last two chapters will provide a detailed account of the findings of the interviews, as well as a discussion of their implications.

### Operational Definitions

In order to understand the organizational structure and development of sororities, it is important to have a clear understanding of terms that are presented throughout this research.

Sorority refers to an all-female, national organization with exclusive membership that identifies itself by a series of two or three Greek letters and utilizes various forms of rituals for induction of new members as well as for other ceremonial events.

National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) is an organization established to foster inter-sorority relationships (ways in which sororities on a national and campus level create a working relationship in order to have camaraderie within the sorority system), to assist collegiate chapters

of the NPC member groups, and to cooperate with colleges and universities in maintaining the highest scholastic and social standards. NPC was founded in 1902 and is comprised of the twenty-six member groups.

National Pan-Hellenic Council Sororities (NPHC) are referred to as the Historically Black Sororities. These groups are members of the umbrella organizations called the National Pan-Hellenic Council that is comprised of the five men's fraternities and four women's sororities. These organizations refer to themselves as service fraternities and sororities and not social fraternities and sororities. Their recruitment process is called Intake and is very different from the NPC organizations.

National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO) are referred to as the Latino fraternal organizations. NALFO was officially founded in 1999 and is comprised of 7 men's fraternities and fifteen women's sororities.

Local Sororities exist only on one campus with no governing structure from a national organization. Local sororities in most cases were founded by a group of women on a particular campus and occasionally expanded from that campus. They often times are governed only by groups of students who are members with very little support from alumnae of that group. Many other challenges on college campuses, specifically with hazing and risk management involve local sororities. This information is from my personal experience from working with various college campuses. Literature concerning local sororities is practically nonexistent.

Greek Community is comprised of both sorority women and fraternity men.

Open/Closed Rituals include rituals that are opened to initiated members and prospective members. These would include big sister ceremonies and senior farewell ceremonies.

Closed Rituals include rituals that are open only to fully initiated members of the sorority.

Initiation Ritual refers to a nationally endorsed ceremony of induction in which an individual is formally recognized as a full member of the organization. Such rituals are often secret and written in specially printed books (Rayburn, 1993). Some of these rituals are also passed on verbally in order to avoid someone discovering all or parts of the ritual.

Open Rituals within Greek organizations are rituals that can be performed and shared with non-initiated members. These rituals may include, but are not exclusive to, new member induction ceremonies, founders' day ceremonies, and ceremonies performed in the event of a member's death.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter presents research previously conducted regarding rituals and rites of passages, the history and structure of sororities, and the growth and development of women. The literature presented provides a context for my research focus on the impact that sorority rituals have on the values and behavior of contemporary sorority women.

#### History and Need for Ritual

Rituals date back to early tribal times and yet are a part of everyday contemporary life. Rituals encompass a set of values, oftentimes establish a culture, and influence behavior of individuals. Rituals may be in forms recognizable to many, such as weddings, funerals, religious ceremonies, and family traditions. Yet, they are also a part of everyday life affecting how we think, how we behave, and what we value. Rituals have different meanings depending on the context in which they are used, as well as the history associated with the ritual (Rayburn, 1999). “Reflexive artifacts, magic, priestly intermediaries, group crisis, ceremonial patterns, liminal interstices, comic levity, sacred seriousness” are terms, washed in meaning, that are part of the abundant anthropological literature about rituals (Manning, 2000; Raybin, 1990; Turner, 1990). “As these terms imply, there is something magical and mystical about rituals. Even or perhaps, especially, in postmodern societies, ritual bind us in the primordial levels through community and culture-building, individual, and communal celebration” (Manning, 2000, p. 1).

In the context of organizations such as sororities, ritual is a symbolic and often emotional expression of the organization’s myths, values and identity and, as such, forms the metaphorical bridge between the individual and the organization (Westley, 1990; Rayburn, 1993).

In a video called "Sharing Our Ritual," (North American Interfraternity Conference, 1994) Greg Hauser, Past President of the North American Interfraternity Conference, explains ritual in a realistic, yet simplistic way:

Think of ritual as if our founders were speaking to us across time . . . Ritual is like a modern day picture in an antique frame . . . The ideas, the principles, the hopes, the dreams, the faith that the rituals expressed are too big for words. You need more than just words to pass these on. You've got to have ceremony. You've got to have all the richness, all the different aspects, as we know them.

In developing rituals, founders of sororities expressed the ideals to which these governing values were presented in a ceremonial rite that could be conducted by others while maintaining the message contained within.

Nuwer (1999) believes that one of the attractions of Greek life is the opportunity to participate in rituals, which are also referred to as rites of passage. According to Driver (1991), many males and females find ceremonies to mark life's milestones, such as childbirth. Driver refers to various reasons that everyone needs to have rituals as a part of their lives, including the need for "liberating rites" that transform their lives and our communities in which they live. He adds that in United States culture, neither young men nor women who have reached sexual maturity have any rituals to celebrate this crucial awakening in their lives. Both Driver and Nuwer assert that if certain rites of passage are not present as part of our culture, young people will find ways of creating their own rites of passage by using such things as alcohol, drugs, and even sex, as rites of passage.

Researchers suggest that ritual is an important aspect in human development (Driver, 1991; Fulghum, 1995; Turner, 1969). Rituals are rich with meaning. If formal or traditional ritual or ritual ceremonies have never been a part of someone's background through their family or home environment, ritual ceremonies may be a new and different experience for them.

## Ritual Ceremonies and Symbolism in Sororities

For most sorority members, the ritual ceremony is not something that they completely understand the first time they take part in it. For some members of the sorority, it may take time before the ritual ceremony and its message is understood (Driver, 1991; Butler 1991). Where an individual sorority member is in their developmental process may determine the impact of the meaning and intent of the ritual ceremony

In addition to formal reading of passages at initiation ceremonies, rituals encompass the Greek letters worn on clothing, symbolic colors, hymn-like Greek songs, and occasionally even drinking rites involving the use of loving cups (Nuwer, 1999). Exterior symbols are usually an individual's way of identifying herself or himself and showing what he/she considers to be pride in her sorority or his fraternity. For many outside the Greek community, these symbols are their only frame of reference to what sororities and fraternities represent due to the secrecy of most rituals (Nuwer, 1999). In order to understand how rituals are a part of sororities, it is important to understand the sorority movement and what is involved within the sorority experience.

### What is a Sorority?

A sorority is a women's Greek letter fraternal organization that has a multi-part mission, including aspects such as sisterhood, academic enhancement, social, philanthropic/community service endeavors, and lifelong friendships. Astin's Involvement Theory (Astin, 1977, 1985) has been used to evaluate women's involvement in sororities. Astin believes that students develop because they become involved with their educational environment and feel connected to other students and faculty. Astin (1977) postulates that membership in sororities has a positive effect on persistence in college, satisfaction with a student's institution, and social life and that these factors affects the student's intellectual self-esteem. "A highly involved student is one, who, for

example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends a lot of time on campus, participates actively in student organization, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students” (Astin, 1985, p. 134). Komives and Schuh (1988) state “these kinds of involvement are congruent with the purposes of sororities” (p. 2-3).

For the purpose of this study, twenty-six sororities that are a part of an umbrella organization called the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) will be included. Each of these sororities functions as a national organization that governs local chapters on campuses across the United States and Canada. Each campus chapter operates under the guidelines of the host institution and the national organization with which it is affiliated. According to the National Panhellenic Conference’s Centennial Publication (2001), “NPC enters its second century with a membership of twenty-six women’s fraternities that represent a total of a 3.5 million initiated. These NPC member fraternities have installed more than 2,900 collegiate chapters, which are located at 630 college and university campuses” (p. 13). Collectively, sorority women are afforded the opportunity to govern themselves as women, possibly more than any other group of young women today. Other sororities such as local sororities, historically black sororities called National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC Sororities), and a new group of Latino sororities who are a part of the National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations, Inc. (NALFO) exist as well. Various other types of ethnic and multicultural groups have evolved in recent years that will not be discussed in this study.

Robson (1966) defines the role of the fraternity [sorority]:

The fraternity [sorority] fulfills the need for belonging. It fulfills a natural, almost instinctive desire of belonging to a group composed of one's peers. Failure to fulfill this need interferes with one's educational development. The satisfaction of this need is acquired through the lessons of getting along successfully with fellow members and through an internal group spirit (p. 30).

Robson writes further:

In a world characterized by casual acquaintance and fleeting contacts, the fraternity [sorority] nourishes the establishment of deep friendship and lasting brotherhood [sisterhood] to enrich one's life. It makes permanent contributions to personality growth and provides foundations to meet the challenges of a chaotic and dynamic society. The college fraternity [sorority] adopts the role of a family during the undergraduate years whether it be small school or large. Brotherhood [sisterhood] and friendship ties acquired in a college fraternity [sorority] last through the years long after graduation, surpassed by few other loyalties throughout life (p. 31).

Robson's description is of the fraternity experience, yet can also be applied to sorority experiences as well. Although not from a professional journal, the following is the best example that I could find to explain a modern day description of what it means to share a sorority experience, as expressed in the words of a member of Kappa Kappa Gamma:

Our lives in Kappa all began differently. As a child you may have heard Kappa songs. As a young teenager perhaps an older sister talked about Kappa. Maybe you were on a college campus before you ever met a Kappa. However our stories began, what is really exciting is that part of your story is shared by every woman of Kappa Kappa Gamma, past and present. Our experiences differ, but despite chapter location, number of members, housing situations, and varied campus life, we do have a shared experience -- our Kappa ritual. We all participated in ritual saying the same words, wearing the same clothes and on a higher level, naming the same dreams and ideals we would seek in our lives. We claimed the value of friendship and the ideals of goodness, truth and beauty and then we endeavored together to seek the finest in life, thought, and character. This is when our Kappa stories became one (Strength, 2000, p. 6).

Strength's portrayal of her sorority experience is based around the concept of ritual. This description, although different than Robson's, continues to present a theme of friendship, sisterhood, ritual, and lifetime commitment.

The structure and intent of sororities is to provide an environment that enhances a woman's academic endeavors and her personal and social growth (Astin 1977, Wilder & Hoyt, 1986; Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2001). In a study conducted by Pascarella, Edison, Whitt, Nora, Hagedorn, and Terenzini conducted in 1996 traced the cognitive impacts of Greek-

affiliation through the first year of college. This study found that the negative effect of sorority impact was not as pronounced as with fraternity men, but found the following:

Compared to their counterparts, who remained independent, women who joined sororities had significantly lower levels of end-of-first-year reading comprehension and composite achievement. Differences between Greek-affiliated and independent women on end-of-first-year mathematic and critical thinking were small and nonsignificant (Pascarella, Edison, Whitt, Nora, 1996).

Pascarella, Flowers, and Whitt (2001) conducted a follow-up study to evaluate the influence of Greek affiliation on the cognitive growth as students' progress beyond the first year of college.

The most recent study found:

During both the second and third years of college, Greek-affiliated women reported greater gains in understanding science...and compared to women who remained independent, Greek-affiliated women reported significantly higher gains in writing and thinking skills after 2 years of college.

An interesting point was found when comparing these two studies:

Taken together, the findings of this investigation, along with Pascarella et al (1996), tend to support the hypothesis that any major negative learning consequences of Greek affiliation occur primarily when students pledge a fraternity or sorority in the first year of college. It may simply be that the pledging process itself interferes with a students' ability to adjust to the rather rigorous intellectual demands of the first year of college. After the initial first year of college, however, any negative consequences of fraternity or sorority membership may tend to diminish if not totally disappear...some evidence was found to suggest that sorority membership may have modest beneficial consequences for women during the second and third years of college (Pascarella et al., 2001, p. 297).

Although these studies address the affects of cognitive development and not necessarily women's development per se, it is essential to understand what effects, if any, sorority affiliation has on the academic development of sorority women.

### Sorority Culture

Sorority culture, like any student culture, can affect the development of identity and purpose in women by encouraging wide-ranging exploration or curtailing it. The sense of self is

strengthened by encountering different kinds of people and situations, observing their reactions, trying out different roles with varying degrees of investment, and receiving useful feedback.

Sororities exist to create an environment that enhances a young woman's process of transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Eisenhart's research describes how women take meaning from culture and make it part of who they are. Eisenhart (1990) describes this as cultural acquisition:

Cultural acquisition is described as stages of increasing individual expertise and identification with a given cultural system-stages in which access to the more advanced levels is limited by an individual's social relationships, a process with both positive and negative implications for individuals and with developmental trajectory that can be discontinuous (p. 19).

Eisenhart found that acquiring a peer group culture meant drawing to their own situation, and condensing its meaning for their own use. She also found that the women that she interviewed in her study indicated that they acquired a new peer group and cultural system similar to the peer groups acquired in high school. The culture of a particular chapter may impact the individual's experience as well as the entire group. Either way, that culture has an effect on the overall experience.

### Sorority Structure

The structure of sororities varies depending on the national/international organization, chapter and campus community. Sorority chapters are different from campus to campus. Some are large with more than 200 members, and some are small with as few as 10 members. Some chapters are housed in traditional houses, others are on commuter campuses or campuses that have chosen not to provide housing. Others have suites or lodges that are strictly for meeting purposes. Some sorority chapters are guided by advisors who are very involved in the daily operation of the group, while others have little or no supervision. Some chapters focus primarily

on social activities, while others focus on academics, philanthropies/community service, sisterhood and ritual. While some chapters find balance in these areas, others do not.

Another difference that occurs within different chapters is the educational level of new members. Most campuses that have a traditional sorority structure primarily have incoming freshmen joining sororities during a period called formal recruitment. Some campuses have second semester freshmen and upper-class women participating in a deferred recruitment period, which limits participation to those women who have an established grade point average and have completed at least one semester of college credit. The dynamics of a campus and the chapter, and even the type of women belonging to a sorority affects the experience of the members.

Although sororities are different both on national/international and local levels, certain aspects are the same. Each sorority within the National Panhellenic Conference structure is governed by a body of elected or appointed officers who are volunteers that ultimately make the decisions for the sororities. They have a national staff of paid employees that manage the daily operations and services of the sororities. The undergraduate chapters basically are structured in a similar manner in that they have officers, manage their individual operations, have a new member educator program, participate in ritual activities, have sisterhood events, and participate in campus activities. They recruit new members through a formal and/or informal recruitment process and go through similar day to day challenges as well as the moments of success and sisterhood. Whether different or similar in structure, the purpose of sororities is to provide an environment where young women grow and develop.

### History of the Sorority Movement

Greek letter organizations have existed on college campuses in this country for more than 200 years (Malaney, 1990). As Hunt and Rentz (1994) write, "Greek letter organizations were

student initiated and created to augment the academic experience and to provide an alternative to the rigors of the classroom” (p. 289). Greek letter organizations began in the United States of America with the founding of the first American society bearing the Greek letter name of Phi Beta Kappa. This society for men was founded at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, in the winter of 1776 (Bryan & Schwartz, 1983). Phi Beta Kappa was founded based on the principles of social interaction, free discussion of issues of the day, and the serious intent of its young founders to advance their own learning. The original motto of this society was “Love of wisdom, the guide of life.” Owen (1991) stated:

This society had the charm and mystery of secrecy, a ritual, oaths of fidelity, a grip, a motto, a badge for external display, and background of high idealism, a strong tie of friendship and comradeship, and an urge for sharing its values through nationwide expansion (p. I-10).

These characteristics are some of the same as present day fraternities and sororities. Phi Beta Kappa, founded in 1776, was not only the first Greek letter society, it was also the first to initiate a woman when it became an honor society in 1875 (Johnson, 1972). Although young women founded their own groups, some were influenced in their early development by a professor or a male figure in their institution or by someone who was involved with a men’s fraternity. Several of the sororities had men who were involved with developing their rituals. These men assisted them in writing their ceremonies since at that time men had the most experience with fraternal groups and could provide guidance (Johnson, 1972).

The difference in time between the establishment of fraternal societies for men and the fraternal societies for women is not surprising, as women were admitted to universities long after men. The first documented admission of women to an institution of higher learning in the United States was in 1837, when Oberlin College admitted female students. This admission of women

was more than 200 years after Harvard College was founded for the education of young men (Chamberlin, 1991). Chamberlin (1991) writes that opportunities for women in higher education were limited until after the Civil War. As Strout (1956) explains:

Prior to the Civil War, few colleges were open to women in any part of the country, and higher education to them meant attendance at a young ladies' seminary or finishing school where the curriculum consisted largely of English literature, composition, drama, French, art and music. But all of that changed after the war. Many state controlled and financed colleges and universities were established and they were not closed to women students. Privately endowed colleges also began to see the light, and women were accepted on the campus very grudgingly but they were there to stay (p. 10).

Due to declining enrollments following the Civil War, several other state universities extended the opportunity for women. Institutions that were founded for educating women included Vassar College in 1865, followed by Wellesley in 1875 and Bryn Mawr and Mount Holyoke in the 1880s (Solomon, 1985; Strout, 1956). All of these institutions were created for women and provided new opportunities for women and changed the face of higher education in the United States. The increase of women in higher learning institutions led to a corresponding growth in the need for environments that would assist women in their development.

Fourteen years after women began attending colleges in 1837, the development of sororities, which were known at that time as secret societies, began. The development of sororities throughout the end of the 1800s and the early 1900s allowed women to come together to share common experiences and "to provide an alternative to the rigors of the classroom" (Hunt & Rentz, 1994 p. 289). As women's enrollment increased in colleges and universities, so did the number of sorority chapters and national organizations. Solomon (1985) presents the following on the development of sororities on college campuses:

The growth of sororities over the period illustrates well the mixed purposed and results of organized social groups. Sororities (sometimes known as fraternities or by a particular club name) were originally founded as secret societies to affirm the ties of friendship.

Gradually, however, they took over public functions, and, to varying extents, became influential forces on many campuses. Thus, at California, Berkeley, where college housing was almost nonexistent, the sororities functioned as select dormitories. In addition, especially at coeducational schools, they provided institutional group support for young women. Administrators, early wary of the political power of these societies as a competing authority, at first tried to halt their development. In time, though, they found it useful to enlist sorority leaders along with those of student government, to control social behavior on campus. Some schools, like Stanford, Chicago, and California, did not permit students to start a chapter unless their grades were required to indicate their intended plans and activities. Sororities gained status from overseeing the members and helping them maintain good grades (p. 107).

In addition, Solomon (1985) writes of the opposition to sororities in the following:

Some educators and students opposed sororities because their presence promoted exclusivity. Membership in sororities was based, not only on personal congeniality, but on the individual's ability to share expenses as well. Students outside sororities contributed to perpetuating them by too often believing that they were being left out of something valuable (p. 107).

These descriptions place into context the changing environment in which sororities began on college campuses and the mixed feelings concerning their contribution to the campus environment.

The history of the sorority movement demonstrates the sorority movement's relationship to women's participation in higher education. In the sorority world, the timeline of these organizations' founding is very significant. Each group was founded based upon the needs of their founders. The age of the founders, the geographical location of the institution where they were founded, and even the religious beliefs of their founders played a significant role in each sorority's purpose.

The first recorded founding of a women's society is Alpha Delta Pi Fraternity, which was founded as the Adelphean Society in 1851 at Wesleyan College. Alpha Delta Pi was followed by Phi Mu Fraternity, which was founded as the Philamathian Society at Wesleyan College in 1852. The two organizations were referred to as secret societies. Pi Beta Phi came into being in 1867 as

the first organization of college women established as a national college fraternity. Kappa Alpha Theta was organized in 1870 as the first Greek letter society for women (until that time women's organizations were referred to as societies, not using Greek letter names).

It is difficult to find a consistent historical account of the 26 NPC sororities. Many of the national sororities' historical books explain only their own historical development. Of the material available, a book by Clyde Sanford Johnson (1972) seemed to be the most comprehensive account that addressed the founding of all 26 groups. Johnson's account of the development of sororities explains in detail how these groups came into being. He explains a need for sororities by documenting the following history. In the beginning of men's fraternities, it was not necessary to restrict women from these organizations. Most of the men's groups were founded on campuses that prohibited women from attending; therefore, the idea of women wanting to join their groups was not a pressing concern. During the Civil War Era, more women entered college, leading to the development of undergraduate women's auxiliaries to men's chapters and even the initiation of women by several men's groups. The role of women in higher education was changing the role of women in extracurricular events as well. After the Civil War Era, the need for women's societies became more apparent and the resultant founding of women's societies accelerated. Johnson (1972) presents an account of the development of sororities as follows: The founding of Kappa Alpha Theta and Kappa Kappa Gamma (1870), during the same academic year at Monmouth College in Illinois, established a pattern that eventually came to prevail: college women would not insist, as a kind of civil right, upon becoming members of men's fraternities, nor would they become secondary departments therein. They would have their own completely separate and equal fraternities to provide themselves with comparable social and other privileges, but independent and self-governing (p. 58).

Following the founding of Kappa Alpha Theta and Kappa Kappa Gamma at Monmouth College in 1870, several other organizations were founded. In 1874, Alpha Phi and Gamma Phi Beta were founded at Syracuse University; Sigma Kappa at Colby College in Maine; and Delta Gamma at a select school later absorbed into the University of Mississippi (Johnson, 1972, p. 59). As the sorority movement began to grow, other national organizations began to develop.

During the later part of the nineteenth century and the early to mid years of the twentieth century, the enrollment of women in higher education and sororities accelerated rapidly (Rudolph, 1990). Solomon (1985) states that "old sororities and new boomed in the 1920s (p. 247). National sororities emerged throughout the United States at many different types of colleges and universities. Even as more women attended college, sororities created an environment for women to come together and share with one another in an environment that was still very much a "man's world." As part of this development, sororities promoted environments where women felt that they were establishing organizations that allowed them to make decisions that directly affected them. The need for common bonds and shared ideals was of utmost importance. These were women of vision, willing to work to see their sororities thrive on campuses where just years before, no women were in attendance.

Following the initial founding of the previously mentioned groups, several others began to emerge. Alpha Omicron Pi was established at Barnard College in 1897 and several other groups developed at coeducational institutions; Delta Delta Delta at Boston University, in 1888; Alpha Xi Delta at Lombard, now Knox College, 1893; Chi Omega at the University of Arkansas, 1895; Delta Zeta, Miami University of Ohio, 1902; and Alpha Gamma Delta, Syracuse University, 1904. Alpha Chi Omega had been formed in 1885 at DePauw University as a professional sorority. Alpha Chi Omega was founded where other fraternities did not as a rule

consider students in the musical department eligible. They began to drop their exclusively musical emphasis by 1900 and are now clearly general (Johnson, 1972, pp. 59-60). An interesting situation occurred at the State Female Normal School, which is now called Longwood College, in Farmville, Virginia, where four groups were founded. These became known as the 'Farmville Four'. Two of these, Kappa Delta, 1897, and Zeta Tau Alpha, 1898, almost immediately became general fraternities. Sigma Sigma Sigma, 1898, and Alpha Sigma Alpha, 1901, on the other hand, placed their earlier chapters at normal schools, seminaries and other institutions offering less than the traditional four-year course and became known as education sororities. Alpha Sigma Tau, founded at Michigan State Normal School in 1899, also followed as an education-based sorority (Johnson, 1972, p. 61).

In the early 1900s, groups more closely aligned with religious beliefs emerged. Many women, specifically of Jewish and Catholic faiths, were not allowed in some of the groups, so they formed sororities based on their religious beliefs. Theta Phi Alpha was founded as a fraternity for Catholic women at the University of Michigan in 1912. Others founded with a common bond in Judaism include Alpha Epsilon Phi, founded at Barnard College in 1909; Delta Phi Epsilon, New York University, 1917; Phi Sigma Sigma at Hunter College in 1913, and Sigma Delta Tau at Cornell University in 1917 (Johnson, 1972, p. 62).

Other groups of women who were excluded in the early days were women of color. African American women founded their own organizations beginning in 1908, with the founding of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., followed by Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. in 1913, Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., 1920 and Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc., in 1922. These groups provided an "important source of leadership training for Black women, whose opportunities to exercise such skills in formal organizations are few" (Giddings, 1988, p. 16). These organizations

refer to themselves as "service" organizations, not "social" organizations because they view community service as their primary focus rather than one aspect of their focus. They also have a common umbrella organization of mutual participation, the National Pan-Hellenic Council. These groups are not members of NPC and, therefore, are not included in the study. Their founding and purpose are very different from the National Panhellenic Conference organizations and it would have been too difficult to compare and contrast for the purpose of this study.

Although other sororities do exist, they are not included in this study.

### The National Panhellenic Conference

The National Panhellenic Conference was organized in 1902 as a conference group (Johnson, 1972) that would give sororities a venue to discuss issues of mutual interest. The National Panhellenic Conference is the largest organization of women's fraternities in the world. The National Panhellenic Conference is organized of 26 National Sororities.

The formal definition is as follows as defined in the NPC Manual of Information, 13<sup>th</sup> Edition, (1999):

What is NPC?

As the name implies, National Panhellenic is a Conference body. Its members are women's fraternities, each of which is autonomous as a social, Greek-letter society of college women, undergraduates and alumnae.

Purpose

National Panhellenic Conference is an organization established to foster interfraternity relationships, to assist collegiate chapters of the NPC member groups, and to cooperate with colleges and universities in maintaining the highest scholastic and social standards.

## Mission

National Panhellenic Conference supports its women's fraternities by promoting values, education, leadership, friendships, cooperation and citizenship.

## How NPC Functions

The National Panhellenic Conference functions as a conference, not as a convention. In 1988, the twenty-six member groups affirmed the concept that National Panhellenic Conference continues to operate as a Conference. Each fraternity selects one delegate to represent it at NPC meetings. The delegate casts the fraternity vote, serves on standing committees and acts as liaison between her fraternity and the other NPC groups. Each fraternity may name three alternate delegates. Business is conducted at biennial conferences and interim sessions. Between meetings a five-member Executive Committee administers those concerns having the approval of the Conference, directs the work of standing and special committees, and oversees the Central Office staff. The NPC Officers (Chairman, Secretary, and Treasurer) are delegates of member groups, holding office for six years, beginning with Treasurer, progressing to Secretary, and then to Chairman. Delegates serve on the executive Committee in the established rotation order. The Chairman of the Alumnae Panhellenics Committee and the Chairman of the College Panhellenics Committee serve as non-voting members of the Executive Committee (p. 5).

The 26 member groups of the National Panhellenic Conference are as follows in alphabetical order:

Name	Site of Founding	Date of Founding
Alpha Chi Omega Fraternity	DePauw University	October 15, 1885
Alpha Delta Pi Sorority	Wesleyan Female College	May 15, 1851
Alpha Epsilon Phi Sorority	Barnard College	October 24, 1909
Alpha Gamma Delta Fraternity	Syracuse University	May 30, 1904
Alpha Omicron Pi Fraternity	Barnard College	January 2, 1897
Alpha Phi Fraternity	Syracuse University	October 10, 1872
Alpha Sigma Alpha	Longwood College	November 15, 1901
Alpha Sigma Tau Sorority	Eastern Michigan University	November 4, 1899

Alpha Xi Delta Fraternity	Lombard College	April 17, 1893
Chi Omega Fraternity	University of Arkansas – Fayetteville	April 5, 1895
Delta Delta Delta Fraternity	Boston University	Thanksgiving Eve 1888
Delta Gamma Fraternity	Lewis School	December 1873
Delta Phi Epsilon Sorority	Washington Square College Law, New York University	March 17, 1917
Delta Zeta Sorority	Miami University	October 24, 1902
Gamma Phi Beta Sorority	Syracuse University	November 11, 1894
Kappa Alpha Theta Fraternity	DePauw University	January 27, 1870
Kappa Delta Sorority	Longwood College	October 23, 1897
Kappa Kappa Gamma Fraternity	Monmouth College	October 13, 1870
Phi Mu Fraternity	Wesleyan College	January 4, 1852
Phi Sigma Sigma Fraternity	Hunter College	November 26, 1913
Pi Beta Phi Fraternity	Monmouth College	April 28, 1867
Sigma Delta Tau Fraternity	Cornell University	March 25, 1917
Sigma Kappa Sorority	Colby College	November 9, 1874
Sigma Sigma Sigma Sorority	Longwood College	April 20, 1898
Theta Phi Alpha Fraternity	University of Michigan	August 30, 1912
Zeta Tau Alpha Fraternity	Longwood College	October 15, 1898

(NPC Manual of Information, 2000, p. 1 and 100 Years of the National Panhellenic Conference, 2001, p. 14)

## Sorority Terminology

Understanding terminology and the context in which terms are used is important to understanding this study. For example, some of the national organizations refer to themselves as women's fraternities and others refer to themselves as sororities. Owen (1991) writes that all of the women's groups were called fraternities in the beginning because no other word existed to refer to a single sex group of women other than the word fraternity. Then, in 1882, Gamma Phi Beta was named a "sorority," a coined word suggested by their advisor who was a professor of Latin, and who thought the word "fraternity" was not appropriate for a group of young ladies (Owen, 1991). "The word sorority is found in the 16<sup>th</sup> century works of More, possibly from the medieval Latin sororitas, or adapted directly from the Latin soror, or sister" (Johnson, 1972, p. 60). Many of the other groups had already been incorporated as fraternities and decided to continue to call themselves women's fraternities. In 1909, the National Panhellenic Conference revised its constitution to use the term "women's fraternity" throughout. This terminology is still in use today. However, so as not to confuse the reader with varying terminology, this study uses the term sorority to refer to all member groups of NPC.

For the purposes of this study, when reference is made to ritual it is primarily referring to the initiation ceremony. The common term used by sorority women for the initiation ceremony is ritual. The term ritual is used throughout this study with the understanding that the reference is primarily to the initiation ceremony because of the undergraduate's understanding of that particular ceremony and possibly their lack of understanding of the connectedness of the other ceremonies.

## What Is Ritual?

In order to explain rituals and rites of passage, it is necessary to describe the context in which these terms will be used. Oswalt (1986) states "rituals are behaviors that are formal, stylized, repetitive, stereotyped and performed earnestly as a social act" (p. 380). He further states that ritual as a behavior "is symbolic and has a predefined, sequential nature which is generated by a specific set of ideas or reasons" (Schultz & Lavenda, 1990, p. 176). Manning (2000) states: "rituals fulfill primordial fundamental human needs . . . human beings need ritual order to live in their communities . . . Rituals' ability to tap into our spiritual and transcendent side makes them an extremely important human activity" (p. 37).

In order to clarify why sorority founders may have thought it necessary to write ceremonies called ritual that would last through time, Driver (1991) explains:

If we think of ritual as enacting a myth, or as a means of persuasion, we are looking at it from the rear. Rituals acquire mystical and symbolic interactions in the course of time. Like art, rituals are likely to have more meanings than words can say. If we look at ritual from the front, from the point of view of its inception, we do not see clear rational meaning but instead the laying out of ways to act, prompted by felt needs, fears, joys, and aspirations (p. 92).

Sororities, like other groups, use ceremonies to bring new members into their organizations. They use ritual ceremonies to convey through time the expectations of members that follow after them. Through rituals, they symbols convey the meanings and purposes of their organizations. Manning (2000) describes ritual as "reflexive artifacts, magic, priestly intermediaries, group crisis, ceremonial patterns, liminal interstices, comic levity, sacred seriousness" (p. 1). Driver (1991) explains the use of symbols in rituals: "Rituals employ symbols so as to invoke, to address, to affect, even to manipulate one or another unseen powers. It is the actions-invoking, addressing, affecting, manipulating that are primary" (p. 97).

Ritual has various aspects. Ritual can be ceremonial, spiritual, and serve as a means of rites of passage (Butler, 1990). Butler states:

Because rituals are actions (or behaviors), it is important to pay attention to the way the ritual is actually carried out, as well as to the text (the particular sequential ordering of acts, utterances and events) that the ritual is to follow. Understanding ritual from the performance aspect will lead to a view of what role ritual plays in the concept of rites of passage (p. 177).

In other words, the way a ritual ceremony is performed has a significant impact on the way it is received by those participating in the ritual ceremony. If it is performed with feeling, passion, and accuracy to the written ritual, the impact can be even more significant and powerful.

### Purpose of Ritual

As sororities developed, a need for structure and continuity emerged. As sororities expanded from their founding campus to other colleges and universities, it became important to keep each sorority's individuality and to establish what made the group special and unique. Although each organization was similar by the mere fact that members were women only, their founders wanted to distinguish themselves from the other groups. They looked for ways to provide traditions that could be consistent between chapters in various locations and that would live on long after them. From my discussions and research, some of the organizations' rituals were written or developed, at least partially, by the founders. Others say that they evolved in the early years of the sorority. Symbols were developed, colors were chosen, and constitutions were written. An important component of this evolution was the development of rituals that would transcend time.

### Ritual as Performance

As previously stated, how ritual ceremonies are performed has a relationship to how the message or intent of the ritual is received by the participants. Victor Turner (1969), a

theorist/researcher in the area of ritual, presents several different viewpoints concerning ritual.

His findings will be used to explain various aspects of ritual, specifically as performance. Turner, throughout his career, investigated ritual in general, and ritual from the performance perspective:

Performance is central to Turner's thinking because the performative genres are living examples of ritual in/as action. And not only when performance is overtly 'ritualistic' -- as in a Catholic Mass, a healing ceremony, a shamanic journey, or a Grotoskian poor theater or paratheatrical event: all performance has at its core a ritual action, a 'restoration of behavior' (Schechner, 1986, p. 7).

Schechner (1986) presents Turner's theory that ritual can be looked at in five different ways:

1. As part of the evolutionary development of organisms - including, but not limited to the development of the brain;
2. As a structure, connecting with formal qualities and relationships;
3. As a performance process, a dynamic system or action, with both diachronic and synchronic rhythms and/or scenarios;
4. As experience, as what a person individually or as part of a collective feels;
5. As a set of operations in human social and religious life (p. 10).

Most national sororities have rituals that have been developed as rites of passage that mark the transition of a person through various phases in the sorority experience. Most rituals begin with a formal pinning ceremony where new members to the sorority receive a pin that symbolizes that they are pledging and are new members of that group. They then go through some type of big sister/little sister ceremony that places them with an older member who is to be a role model to them within the sorority. The next ceremony that they participate in is the initiation ceremony where they learn the secrets of the sorority and become a member of the sorority.

The sorority structure includes a variety of other rituals as well. Many of the sororities include ritual in chapter meetings either at every meeting, or on a schedule, such as once a month. Other ritual ceremonies of the sorority include recognition for someone moving to alumnae status, leaving college such as a senior farewell, founders' day ceremonies, as well as a

ceremony when a member passes away. Some of the ritual ceremonies, referred to as closed ceremonies, limit attendance to initiated members only, while some, referred to as open ceremonies, may have non-initiated members in attendance.

Like Turner, Driver (1991) refers to ritual in terms of performance. Driver (1991) states that if any one thing clearly distinguishes performance in the ritual mode from other kinds of events, it is that the performer assumes roles and relates what is going on in an “as if” way not appropriate to the workday world. As Turner insists, ritual realizes itself in a subjective mood. He believes that the so-called “sacred space” and “sacred time” of religious rituals are, above all, imaginative construction, “rules of the game.” The purpose, then, of performing rituals is to help make the ideas of a culture concrete, to take on a form, and to give direction to a group (Butler, 1990). Our understanding of the world does not come merely from mind, but rather from a coming together of mind, emotion, and body (Schultz & Lavenda, 1990).

The consistent performance of the ritual has been the foundation of sororities since 1851. Many of the NPC sororities have made changes to the initial ceremonies since they were written by their founders as expressed earlier in the example of Kappa Kappa Gamma. The way that the rituals were performed, the ritual equipment used, and even the wording has possibly been changed over the years. Others have made changes due to certain religious challenges. Some of the rituals of the sororities were based upon or included certain religious references. Some of the sororities have even evaluated and changed the way that certain rituals are delivered. Whatever the case may be, it is important that the ceremony, as Turner (1969) and others have indicated, be performed with consistency and passion in order for the ceremony to have a lasting and meaningful effect on those participating.

## Ritual as a Rite of Passage

Understanding ritual not only from the performance perspective, but also as a rite of passage is very important. According to Schultz and Lavenda (1990), Arnold Van Gennep first identified rites of passage in 1909:

Certain kinds of rituals around the world had similar structure. These were rituals that associated with the movement or passage, of people from one position in the social structure to another: births, initiations, confirmations, weddings, funerals, and the like (p. 177).

These observations have led to the concept of rites of passage. The definition of rites of passage is as "rituals associated with the movement, or passage, of people from one position in the social structure to another" (Butler, 1990, p. 5). Leemon (1992) explains as well that through recurring social mechanisms, a society provides for orderly transitions in its social relationships.

Rites of passage are most often characterized by these different phases. The first phase is the separation phase that comprises "symbolic behavior signifying that detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the societal structure, from a set of cultural conditions or both" (Turner, 1969, p. 94). It involves "separation from the old position and from normal time in which the ritual passenger leaves behind symbols and practices of his or her previous position" (Schultz & Lavenda, 1990, p. 177).

The second phase is the transition, marginal or liminal phase. Turner (1969) presents that during this phase, the characteristics of the ritual passenger are ambiguous and that the ritual passenger is neither in her (his) old life or in her (his) new one. "The person is often subjected to ordeal by those who have already passed through." (Schultz & Lavenda, 1990, p. 177). In the liminal phase, Van Gennep believes that the person going through the rite is symbolically placed "outside society" and frequently forced to observe certain taboos or restrictions. During this

period, he noted, the normal rules of the community may be suspended, or the rite may be seen as a symbolic death, leading to a new rebirth (Morris, 1987). The "liminal" phase is often times the "breaking down" phase. At this stage, it is possible that hazing in the form of physical or mental abuse may take place. Breaking down the ritual passenger through physical and/or verbal means will allow the rebuilding process to follow. One of the goals of the passenger is "learning the group's private teachings or secrets leads to the rebuilding process." (Butler, 1990, p. 6). He states that "it is through initiation rites that the ritual passenger is humbled and leveled to make them fit for a higher status or state" (p. 6).

The third phase is the reaggregation or reincorporation phase, which involves the ritual passenger being "reintroduced to society, but in her or his new position" (Butler, 1990, p. 6). Turner (1969) writes that "the ritual passenger is in a relatively stable state once more and by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-à-vis of a clearly defined and structural type; the passenger is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents or social position in a system of such positions" (p. 95). It is during this phase that "the wearing of new insignia will occur" (Morris, 1987, p. 247). The passage is now complete and the ritual passenger now is afforded all rites and privileges of the group and is expected to live them accordingly.

Based upon these descriptions, it is apparent that rites of passage and ritual have important roles in many different aspects in the lives of most people. Although most people may not even be aware that many rituals are formalized and common throughout our culture, and others are common within certain subcultures and ethnic groups. Butler (1990) states "still others are less formal and less common are only practiced within select subgroups" (p. 7). Further, Butler states that "it is apparent that rituals continue to be an important means of defining who

we are and giving meaning to us within our society” (p. 7). Sororities demonstrate this aspect of ritual and its importance in development of sorority women.

The other role of ritual as it relates to sororities is the aspect of communities as explained by Victor Turner in The Ritual Process:

Broadly speaking, rituals generate, maintain and create order; but they do so in a peculiar way, by grounding the sense of order in something that is other than itself, something fundamentally at odds with order—namely participation in an undifferentiated care of life (p. 163).

Sororities are communities who live and learn together. Ritual ceremonies not only bring the sorority members together in a physical assembly, but also tend to unite them emotionally. The ritual bonds sorority women in ways that create lifetime commitments to one another and to their sororities. This statement may be the most effective way to explain the role of ritual in sororities.

#### Living the Ritual

Putting the ritual into practice by living out the concepts represented in the rituals may be of greater interest to many than the actual performance. In many ways, these go hand and hand. Ritual as performance conveys the message of what the ritual ceremony is. If the ritual ceremony is performed with passion and conviction as expressed by Turner (1969) and others (Driver, 1991), then those receiving the message can put the words and meanings into action. The phrase "living the ritual" conveys that if members of the group understand the meaning of the ritual and take seriously the commitments and promises made during the ceremony, then the "living" aspect may affect behavior and choices made by the individual members of the group.

Ed King, currently considered by most in the fraternity and sorority world as the expert speaker on the college circuit on the topic of ritual and values, presents that ritual allows members of fraternities and sororities the opportunity to share their lives with one another. As

part of his presentations, he states that "at the end of a meeting or ceremony each member should be given an opportunity to share what is going on in their lives and that this sharing is the most significant part of the Greek experience" (E. King, personal communication, 1997). King (1997) is the author The Secret Thoughts of a Ritual. Inclusion of this document (used with permission) in its entirety will assist the reader with a view of ritual as written from the ritual's perspective as if it were something living. It will help to explain sorority ritual in a way that is different than any other example that has been written. It states:

There are many of us around. Some of us are very informal and loosely structured, others are very formal and precisely worded. Whether you are aware of it or not, your whole life is based on certain ritualistic patterns. The way you get up in the morning, the way you study, the way you organize your social life, the way you speak and write, these are all based on certain habits or routines that you develop and are performed, by and large, in an informal realistic way.

Today, I would like to share with you some thoughts on another kind of ritual, one that is considered very private and is often esoteric. I am the sorority ritual. One that you will find locked in a file in the corner of some dark office. Because I don't get used or opened very often, I have a lot of time to think and I'd like to share with you some of my thoughts. Sometimes, I go through a real identity crisis. Who am I? What am I? Why am I? In order to know what a thing is, you must first know what it is for. You tell what a thing is for by the way it is used. Although there are some exceptions in the way I am used, let me tell you how the majority of sororities use me. The vast amount of my time is spent in a dark cabinet, locked up and gathering dust. About once a semester there comes a mad rush for my existence, people literally scrambling, and all of a sudden I become very important. It's really funny because many times they can't find me. They forgot where I was placed and a mild panic sets in until finally they dig me out from under the stacks of constitutions, by-laws and chapter minutes. Once I am found, I am under 24 hour surveillance. It's almost as if I am being digested, but that's not really it; what's happening is that I'm being memorized. I'm literally, studied word for word, phrase for phrase, and sometimes people even argue over me. Two or three people all wanting me at the same time. They begin with, 'Well let me just copy my part,' then the argument gets hotter because somebody says, 'No, it's not legal to copy anything out of the ritual.' Some people, however, go ahead and fudge a bit and copy their part and then pass me on.

After being up almost all day and all night for a week, I am taken to a dimly lighted room where a number of people are gathered. There I am presented with much feeling and serious drama. It is obviously a moment of great climax for some of the people, for they are seeing and hearing me for the very first time. Shortly after the ceremony, I am brought back to the dark room and placed in the locked file drawer and I am not seen or heard of until the end of the next semester. In this case, as a ritual, what

am I? Well, as I see it, I am a perfunctory service that must be performed in order to get new members into an organization. Once the initiation is over, I'm pretty much pigeonholed until the next class is to be initiated.

However, in some sorority houses I exist in quite a different fashion. Shortly after the initiation the sisters come in one by one, get me out of the drawer and look me over very carefully. Some just like to read me, others try to memorize me. Whatever the case, I like it when they use me. Sometimes they even argue over me, and this gets exciting because you see that's what I'm about. I'm meant to be read carefully, discussed and even argued about. Yes, in fact, I can even be changed. I'm really a very human document, one that was written down some time ago after a great deal of thought by one or two women and I have been reworded, rephrased and re-evaluated many, many times.

In order to know what I'm really about, I need to be perpetually used and studied. (Too often the members mention me only at initiation time and I'm really meant for much more than that.) In fact, one of my most important missions is to help the active chapter at its weekly meetings when I can really help the chapter get things together. There are always a few women who don't like to use me and put up a big argument about having an informal chapter meeting. What a joke that usually turns out to be. Most informal chapter meetings last a heck of a lot longer than formal chapter meetings where I'm used. As I've listened to people and watched how they use me, a couple of important thoughts have crossed my mind. First, the sororities have done an excellent job in keeping me an esoteric document, that is, basically a secret document and therein is much of the problem. Not only am I a secret document to the outside, I am a secret to most of the members as well. They really don't know or understand me because they've never really studied me. Some people, I suspect, would like to keep me very, very secret because if non-members found out what I stood for, they might expect the members to live by it and that would be very difficult. Therefore, they keep me secret and they won't have to change their lifestyle.

Although I can be used in different ways and for different things, when you boil me down to my fundamental essence, I'm essentially one thing, a system of values. I don't change very much because I am the product of history and the spirit of woman and how she relates to her fellow woman and to her God. This relationship between woman and woman, and woman and God, has never been a static one. It is confusing and illuminating, painful and exciting, a separation and a reunion and although I appear to be a contradiction, I am really no more of a contradiction than woman herself. Too frequently we forget that woman is both animal and spiritual in nature, and to reconcile the two can often be painful, confusing, and frightening. And that is why it is so critical that woman understands who I am and what I am for.

Because I am a system of values, I am therefore, an instrument of self-evaluation. My values are clear and absolute and yet difficult to emulate. To state a few, I am honor, courage, integrity, fidelity, courtesy, and I demand self control as well as ambition and humility. What your founders did is take the idea of friendship and move it a significant step forward to the concept of commitment.

Those of you who are leaders in the sorority movement, the officers of the national, international or general sororities, you who are professional sorority women, must continue to ask yourselves how you can improve in articulating to your members the

message of your sorority. Why is it that some of the members get it and others do not? To some the message goes deep and becomes a part of their very being, while for others it never scratches the surface. Ask yourself the question when you attend your regional meetings, your workshops, retreats, leadership schools, how much time do you spend discussing and sharing with each other what personal effect I have had on your lives? Do you, as so many active chapters do, use me to start the meetings and close the meetings and become so involved in your day to day business that you forget that I am there to be reflected upon? For those of you who do understand and use me, are you afraid or ashamed to share those experiences and thoughts with your fellow sisters? Those of you who are sorority leaders, and are not using me in this way are very derelict in your responsibilities, your duties, and the very oath that you took when you became a member and an officer in your sorority. For, you see, as written in your esoteric manuals, I am really of very little value unless you and the other sisters come, and through your mutual sharing begin to experience the essence and depth of my message. Then you and I are activated by the real charge into your spiritual and moral fiber that is possible for all women but achieved by too few. The effectiveness of my message is in direct proportion to your knowledge and belief in my values.

If there is something about me that you do not like, then change me, but for God's sake do not ignore me. It is the indifference to and the ignorance of my essential message that continues to stifle the growth of the sorority system. Never has the time been so ripe as this period in our history when the young people of today on our college campuses are crying out for the kind of message, guidance, value, and leadership that has been so long hidden in my pages. If you would just realize that by better knowing and understanding me, many of your day-to-day problems, housing, drugs, collections and apathy, would simply fade away and not exist.

If a sister slips and becomes derelict she should be asked to review her oath and charge, and if she chooses not to obey and follow that oath then she should be asked to leave the sisterhood. If you would weed out those who do not wish to follow or believe in the obligation they swore to uphold, we would all be much better off. Too frequently I see you caught up with the numbers in our sisterhood rather than the quality of our sisterhood.

Basically I am a road map to help a person along her journey of life and assist her in her communion with her fellow travelers. Who am I? Your ritual. What am I? A system of values. What am I for? My purpose is not to make you a better sorority women, but rather a better human being (King, 1990).

Putting ritual into action can happen only in conjunction with an understanding of what it means, its intent, and if it is taught and performed consistently and persistently. Without the living component, the ritual is only a ceremony. The above document connects the ritual to lives of the undergraduate sorority women and sets the stage for an understanding of the importance of the ritual.

### Value Congruence

Research conducted by Burnett, Vaughan, and Moody (1997), indicates a correlation between an organization's values and an individual's values. They postulated that potential members seek value congruence as selection criteria when determining which sorority to join. They expected that female students would join sororities with values that matched their own values. Participants were questioned prior to and after their participation in sorority membership recruitment. Prior to the recruitment process, participants were asked to indicate the values of their 'ideal' organization. After the recruitment process, they were asked to indicate the values of the sorority that they had an interest in joining. They found that the values participants attributed to their ideal organization were similar to those they used to describe the organization they wanted to join. The study also indicated that there was a correlation between an individual's ideal culture and the organization's culture that they joined. The findings of the study supported the position that individuals will choose an organization that matches their own and values. "The significant correlation indicated a 'fit' between an organization's values and an individual's values" (Burnett, et al., 1997, p. 299). Ford (1999) stated, "it is important to ensure that the values and ethics important to the organization are shown to the newly recruited and initiated" (p. 12). Values emerge as a factor in the selection and recruitment of sorority women and should be considered by the organizations as a primary source of identifying women interested in sororities and those whom the sorority accepts into their membership.

### Developmental Theory

The purpose of this section is to examine the developmental processes of women, specifically because the participants of this research are women in sororities. This section will briefly mention student development theory by traditional theorists such as Astin, Chickering,

Kohlberg, and Tinto. The focus will then shift to research by Carol Gilligan, Margaret Eisenhart, Mary Field Belenky and her colleagues, and others who have focused their studies specifically on women. This section will establish how many women relate to one another in order to suggest a context for understanding what the sorority experience provides to undergraduate women. Understanding the developmental stages of young women is significant to this research study. The research question focuses on the impact of ritual on the values and behaviors of contemporary sorority women. It is necessary to understand where they are in their personal development in order to understand how their sorority experience fits into this development. The depth of their ability developmentally to associate the substance of ritual to their lives is an important concept to evaluate when trying to ascertain the impact of ritual on their behavior and values.

Having served as an advisor to both men's fraternities and women's sororities from 1991-2001, I had the opportunity to witness first hand the differences between men and women and their developmental processes. Research shows that some aspects of Greek experiences affect women and men differently (Kuh & Arnold, 1992; Pascarella, et al., 1996; Pike & Askew, 1990; Whipple, 1998). In their study on gender and values among Greek members, Testerman, Keim, and Karmos (1994) found:

Males valued Conformity (allowing what is socially proper, correct and accepted) and Leadership (being in charge of other people, having authority, or power over others) more highly than women . . . Females value Support (being treated with understanding and consideration, receiving kindness and encouragement from others, and Benevolence (doing things for other people, sharing things with others, being generous) more highly than males (Cited in Whipple, 1998, p. 3).

This statement illustrates the differences in the development of men and women and their experience of Greek life. Sottile (1994) cautions that when examining student development:

the majority of authors . . . have generalized or misrepresented findings to the experience of college women. Traditional theories of college student development grew out of the male experience and the amount of literature and research pertaining to the experiences of college females is limited and unsystematic (p. 21).

In a search for studies about identity and moral development of sorority women, once again the available studies included information that combined both sorority women and fraternity men. One study addressed the matter of identity and moral development, but only referenced Kohlberg and Chickering's theories. The study compared the differences in the impact of Greek affiliations on women and men at one campus. It even acknowledged the need for gender-based differences to be evaluated when determining programming and the effects of membership in fraternities and sororities, but continued to use theories that were male driven (Kilgannon & Erwin, 1992).

Within the last 30 years, theories of student development by such researchers as Chickering (1969), Kohlberg (1984), Astin (1977, 1985, 1996, 1999), have traditionally been the foundation for most student development personnel. Tinto (1975) has also conducted research. Respectively, each of these and many other researchers have added to the advancement of developing campus learning environments for student populations even though, as we continue to see, these populations seem to be constantly changing. The works of such researchers as Carol Gilligan (1982), Margaret Eisenhart (1990), and Mary Field Belenky and her colleagues (1986), suggest that the theories presented concerning human development had primarily been written from a male perspective. This has been said to indicate a gender bias in these studies. Carol Gilligan and the previously mentioned research have attempted to provide an alternative to the traditional means of studying development. Gilligan and others present a perspective that it is

necessary to develop two different theories to describe both sexes accurately. They argue that research should be conducted based upon this concept.

### Women's Developmental Theory

According to Muss (1988), Gilligan's research and theories provide a major impetus for the rethinking of both developmental theory and the role of sex differences in theoretical conceptualizations. Gilligan, who worked with Kohlberg in earlier studies, presents a new perspective that challenges research to differentiate studies that addresses how males and females make moral judgments and, as a result, may differ in development. Kohlberg (1984) conducted studies concerning moral dilemmas, but originally conducted all of his research with males. He later gave moral dilemmas to females and identified them separately and he did find sex differences in the development of moral judgment. Gilligan (1982), however, took Kohlberg's theory that states that development takes place at different stages, and created what she refers to as *A Theoretical Consolidation: The Female Stages of Moral Reasoning*. Through her studies, Gilligan discovered that female development is marked by the need for connectedness whereas males seek separation or individuality.

In addressing the major differences between male and female moral reasoning, Gilligan (1982) maintains that the majority of males and females utilize two different voices. She states:

One of these voices, the one most commonly identified with the masculine world, speaks of preserving rights, exercising justice, obeying rules, and upholding principle; logical and individualistic, this male voice advocates equality, reciprocity, autonomy, and individualization; in short, this represents the justice orientation. The other voice, more dominant in women than in men, speaks of caring for others, sensitivity to others, concern for others, connectedness to others (p. 227).

To better understand Gilligan's Female Stages of Moral Reasoning and the transitions between the different levels the following are included here to provide an understanding of the various phases that a female develops through:

Level 1: The Orientation Toward Self-Interest

At the simplest level of moral reasoning, women are pragmatically preoccupied with self-interest and survival. At this level, moral consideration would enter the reasoning process only if the subject's own needs were in conflict. Decisions at this level are made for what would be best for the subject, without consideration for anyone else (Muss, 1988, p. 233).

The First Transition: From Selfishness to Responsibility

The individual begins to become aware of the difference between what she wants (selfishness) and what she ought to do (responsibility) . . . . This growth from egocentric selfishness to an emerging concern for others is the first major step from childhood toward a more mature level of moral reasoning (Muss, 1988, p. 234).

Level 2: Identification of Goodness With Responsibility For Others

During adolescence, often development leads to the next higher level of moral reasoning and allows a societal perspective to emerge. In this stage, the young woman equates goodness with self-sacrifice and with pleasing and care for others. When a problem cannot be resolved in the best interest of everyone, she will sacrifice her own preferences to redefine the problem in terms of care and responsibility to others. The ability to value and assert oneself implies danger because it can lead to criticism, even abandonment by others (Muss, 1988, p. 234).

The Second Transition: From Conformity to a New Inner Judgment

The beginning of critical questioning about her own value characterizes the second transition. The young woman begins to wonder whether her concerns are really selfish or whether considering one's own values and needs, not only those of others, might actually be responsible. The essence of this transition is the change 'toward a new conception of goodness which turns inward in an acknowledgment of the self and an acceptance of responsibility for decision' (Gilligan, 1977, p. 500). However, the individual's perception of her self-worth is still too uncertain to allow her to claim full equality with others (Muss, 1988, p. 235).

Level 3: Focusing on the Dynamics Between Self and Others

At the third level of moral reasoning, which many never attain, the individual develops a universal perspective. At this level, a woman no longer sees herself as submissive or powerless; she has become an active and equally valid participant in the decision-making process. She has learned to verify her capacity for independent judgment and the legitimacy of her own point of view. The woman's criteria for decision making are predicated upon a transformed understanding of interpersonal connectedness and on care for others (Muss, 1988, p. 235).

Gilligan's theory addresses multiple dimensions that transition the young females through several stages of adolescent development. The factors of development seem to relate to a process that involves how individuals perceive themselves and their environment. Whether one believes in Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning, Gilligan's Female Stages of Moral Reasoning, or another theory, what seems to be clear in these works is that a developmental process occurs and that it is important that those who work with sororities understand this process in some way.

### Sororities and Women's Development

Riker (1983) states that "the heart of the Greek system is typically described as the personal growth and development of the individual member, nurtured in a group environment of mutual trust and support" (p. 49). He also states that "key factors influencing this development are the quality of interpersonal relationships and the stimulation of the group environment" (Riker, 1983 p. 49). Although Riker did not specifically single out sorority women, his theory is very similar to Gilligan's theory and Newton's theory as it relates to the sorority experience. According to Riker (1983), two significant outcomes can result from a sorority or fraternity experience that are positive: more effective and efficient group and members skilled in continuing the process of self-study for ongoing evaluation and problem solving (cited in Colgan & Opper, 1983). Each of these theories references how an individual develops within herself and in relationship to those around her.

Gilligan's Female Stages of Moral Reasoning can be applied in some aspects to women in sororities. Because sororities are single sex organizations, the dynamics of their decision-making process are different than organizations that are comprised of men only or of both men and women. As a young woman enters a sorority, she is brought into a culture that is comprised of

only women, all with varying opinions. Specifically, sororities have standards and policies that may conflict with the preconceived ideas that freshmen, as well as others, have concerning sorority life. Many young women enter the sorority culture thinking that it is primarily a social environment. Few truly understand the responsibility of being in a sorority when they join. If a woman is at Gilligan's Level 1, then she may be in direct conflict with the goals of the sorority. She may strongly perceive the sorority to be different than what it is.

Based upon my observations and experience, once a sorority woman has been through a new member program, a transition into Gilligan's Level 2 may occur. The new member program is an orientation period to educate new women in the sorority on the history, purpose, and structure of the sorority, expectations of membership, and building of relationships within the group. Participants may want to be a part of the group so much so that they may, as Gilligan tells us, "equate goodness with self-sacrifice and with pleasing or caring for others" (Muss, 1988 p. 234). Within the sorority culture, this level is where the possibility of such things as hazing could take place. Because new members may want to prove themselves to others for fear of "criticism and even abandonment" by the group, they do things that people ask them to do even when they know that they may not be morally right. Level 2 could be a dangerous phase for sorority participants. The young woman may see the sorority as a substitute for the family unit and may expect caring to be a part of the experience. This may not be the case for all women. For others, this could be the time that their commitment to the sorority begins in a positive way. They begin to realize that they are becoming a part of something and can contribute to the organization.

Level 2 can be examined in the context of new members as well as in the context of a majority of sorority members as well. If most women do not get to Level 3 according to Gilligan, then it would be logical to assume that most sorority women do not ever get out of Level 2. At

this level, members of sororities may not get pass the superficial aspect of sorority life. Decisions may be made based upon “pleasing others” rather than based on an understanding of the entire sorority experience including ritual. Sorority women at Level 2 may only focus on the social and will not move on to something more meaningful and to a deeper level of development.

It may be that Gilligan’s Level 3 would be the member within the sorority who realizes through a number of different experiences that “she has become an active and equally valid participant in the decision-making process.” Perhaps this development occurs not necessarily because of the age or year of the sorority member, but because of her capacity to see her abilities and what she has to offer the sorority. This could be attributed as to why a younger member may become president or an officer, not because of her age or experience, but because of her development. By this stage in their development, women are usually becoming secure enough with themselves that they value their own moral reasoning and judgment. At this level “the woman’s criteria for decision making is predicated upon a transformed understanding of interpersonal connectedness and on care for others” (Muss, 1988, p. 235). Often, juniors and seniors begin to see their role in the sorority as being the ones who share their “wisdom” with the younger members. However, it may not be their age or year in school that enables them to understand this role. Rather, it may be their personal development and the impact, or lack thereof, of the sorority on their experiences that has led to their belief that they are the ones who can make the difference. At this level, some women may also begin to see themselves as leaders and take on leadership roles within the sorority. For some members, exceptions to this level are that some members feel that they are outgrowing the sorority and begin to break away. It may or may not be that, at this level, the quality of the sorority experience helps to determine whether the

member transitions to a leader/role model/mentor, or sees the sorority experience as insignificant in her personal, educational and professional development.

I have attempted to place sorority membership in levels that connect to Gilligan's Female Stages of Moral Reasoning. These levels represent the growth that a woman experiences as she develops as a person within the sorority. It must be noted that the examples given are just a few and that exceptions do exist. Like the studies that have been conducted concerning adolescent development, the impact of sorority culture on sorority women continues to be evaluated. Through my own experiences and having worked with chapters on various campuses, Gilligan's theory is very consistent with observation of sorority women. Gilligan's Female Stages of Moral Reasoning can be applied possibly to all college women. In this particular example the comparison is directly made to the development of sorority women.

Although development has been discussed in the context of age, various other aspects of development such as moral, intellectual, and social, provide understanding of sorority women and their development. As mentioned earlier, several studies have been conducted concerning moral development and intellectual development of sorority women. As indicated through those studies, women, including sorority women, develop not only because of their age or year in school, but because of the experiences that happen during that time. The experiences of a woman in a sorority impact their development as well. This development may be based upon social experiences, sisterhood experiences, as well as various other experiences, but may not be linked to their experiences with ritual specifically.

Another viewpoint in the area of women's developmental theories is that of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986). These authors believe that empowerment is an important issue in developing the power of one's (women's) mind. They state "that they

[women] can strengthen themselves through the empowerment of others is essential wisdom often gathered by women” (1986, p. 47). Within the sorority experience, this theory is applicable as the concept that the support of a group of women encourages self-confidence and true peer to peer empowerment. The sorority experience is designed to create an environment that encourages young women to take on leadership roles, and to feel empowered to do whatever she wishes to do. A sorority should be a place where young women grow and become confident women.

Whether or not this happens depends on the type of environment that a particular sorority creates.

Regardless of which theory one chooses, the importance of this section is to realize that sororities operate in a manner based upon the various stages, phases, or levels that their members are experiencing. It is important to consider these theories when educating young women as to how to live with and learn from one another.

### Transitions as Rites of Passage

Transitions as rites of passage are defined in various ways. The viewpoint of Newton (1995) describes a theory of the process of childhood to adulthood as a "rite of passage" (p. 26). The author discusses the transition from adolescence to adulthood from an anthropological and psychological orientation. Newton (1995) believes that “the adolescent process involves adaptive interaction between the individual and the environment” (p. 24). He refers to the transition period as "a rite of passage,” and divides adolescence into three stages:

Stage 1: Withdrawal - The physical growth spurt and the first signs of puberty growth initiate an instinctive withdrawal of the child from adults, particularly parents. During this process, the child develops secrets with friends and a peer group away from the family and other significant adults. This process has a deep psychosocial purpose in terms of ending childish dependence on family (p. 27).

Stage 2: Isolation for Preparation - Early adolescents experience enlarged bodies and developing sexual profiles as discontinuities. In addition, they require space and time to come to terms with the new higher level of consciousness of self that occurs in brain

development. The isolation period allows the child to adapt to the enlarged adult body, the reproductively mature body, and the new sense of self into a unified person (p. 28).

Stage 3: Reentry to Society as an Adult - Non-Western cultures celebrate reentry in a clear ritual of new status, often including change in clothes, jewelry, scarification, and name. In years past, completion of high school combined with first job, or completion of college combined with first job, marriage, and independent residence together constituted a ritual of adulthood in the society (p. 29).

In United States culture, neither young men nor women who have reached sexual maturity have any rituals to celebrate this crucial awakening in their lives (Driver, 1991). As a result, the only way for them to acknowledge this longing for a ritual is to become sexually active. He challenges that people who either ignore rituals or rites of passage or view them negatively fail to see why they are so important for many individuals.

Like Newton (1995), Driver (1991) discusses the concept of rites of passage and how today's span of transition from adolescence to adulthood has increased. Both authors assert that legal definitions of adulthood and traditional definitions of adults' developmental theories may not always be the same. During the period from 18 to approximately 23 years of age, individuals have been declared legal adults with certain rites and privileges such as the right to vote, sign legal documents or to be tried as an adult if one has committed a crime (Newton, 1995). Other issues, such as the legal drinking age being raised from 18 to 21 causes confusion within young adults. Working with college students, I constantly hear "If I can vote, fight for my country, and be tried as an adult, why can't I drink at 18 years of age?"

Defining when a person is an "adult" or "young adult" is often marked by the privileges that are given or bestowed upon them whether it be by society, the government, their religion, families, organizations and friends. If the expectation is that members of a sorority are expected to mature, then their environment must allow them to take responsibility and learn how to

become productive and caring people. Sororities have an opportunity to provide this type of experience as long as it is true to the real purpose of the organization and its original intent.

Over the years, markers for adulthood have changed. The rites of passages that once were significant for previous generations are being prolonged, or in some cases, no longer exist. With people delaying marriage until their late 20's or early 30's and the drinking age being raised, people taking longer to complete a college degree, etc, many individuals moving through the adolescent to adulthood process are very unclear as to when the transition occurs. Newton (1995) explains that "the lack of a clear entry to adulthood status sends ripples of confusion back through the adolescent period" (p. 29). The opinion of many university administrators, community members, parents, and even students is that this same uncertainty of transition to adulthood often times is what happens in sororities and fraternities. These organizations, structurally, can provide this type of environment. The question that continues to be a challenge is: do they? Are these organizations establishing environments that challenge young men and women to hold themselves and others accountable and are they making the transition to responsible young adults?

Newton (1995) refers to Gilligan's distinction between male and female development to describe how the stages that he presents have addressed sex differences as they relate to the transition from adolescence to adulthood and the concept of rites of passage. He states that the young female can continue a close relationship with the mother as a role model and supporter for her own female development. Expectations for females involves nurture, relationship, and cooperation (Newton, 1995). This could relate to the sorority experience for a young woman who is away from her mother figure and looking for a role model, or in the case of a sorority, "role models" who will be involved in the nurturing, caring relationship. Newton (1995) reminds us of

Gilligan's point that sex differences do matter and that males and females see the world very differently. This concept is key when looking at sororities, and specifically taking into consideration the single sex component of these organizations.

Sororities offer an environment that has engraved within its foundations a system of rites of passages. From the time young women become a part of a sorority, ceremonies and symbols represent their "passing through" various phases of the organization. Most of these ceremonies and symbols are handed down from generation to generation through rituals, creeds, and classes of membership as a means of passing down the traditions established by the various sororities' founders and early members in the mid eighteenth hundreds and early nineteenth hundreds. The most significant rite of passage that a new member of the sorority participates in is the formal initiation ceremony. This ceremony represents the new member's passage from new member to a fully initiated member. The education period that has led up to this point is designed to assist that young woman through a similar process as the adolescence to adulthood concept.

Sorority women are challenged by their organizations to develop as individuals and learn to understand how to be supported by the group. The sorority experience is expected to be a growth process. From the beginning of sororities, the intent was to create environments where young women could grow and support one another. The importance of this relationship and this developmental process is key to understanding how they operate and grow within the sorority.

#### Group Dynamics

A sorority is known as a group. The members of the group influence one another by the mere fact that they are a group. Taylor, Peplau, Sears (1997) define a group as "people who are interdependent and have at least the potential for mutual interaction (p. 286). They further state

that "the essential feature of a group is that members are interdependent, meaning that they influence one another in some way" (p. 286).

Sororities are groups of women who by their structure require many facets of operation. They manage their day to day operations, govern themselves, and interact most often on a daily basis in some way. Because of this structure, it is necessary to understand what causes a member to join as well as how and why they act as they do. One theory to consider would be Heider's Naïve Psychology, otherwise known as the attribution theory (Taylor, et. al 1997). Heider was interested in how "people in everyday life figure out what is concerning what" (Taylor et. al 1997, p. 57). Another definition of attribution theory is a "description of the way in which people explain the cause of their own and other people's behavior" (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 1999, p. 121). Heider's attribution theory includes two perspectives: internal attribution and extreme attributions. Aronson, et. al, 1997 defines the attributions as follows:

Internal Attribution is the inference that a person is behaving in a certain way because of something about him or her, such as a person's attitude, character, or personality. External Attribution is the inference that a person is behaving a certain way because of something about the situation he or she is in; the assumption is that most people would respond the same way in that situation (p. 121).

An individual within any group struggles with who they are as an individual and how they function within the group. Sororities have the same challenges.

### Summary

In summary, this chapter presents various aspects of ritual, rites of passage, female development, sorority women, and sororities in general. History and the need for ritual establish a foundation for the basis of "why ritual." I presented the sorority experience from several different perspectives. It is important to understand the various components of a sorority, including the definition of sorority as well as how a sorority's culture and structure affects its

undergraduate members. Understanding the history and development of sororities and women in higher education gives perspective on how these organizations evolved.

The role of ritual in general as well as within the sorority structure is presented through the explanation of what is ritual. Ritual as performance, rites of passage as well as putting ritual into practice (living the ritual) answers the question of "why ritual." This is significant because of the relationship of ritual and sororities' ability to last through time. How young women develop and grow through their sorority experience is the most important aspect of the sorority movement. The intent of this research is to establish an opportunity to further discuss and encourage additional studies to be conducted on this topic.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to provide an understanding of the impact of sorority ritual on the behavior and values of contemporary sorority women. This qualitative study has been conducted through in-depth individual and focus group interviews. This chapter of the dissertation will provide the reasoning behind my choice to conduct a qualitative study as well as a discussion of the types of qualitative methods that were used for this study. The research design and data collection methods as well as population and sample description have been included.

#### Design

Qualitative design was chosen in order to collect data through “human instrument, the researcher, rather than through some inanimate inventory, questionnaire, or computer” (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). Patton (as cited in Merriam, 1998) defines qualitative research:

Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of the setting – what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting – the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting...The analysis strives for depth of understanding (p. 6).

I have selected the qualitative design method to give me the opportunity to gather data that is rich in content and to actually be able to observe the reactions and emotions that the sorority women exhibit as they discuss ritual. According to Merriam (1998), interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior and the feelings and emotions towards something. Ritual ceremonies are typically not something I could have observed; therefore, ethnography was

not an option. Actual observance of ritual was not an option because I could not take part in closed ritual ceremonies due to the secrecy of these ceremonies.

As discussed in Chapter II, the topic of ritual is very close to me, therefore, in order to assure that my bias would not interfere with the interviews, I developed interview questions that were clear, concise and not leading. In addition to the structured interview questions, I did not make personal comments about my beliefs during the interview process. I did recognize that I had personal bias, and therefore took every precaution that I could in order to allow for the sorority women's responses to be their own, without guidance from me. Patton (1990) writes that it is important to understand the power of interviewing and to anticipate and deal with the ethical dimensions of qualitative inquiry:

Because qualitative methods are highly personal and interpersonal, because materialistic inquiry takes the researcher into the real world where people live and work, and because in-depth interviewing opens up what is inside people, qualitative inquiry may be more intrusive and involve greater reactivity than surveys, tests, and other qualitative approaches (p. 356).

In an effort to address ethical concerns that may have arisen, I assured the participants of confidentiality as it related to their individual identity and their sorority affiliation and had them sign an informed consent form. The participants were informed during the interview that their campus identity would be included in the study. I made certain that I followed all procedures as it related to data access and stayed within the boundaries established by this study. I have taken my role very seriously and have upheld my agreement to keep confidential the identity of the individuals and their sororities.

Each participant was asked to sign an informed consent form along with a statement of confidentiality on the part of the researcher. Permission to interview their undergraduate sorority members was obtained from the National Panhellenic Conference Research Committee (see

Appendix E). I submitted the interview questions to the Chairperson of the Research Committee, and they were then distributed to each of the 26 National Panhellenic sororities. I discussed this research with many of the national presidents, officers and delegates prior to this study to make certain that they feel confident in my ability to keep my ethical responsibility. Ritual is a very sensitive topic, and the National Panhellenic Conference sororities' confidence in my ethical behavior is very important to my ability as a researcher to have access to their members.

#### NPC Sororities Only Included in the Study

The sorority world includes several types of sororities that could have been included in this study. Those groups include historically black, local, Latino, and Asian sororities, which all exist on college campuses today. Having worked within the NPC structure, the most important reasons that I have chosen to limit this study to the NPC member groups are access and purpose. The National Pan-Hellenic sororities (historically black sororities) are even more protective than the NPC organizations. Latino and Asian sororities are similar to the historically black sororities. In addition to the national sororities, some campuses have local sororities, groups that have only one chapter and no national structure. In most cases, it has been my experience that local sororities are not rooted in ritual as much as they are in tradition. Many of those organizations have stayed local because of their desire to self govern and to perpetuate hazing activities that are restricted by National sororities. Many local groups have affiliated with national organizations because of the mandates by their campus. The liability of local sororities is much greater for colleges and universities because they are not held accountable by a national organization. Working within the confines of NPC did create some limitations for me as a researcher. I do feel however that I have been able to gather information that will enhance the research information concerning sororities and ritual.

### Role of the NPC Research Committee

Areas of concern that arose at the beginning of the study included that of secrecy by the national organizations. A copy of the dissertation proposal in its final form was sent to the Research Committee of the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC). The Research Committee of NPC informed me as to any concerns that they believed to be in conflict with the ethical standards as it relates to National Panhellenic Conference prior to the interview process (Appendix E). They reviewed a synopsis of my research concept and offered several suggestions, which I have incorporated into this study.

### Method

#### Participants

The participants for this study were sorority women at four-year colleges and universities from various colleges and universities within the United States. The interviews were conducted as individual interviews and in focus group interviews. I conducted nine focus groups on eight different campuses. The campuses were from various parts of the United States. I conducted 23 individual interviews. I conducted the 23 individual interviews on seven different campuses. The campuses were chosen based upon their geographic location, the type of institution (whether public or private, large or small), the type of sorority community that was on that campus, as well as my ability as a researcher to travel to that institution. The descriptions of the campuses are included in Chapter 4 of this study. The same questions were used for the individual and focus group interviews. The focus groups were comprised of 2 to 8 sorority women either from the same chapter or different chapters on the same campus. Table 1 provides a listing of the campuses and the number of interviews and what type of interview was conducted.

**Table 1**

**Individual and Group Interviews**

Index	Individual Interview	Group Interview
Campus		
Ramapo College		1
University of Alabama at Birmingham	2	1
University of Dayton	2	1
University of Southern Mississippi		2
University of South Alabama	3	1
Louisiana State University	3	1
Florida State University	6	1
Tulane University	5	
Loyola University	2	1
Total # of Interviews	23	9

The sorority women were asked to volunteer to participate in the study either by a chapter officer, the Greek advisor, or me. This study included both private and public institutions with enrollments ranging from 1,200 to 35,000 graduate and undergraduate students. Chapter size ranges in membership from 10 members to 210 members. Some participants lived in sorority facilities such as houses or residence halls, and others were commuter students. I planned interviews with this criteria established in order to create a range of various sorority experiences. The criteria included sorority women from various size campuses from different parts of the country, various size chapters, as well as residential and commuter campuses. Some of the chapters were older, more traditional chapters, while some will be young and growing. Some of

the chapters were part of large national/international sororities while others were part of smaller national/international sororities. The sorority women ranged from sophomores to seniors. They were officers, committee members, and regular members who do not hold positions in the chapters. Some of them were older members while others were newly initiated members. The demographic information concerning these women and their campuses are included in Chapter 4 of this study.

### Interview Structure

The participants in the study were asked to volunteer to be interviewed on an individual basis. The participants, as well as their national organizations, were assured of complete confidentiality and that no questions were directed at anything that is specific to the actions, symbols, or scripts of their individual rituals. Each participant was asked to sign a consent form as well as to complete a demographic sheet to assure confidentiality and to track the demographics of those being interviewed. Questions were designed to discuss the impact that their sorority rituals have had on the values and behaviors of them as individuals and their belief of the effects on their chapter members as a whole.

### Interview Questions

Ritual and its effects on an individual are very personal and can best be discussed through face to face individual and focus group interviews. Each interview was conducted and tape-recorded, then transcribed and coded for common themes.

The interview questions were designed to challenge the participants to reflect on what ritual means to them and to the members of their chapters. The questions were designed to focus on the research question: Do sorority rituals have an impact on the behavior and values of contemporary sorority women? (See Appendix C) The interview questions, as well as

descriptions of the study, were evaluated and approved by the National Panhellenic Conference Research Committee. One of the limitations was that the interviews took place during the summer months, which meant that fewer sorority women were available to be selected. I do not believe that this affected the study greatly, I only wanted to include it for point of reference.

### Interview Arrangement

The individual interview should "illustrate the value of detailed, descriptive data in deepening our understanding of individual varieties" (Patton, 1990, p. 17). The individual interview allowed me to gain perspective from various women as it relates to their personal thoughts and experiences. Focus group interviews allowed me to get perspectives from groups of sorority women who were and were not from the same chapter or affiliation. "Groups are not just a convenient way to accumulate the individualized knowledge of their members, they give rise synergistically to insights and solutions that would not come about without them" (Brown et al., 1989, p. 40). I chose focus group interviews because they have several advantages. Patton (1990), states:

It is a highly efficient qualitative data collection technique. In one hour, the evaluation can gather information from eight people instead of only one person. Thus the sample size can be increased significantly in an evaluation using qualitative methods through focus group interviewing. Focus group interviews also provide some quality controls on data collection in that participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other that weed out false or extreme views (pp. 335-336).

Individual and group interviews were arranged with the assistance of the Greek advisor or university authority on each of the campuses selected for the study. These campuses were selected based upon various criteria such as size of chapters, private colleges and universities verses public universities and the location of these campuses. I chose institutions that have different types of sorority cultures and structures and arranged the interviews at various campuses

where I was able to travel based upon finances and accessibility. As I stated earlier in this study, sorority chapters vary from campus to campus. I included sorority women from campuses that had a wider range of experience as opposed to just one type of sorority chapter or a certain part of the country. I visited campuses in various regions of the United States with the exception of the West Coast and Southwest. I conducted interviews at small, private institutions, as well as large public institutions and regional institutions. Most of the interviews were conducted in campus meeting rooms. One was conducted in a residence hall facility.

### Trustworthiness

Research is concerned with the ethical manner in which studies are conducted. Terms such as internal validity, external validity, and reliability are used in qualitative research. “Being able to trust research results is especially important to professionals in applied fields, such as education, in which practitioners intervene in people’s lives (Merriam, 1998, p. 198). Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four constructs for qualitative research, which are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, which establish the “truth value” (p. 290), or trustworthiness, of qualitative research.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), one of the primary goals of credibility in qualitative research is that the study is conducted such that the “probability that the findings will be found to be credible is enhanced” (p. 296). In order to enhance the credibility and dependability of my findings, two colleagues conducted “peer examinations” (Merriam, 1998, p. 204) of the transcripts of the findings of the study. The two peer examiners have worked with me throughout this study in order to enhance internal validity. One of the peer examiners is familiar with the sorority environment and the other is an academic, faculty person. With their

recommendations, the findings were coded by themes and analyzed by the primary researcher (myself) and are reported in Chapter IV.

In this study, verbatim quotes were used to convey the participants' thoughts and feelings to the reader. Merriam (1998) recommends use of "rich, thick description . . . providing enough description so that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and hence, whether the findings can be transferred" (p. 211). Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicate that the construct of transferability is the concept that one set of findings may be applicable in another study. Lincoln and Guba postulated that determining the transferability is not the responsibility of the original researcher because that researcher cannot determine what future studies the findings may be applied to. "Therefore, the burden of transferability lies with future researchers" (Williams, 1997, p. 53).

Conformability as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) corresponds with the quantitative research concept of objectivity. Whether or not the data is confirmable is the primary question according to Lincoln and Guba, not whether or not the researcher is objective. Williams (1997) states: "Objectivity is not a state which qualitative researchers strive to achieve. By nature, qualitative research is subjective. All researchers approach the research process with certain inherent biases" (p. 54). At the beginning of my study, I outlined and identified my experiences and preconceptions as it related to this research and established a system of data analysis that would help me to maintain neutrality in reporting the results.

### Pilot Study

The interview structure was guided by questions that address the participant's beliefs and values and thoughts as to what role ritual has in her individual behavior (See Appendix C). Questions addressed the participant's perception of the role of ritual in her chapter's behavior as

a whole. I piloted the interview questions of this study with the students at West Chester University in West Chester, Pennsylvania in order to clarify the interview questions and methods before I began the actual study. The group of women that were interviewed was upper-class students who had held various chapter and campus leadership positions. The five participants consisted of three from different chapters and two from the same chapter. They made recommendations concerning the USMPQ and the Interview Consent Form as well as suggestions as to who I should interview and how I should interview. They thought that I should conduct focus group interviews as well as individual interviews specifically with newer members and older members to compare and contrast the difference in their perception of the role of ritual. I thought that the dynamics of interviewing sorority women from various affiliations was a very effective way of group interviewing. One recommendation from them was that if I conducted focus group interviews, the women needed to know one another in order to feel comfortable with sharing. It did not matter to them if they were from different affiliations, just that they knew one another. They also made suggestions concerning the interview questions.

The information that they expressed was diverse. They expressed that as upper-class students their perspectives on ritual and their sorority experience as a whole has changed since they were freshmen or first year sorority women. They said that they were aware that their actions were a reflection on their sorority, but they also acknowledged times when their actions may have been in conflict with their sorority ritual. Most of them said that they were taught ritual. One of them said that her chapter did not teach ritual and she could see how it affected them. She said that they were having some challenges and that some of the challenges were based upon the lack of understanding of who they were as a chapter. The clear message that they shared was that the importance of ritual changed in their lives as they had grown up.

After the pilot study, changes were made to the interview questions, as well as the some modifications as to how I as a researcher needed to conduct the interviews. The only recommendation that the students from the pilot study suggested that were not incorporated was the participants should know one another prior to the interview. Due to timing and trying to not select particular participants, it was difficult to know if they knew one another before the interviews. The primary way to determine that factor would have been to interview only women from the same chapter, and that was not the intent of the study. Room dynamics, interviewing style, tape recording and labeling as well as organization of the demographic information was improved following the pilot study. Questions on the USMPQ and the Interview Consent Form were also modified.

#### Data Analysis

From these transcripts and field notes, I have looked for common themes to compare similar thoughts to see if a pattern exists in any of the interviews. I conducted my analysis with cross-case analysis, grouping together answers from the different participants to common questions and analyzing different perspectives on central issues.

I began category construction following the recording of the first interview transcript and the field notes collected in the study (Merriam, 1998). I took the field notes and began to make notes on the date that was interesting and relevant to the study. I reviewed my field notes as well as the demographic information that I had gathered about the first campus and the sororities on that campus. I reviewed the university web site, recruitment books and brochures published by the campus, rush/recruitment information published by the Panhellenic Council, and any additional information that I could gather to get to know the campus and the sorority structure on that campus. After working through the data that was collected, various categories emerged.

These categories were reflective of the purpose of the research. As the data collection continued, a connectedness to Chapter II began to emerge. Systematically classifying the data into themes was the next step in the process in order to interpret the data. Once the main themes were classified, those themes were subdivided into two or three additional themes. One of the sub-themes was then divided into two additional themes.

Interview records were kept chronologically along with notes regarding the development of the interview process. I also kept a journal of my thoughts, actions, and feelings during the interview process. I described the participants in general terms, described the institutions they attended, as well as the process as it developed and of any issues that occurred along the way. Their identity will be kept confidential as stated to them during the interview process.

#### Observation of Rituals

As stated in Chapters I and II, most sorority rituals are secret and would not allow for observations. If the opportunity would have arisen for observations of rituals that are considered open rituals, then I would have taken the opportunity to gather information based upon observation. This study did not include an opportunity for observation. I did not read actual ritual ceremonies from these sororities, but I did, throughout my research, discuss information with national archivists and national officers. A key component of this research was the trust of the national sororities. I had numerous discussions with national officers concerning this study. I attempted to reassure officers and volunteers of the sororities that my interest for this study is to create a better understanding of what role, if any, ritual is playing in the lives of undergraduate sorority women. Those who work with sororities on all levels are interested in the impact and understanding of ritual by undergraduate members of sororities. I have conducted the interviews as well as participated in all aspects involved in the data gathering process.

## Challenges Faced During the Study

The greatest challenges I faced during this research were the recurring questions “why ritual?” and “how are you going to study what, to most, is a secret, very sacred topic?” Early in my career of working with sorority women, I was fascinated with the importance of ritual and its role in the sorority experience. I began to learn from reading, attending conferences, and listening to students and national officers speak of ritual, specifically the importance of the initiation ceremony. Although I am a member of a sorority, my undergraduate experience taught me little about ritual. I knew that we had to conduct a ceremony that brought new members into the sorority. I did not understand the meaning of the ceremony nor did I understand the concept that ritual was a system of values or standards by which I had promised to live my life. I did not make decisions about my life based upon my sorority's ritual -- to me it was a nice ceremony, but that was it. It really had no meaning.

I have conducted this research to examine the initiation ceremony and its effect, if any, on the values and behavior of sorority undergraduate women today. One of the concerns that have evolved is my ability to remain objective and non-biased as it relates to this study. A quote in a chapter called "Outside In, Inside Out" (Minh-Ha, 1991), I think best describes what I believe to be true, especially as it relates to this topic:

The 'portraits' of a group produced by the observer as outsider and by the observer as insider will differ, as they will be relevant in different contexts. This underlies the current cry 'you have to be one to understand one' (p. 72).

I think that this phrase best describes that it would be very difficult to conduct this study if I had no knowledge of what a sorority ritual ceremony or initiation ceremony entails. I have only

participated in my sorority ritual, which in many ways, places me as an outsider looking in.

Minh-Ha (1991) gives another description of the insider looking in:

The moment the insider steps out from the inside, she is no longer a mere insider (and vice versa). She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Like the outsider, she steps back and records what never occurs to her the insider as being worth or in need of recording. But unlike the outsider, she also resorts to non-explicative, non-totalizing strategies that suspend meaning and resist closure. This is often viewed by the outsiders as strategies of partial concealment and disclosure aimed at preserving secrets that should only be imparted to initiates. (p. 74)

Although I do not know the secrets of the other sororities, I do have an understanding of what those rituals entail and their intent as far as the purpose of the ceremonies. Because I am not a member of any of the other sororities included in this study, I have been an outsider who did not and does not know the content of those ceremonies.

I feel that this explains my ability to be connected to this topic and yet, has established my ability to be an outsider. I have taken precautions such as having two examiners review the coding the transcripts, selecting the sorority women randomly for the study, as well as conducting interviews on campuses where I am not speaking or presenting in order to ensure non-biased responses. My bias has been my passion for this topic. Under the direction of my major advisor, two examiners, and my dissertation committee, I have taken precautions to evaluate my bias and to be conscience of my bias at all times during this study.

### Limitations

Formal rituals, such as those associated with Greek letter organizations, are often difficult to study. The nature of the organizations and the role of "ritual," specifically the initiation ceremony in those organizations, often times create a sense of secrecy to the point of not ever mentioning the word "ritual." Rituals or ritual ceremonies are the foundation of what makes each sorority unique. Perhaps the greatest challenge for researchers is the fact that many of the rituals

associated with sororities are secret and only known by those who have shared in those ceremonies. Ritual ceremonies are often not even discussed within the confines of the sorority because members have been taught that ritual is something that is sacred and secret and should not be discussed due to the fear that someone who is not an initiated member may overhear the conversation. This concept has been challenged in recent times as an attempt to bring contemporary sorority members back to the focal point of the sorority, which is supposed to be ritual.

The secrecy of individual sorority rituals established clear parameters for the in-depth investigation of specific symbols, passages, and actions performed during the actual ritual ceremonies. Although this could have been somewhat of a challenge, my approach was one that gave the sorority women an opportunity to discuss the role of ritual in a non-intrusive environment. By working with chapters not of my affiliation, I have learned how to discuss ritual in concept without knowing the specifics of their rituals. Clarity and openness with the undergraduate sorority women and their national representatives have been crucial components of this study. Instead of specific words or descriptions of individual sorority ritual ceremonies, specifically initiation, I only included commonalities that all sorority rituals encompass such as the use of common themes, religious foundations, if applicable, and expectation standards that are portrayed through the ritual ceremonies and open creeds and mottoes.

In Chapter two, I discussed the works of Victor Turner (1969) and his perspective of the importance of the performance of the ritual ceremony. One of the major limitations of this study was the participants presented their assessment of the impact of the ritual ceremony. The limitation is that because sorority rituals, specifically, initiation, are closed ceremonies, I was not able to participate or observe the performance of an actual ceremony. The account by the

sorority women was a cognitive assessment of their perception of ritual. Observing the performance of their ritual ceremonies would have given me an opportunity to assess the concepts of bonding and tradition, and the impact that the performance of the ceremony had by those in attendance.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

Summarized in this chapter are the major findings of the study. This chapter is organized into four primary sections: (a) the participants in the study, (b) campus descriptions, (c) the findings, and (d) a summary of the findings.

#### The Participants in the Study

In this section, a brief description of the sorority women who participated in the study is presented. Due to the nature of the subject and the level of confidentiality, it is not possible to describe the sorority women's chapters and their chapter culture, or to go into great detail about the sorority women themselves. Basic demographic and sorority involvement information provided by the participants is included in Table 2 and Table 3.

#### Demographic Profile of the Participants

Fifty-one undergraduate sorority women were interviewed on nine campuses. These interviews consisted of individual and focus group interviews. As indicated in Table 1, the sorority women ranged in age from 18 to 22 years of age. Because the interviews were conducted mainly during the summer months, all of the women had completed their freshman year and no new members were available until after recruitment began in the fall semester, which was after the time frame created for the interviews.

The demographic profile of the 51 participants in the study (see Table 1) consisted of age groups ranging from 18 to 22, with only one participant (2%) age 18, seventeen at age 19 (33%), twenty two at age 20 (43%), ten at age 21 (20%), and only one participant at age 22 (2%).

In addition, only one participant was Asian American (2%), two were Multi Ethnic (4%), one was Native American (2%), one was Hispanic (2%), one was Spanish (2%), and 45 were Caucasian (88%).

The age ranges seem to be comparable to the national average of women who are involved in sororities as indicated earlier in this study. In most sororities, it seems that the majority of the women range in age from 18 to 22. The ethnicity seems to be that the majority of women who are in NPC sororities are Caucasian. This demographic might vary depending upon the geographical location of their college or university and the demographics of a particular campus.

**Table 2**

**Demographic Profile of Sorority Women Participants**

Index	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
18	1	2
19	17	33
20	22	43
21	10	20
22	1	2
Total # of Participants		51

(table con'd.)

Index	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Asian American	1	2
Caucasian	45	88
Multi Ethnic	2	4
Native American	1	2
Other		
Hispanic	1	2
Spanish	1	2

\* N = 51

Table 2 contains the demographic profile of the study participants by age and ethnicity.

The 51 participants all joined their sororities between 1998 and 2001. Nine (18%) participants pledged in 1998, twenty-three (45%) in 1999, twelve (23%) in 2000, and seven (14%) in 2001. No first year members participated in the interviews. Some of the sorority women had participated in deferred formal sorority recruitment in the spring of 2001, but they designated their status in their chapters as second year. Of the 51 participants, the majority of them were in their second and third years in the chapters with twenty-one (41%) in their second year, seventeen (33%) in their third year, and thirteen (26%) in their fourth year.

In the description of year currently in school, the data was evenly distributed, with the exception of freshmen, who were not included as participants due to the timing of the interview process. One question not asked on the demographic information was during what year in school did they join their chapters. For this reason, the years currently in school do not match the years in the chapters. Some of the women joined their sororities during their junior and senior years in

school. Sixteen (31%) sophomore participants, eighteen (36%) junior participants, and seventeen (33%) senior participants were interviewed.

Questions regarding leadership and involvement in their sorority provided a variety of answers. Some of the participants indicated involvement in both minor office or committee positions as well as executive board positions. Thirty-two of the participants indicated that they had been involved in at least one type of minor office or committee position. Seventeen indicated having held or currently holding an executive board position within their sorority. Fourteen of the participants indicated that they had never held a leadership position within their sorority or the sorority community (i.e. Panhellenic, Greek Council, etc.).

**Table 3**

**Sorority Involvement**

Index	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Year Became a New Member</b>		
1998	9	18
1999	23	45
2000	12	23
2001	7	14
<b>Year Currently in Their Chapter</b>		
1 <sup>st</sup>	0	0
2 <sup>nd</sup>	21	41
3 <sup>rd</sup>	17	33
4 <sup>th</sup>	13	26

(table con'd.)

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**Year Currently in School**

Freshmen (The interviews took place before the beginning of the Fall Semester)	0	0
Sophomores	16	31
Juniors	18	36
Seniors	17	33

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**Leadership/Involvement in Their Sorority**

Has held at least one type of minor office or committee position	32
Has held an Executive Board position	17
Has never held any type of position in their sorority	14

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\*Note: Some of the responses were based upon the fact that some of the participants held both minor office or committee positions and executive board positions.

Table 3 contains sorority involvement information including the year that the participants became new members, year currently in the chapter, year currently in school, and the leadership and involvement in their sorority.

**Dynamics of Focus Groups and Individual Interviews**

During the individual and group interviews, there were several dynamics that seemed to indicate the comfort level of the students while discussing ritual. The individual interview participants appeared to be more open and comfortable in discussing their feelings and thoughts about ritual. The level of comfort may have been increased by the confidentiality element of the interview. The focus group interviews were different in that not all of the participants seemed comfortable with discussing ritual in the presence of other sorority women from different chapters. This factor is reflective of the participants understanding that ritual is “secret” and should not be discussed. Many sorority women have taken this concept to the extreme in that not only do they not discuss ritual outside of their chapter, but also many of them do not discuss

ritual among themselves outside of the context of the ritual ceremony. There are exceptions with chapters who intentionally have made ritual an integral part of their chapter experience.

Another dynamic observed during the focus group interviews was that the members who had been in the chapters the longest were the ones who would answer most of the questions or at least answer the questions first. The newer members would often respond to the answers of the “more experienced” members. The newer members seemed more cautious in answering the questions.

Four of the focus group interviews consisted of women from the same chapter. The interview dynamics were similar to the other focus group interviews in that the members who had been members the longest took the lead on answering the questions. They did seem more comfortable talking about ritual possibly because they were all members of the same sorority.

### Campus Descriptions

A description of the campuses where the interviews were conducted is presented in order to create an understanding of the campus culture. These descriptions were gathered from personal observation, information from the person responsible for Greek Life on a campus, the University web sites, and publications from the institutions. As part of the interview process, I indicated to the participants that their institutions would be discussed as part of this study, but not their sororities nor the participants themselves.

An over sampling of campuses in the southeastern part of the country was due to limited resources, time constraints, and my inability to travel to all parts of the United States. Several of the campuses that were chosen that are located in the southeast typically attract students from various parts of the country and are not typically southern campuses. Tulane University and Loyola University are campuses that are very different than other institutions in the South based

upon the demographics of their campus. The other campus that is different than a typical southern campus is Florida State University. In addition, Ramapo College in New Jersey and the University of Dayton in Ohio are also included in this study.

#### Ramapo College

The first interviews were conducted at Ramapo College in Mahwah, New Jersey. Ramapo College founded in 1969, is a small, public institution that has an enrollment of approximately 5,200 students. The campus is a very modern campus with newly constructed residence halls, some nostalgic buildings, but mostly a campus of first generation students. Their sorority community was founded in 1989 and has four National Panhellenic Conference sororities that average in size from 30 to 50 members. The sororities do not have their own housing and the university does not provide housing for the sororities. Most of the women live on campus, at home with their parents, or in off campus housing. Their students are primarily from the New Jersey area and stay connected with their families. This campus was selected due to its location in the northeast, newer campus as well as a very young sorority community with many students not only being first generation sorority women, but first generation college students.

#### University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB)

The second campus is the University of Alabama at Birmingham, located in Birmingham, Alabama. UAB is a public institution, founded in 1945 and has a total enrollment of approximately 15,000 students including a medical school. Their campus is located in an area of the city where a medical school and hospital are also located, which was not like a traditional campus where the entire campus was in a designated area. Being attached to a professional school seemed to create a very different environment for the students. Their sorority community

was founded in 1978. Their average chapter size is 45 and they have 4 NPC chapters on their campus. Sorority housing consists of chapter suites in a University owned facility.

#### University of Dayton (UD)

The third campus is the University of Dayton located in Dayton, Ohio. UD is a private, Catholic, Marianist institution founded in 1850. The total enrollment is approximately 6,400. The academic requirements are very competitive and many of the students come from all over the country. Many of the women who are in sororities are also involved in many other organizations on campus. Seven NPC chapters make up approximately 18% of the student population and average approximately 70 members per chapter. Sororities began at UD in 1933, but have only been recognized by the University since 1967. The sororities have houses that are owned by the University and are rented or leased by the organizations. The campus is very academic focused and most of the students complete their degrees in four years.

#### University of Southern Mississippi (USM)

The fourth campus is the University of Southern Mississippi located in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. USM is a public institution with an enrollment of approximately 13,000 students. Founded in 1910, many of the students who attend USM are from Mississippi and the surrounding states. The eight NPC chapters on campus average approximately 85 members per chapter. Each chapter has a chapter suite in a residence hall referred to as “Panhellenic.” The sorority community at USM was founded in 1949.

#### University of South Alabama (USA)

The fifth campus is the University of South Alabama located in Mobile, Alabama. USA is a public institution that was founded in 1963 with an enrollment of approximately 12,000 students. Being located in Mobile, Alabama gives USA a certain kind of charm. The sorority

community consists of five NPC chapters and was founded in the early 1970s. Unlike many young sorority communities, the University of South Alabama sorority chapters have newly constructed homes that hold 22 women. Within the last four years, the University has built new houses, identically constructed, that are owned by the University and are leased by the groups. For a sorority community that comprises only a small percentage of the campus population, this is a very big step for the University. The average chapter size is 70 members. Many of their students as well as their sorority women are first generation students and first generation members.

#### Louisiana State University (LSU)

The sixth campus is Louisiana State University located in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. LSU is the flagship institution of the State of Louisiana and was founded in 1860. LSU is a very traditional and large public institution with approximately 31,000 students. The sorority community was founded in 1909. LSU has 10 chapters, ranging in size from 140 to 210 chapter members. They live in beautiful, mansion-like homes that house 45 to 60 members, have cooks and meal plans for every member. They are one of the Southeastern Conference (SEC) universities where football is a very important part of campus life. Many of the members come from Louisiana, but some do come from out of state.

#### Florida State University (FSU)

The seventh campus is Florida State University located in Tallahassee, Florida. FSU is similar to LSU with approximately 35,000 students, located in the South, and having a very large sorority population. It is different, however, in the sense that many of the students come from either South Florida, with its large Hispanic population, or from the east coast, because they try to escape from the winter months. The sorority community is comprised of 14 NPC chapters with

chapters ranging in size from 150 to 210 members. They live in sorority owned houses. The University was founded in 1851 and the sorority community began in 1904. Some of the chapters are reaching their 100-year celebrations.

### Tulane University

The eighth campus is Tulane University located in New Orleans, Louisiana. Although located in New Orleans, Tulane is similar to a northeastern type of institution. The description that Tulane uses in their communications is that they are a private, research, non-sectarian university. With an enrollment of approximately 5,700 students, a medical and law school, as well as many other professional schools to its' credit, Tulane attracts a highly academic as well as social justice type of student. Founded in 1834, the dynamics of being located in the middle of a city also attracts a different type of student than those attracted to a traditional institution in a college town. Their sorority community began in 1891 and has six NPC chapters as part of the sorority community. Sorority houses are located off campus and are organization owned, but are used for meeting and gathering purposes only. The average chapter size ranges from 115 to 160 members. The students are not typically from the South and are attracted to Tulane because of their academic programs as well as the diverse student population.

### Loyola University

The ninth and final campus, Loyola University is also located in New Orleans, Louisiana. Loyola is a Jesuit, Catholic institution founded in 1912. Loyola is a liberal arts institution, which also has a law school. With an enrollment of approximately 4,000 students, Loyola, like Tulane, is not a typical southern university. Located right next to Tulane, Loyola is similar in its diverse student population and high percentage of out of state students. Consistent with Jesuit ideals, the University's mission includes a strong sense of social justice. The sorority community is

comprised of four NPC chapters with an average chapter size of 55 to 70 members and began in 1959. The sororities are comprised generally of women who are involved in a myriad of other activities as well. Sororities do not have houses and the chapters operate from a small office in the student union.

### Findings

Presented in this section are the findings of this study. The participants' shared experiences, thoughts, attitudes, and feelings regarding ritual and its meaning in their lives and in the lives of the members of their sorority. The data from the interviews are separated into categories of responses. The interview guide was designed to understand the participants' understandings, thoughts, and feelings concerning the ritual ceremonies. Responses are presented in their words.

As indicated in Chapter III, two sources of data were used in the study: a structured interview and the Undergraduate Sorority Member Profile Questionnaire (USMPQ) (Appendix B). Responses to the interview questions by the participants provided their perceptions of the role of the ritual ceremonies in their sorority experiences. The demographic information from the questionnaire provided general background information of the participants as well as the general involvement information. Through data analysis, three major themes emerged: (a) the sorority women's beliefs and values, (b) the sorority women's perception of ritual, and (c) the sorority women's development within the sorority experience. The three major themes are discussed in the following sections.

#### Sorority Women's Beliefs and Values

The first major theme captured the participants' perception regarding their beliefs and values, as well as the impact, if any, that ritual has on them. Two primary components framed the

participants' feelings about the ritual ceremony and their beliefs and values: (a) previous beliefs and (b) religious beliefs.

### Previous Beliefs

Some of the participants indicated that the beliefs and values they held prior to joining the sorority had an impact on the sorority they chose to join and, further, on how that sorority continued to strengthen and reaffirm those beliefs. Further, they indicated a connection between the values that they held and the values that were expressed in the sorority ritual.

Some participants stated that they joined their sorority not in order to develop their values but, rather, because they saw a place where their values could be expressed and supported. "I feel that I had a strong values base before I joined the sorority . . . I wasn't looking for that." Several of the participants did reference that the reason that they selected a particular sorority during the recruitment process was because they perceived that organization as "having women that represented the values and standards of that organization":

With my experience, ritual is an expression of my sorority's values and what we stand for and these are the things that I hope that I carry into to everyday life and that is what drew me to my sorority. It was the clear values that the chapter showed and exemplified . . . I think that ritual touches your life more than people would think.

For some of the participants, the sorority was a place to be able to stay true to their personal value system, not really to develop one. The participants indicated that values and beliefs are somehow connected to one's understanding of the ritual, but not necessarily developed by the ritual.

Several of the participants referred to their parents as creating the foundation for the beliefs and values that they brought with them into the sorority experience: "A lot of things are

just basic things that your parents taught you anyway, like how to be a good person . . . it is not very different from what you have already been taught.” Another participant stated:

In relationship to what my own ritual and my sorority values and beliefs, I believe that I follow them on a day to day basis, but I don't feel like the sorority taught me all of that . . . my standards are actually the standards that my parents taught me many years ago.

These participants did not see their sorority ritual as teaching them anything different about their values than what they brought with them when they entered the organization:

For me, ritual has affirmed what I learned at home. It hasn't made me any more receiving to different values because, for the most part, a lot of my opinions about life were kind of formed before I went to college...not to say that I am not willing to change, but I don't know many people that come out of college drastically different.

A few of the participants said that the personal values they had before they joined their sorority have not changed due to the sorority experience because they are essentially the same:

I have not drastically changed since I joined my sorority . . . I think that ritual gives a group of women common principles and a common direction which is extremely helpful, but that direction isn't drastically different from what I was given at home. I try to carry myself well and it is as much for my family and friends as it is for my sorority.

Another stated that: “I believe that my word is my honor and when I say that I'm going to do something, I am going to do it . . . that is just the way that I was brought up.” These comments clearly reinforce the conclusions of a study of the social ecology of sororities by Risman (1982), which states “sororities act in loco parentis, fraternities do not” (p. 241). Sororities take on the role of the parents in maintaining values, rules, and societal norms for interaction. As pointed out by Komives and Schuh (1988), this may seem restrictive and non-developmental, but conversely, actually serves to help develop and maintain appropriate behavior.

A few of the participants expressed the belief that their parents taught them the foundation for their “values” but their sorority ritual is “intertwined” with what they were taught by their parents. For example:

I feel that my parents instilled morals and values in me that I have lived by since I was five years old. I also feel like if I had not joined my sorority, that I would not be the person that I am today either. I think that the core values that my parents taught me are intertwined with the responsibility that my sorority has taught me. The sorority’s standards just happen to be the same standards that I was taught years ago.

Another participant reiterated this: “For me, ritual leads back to the way I was raised and my personal values because I have very high standards of myself.”

Some participants also indicated that the sorority ritual was not a means of creating values for women who entered the sorority without a basic foundation of values and beliefs:

I think that how people understand ritual and what it means to them has a lot to do with the way that they were brought up. People who are hearing values and things like that for the first time or who haven’t heard it through their lives, just kind of let it pass by.

The research conducted by Burnett, Moody, and Vaughan (1997) indicates that potential members seek a sorority environment that has values that parallel their own. This is clearly indicated in the comments of the participants who have entered the sororities with an established value system that parallels the values expressed through the sorority’s ritual. Their comments regarding other members who lack a basic foundation of values may actually indicate not a lack of values, but rather a difference in values. In choosing a sorority, it has been shown that women seek groups with the same values (Burnett, et al. 1997). Perhaps it is not the ethical standards and values expressed in ritual that these women sought, but rather some type of other value, such as friendship, popularity, physical attractiveness, or social opportunity.

Not all participants indicated that the values and behavior of their sorority chapter paralleled their personal values. One of the participants indicated that Greek life has challenged her “morals”: “I don’t think that I learned or got my morals from my sorority, I think that I brought them with me. . . . I think that my morals are actually challenged by a lot of the aspects of Greek Life.”

### Religious Beliefs

Several of the participants stated that they valued the ritual ceremony experience because it was similar to religious types of ceremonies that have been important to them. Some of the participants used words such as “sacred” and “spiritual” to exemplify the parallels that they perceived between the sorority ritual and religious ceremonies. One participant stated, “Most of the women in my chapter link ritual to a religion or spiritual connection and the women that aren’t that way tend to have a harder time linking ritual to their lives.” Several of the sorority women view ritual as “what brings us closer to one another and God. It is kind of hard to explain...for me, it all brings you back to God and the Bible.” “Ritual is almost like a church service. It is very solemn, contemplative, formal and you get the feeling like you are in a church.”

One woman said that she actually realized what ritual was through a bible study:

It took me about a year and a half to really get ritual . . . it was actually weird because during bible study I started realizing what ritual is about . . . it’s cool because that is how I learned and realized what ritual meant to me.

Yet another said:

Our ritual ceremony is simple and not very complex. I think that it has simplified my life as I focus on my Christianity, my faith . . . I think that is what was really strengthened by our ritual . . . our ritual has helped me become and understand who God is and what He has given us.

Several of the participants related the ritual ceremony to that of a church service with some of them using the analogy of some type of Catholic service or ritual specifically:

The initiation ceremony so far is my favorite ritual that I have participated in. I haven't gone through when anyone else is initiated, but my initiation just meant a lot to me. I am Catholic and initiation reminded me of when I went through confirmation in a weird way. It was just a very powerful moment and it was just a good bonding experience. Everyone in the chapter was there and it was very sacred.

As indicated in Chapter II, some of the sororities were founded on religious principles. Therefore, the participants' association between religious beliefs and the ritual ceremony was not unexpected. For many of the participants, the very nature of the ritual in a ceremonial context invoked association with religious ceremonies, even if they did not see themselves as "religious" or "spiritual" women.

#### Sorority Women's Perception of Ritual

The second theme conveyed by the participants' descriptions was the sorority women's perception of ritual. Although participants commented on the different types of ritual ceremonies, the primary reference to ritual was the initiation ceremony: "Initiation is the most sacred ritual." Several other references were made to ritual as the initiation ceremony. Therefore, the second theme details three major descriptions as to the participants' perception of ritual: (a) ritual as a bonding experience, (b) ritual as a tradition, and (c) ritual as a required activity.

#### Ritual as a Bonding Experience

Many participants indicated that ritual was a bonding experience to bring the chapter together: "The general purpose of ritual is to bring us together and realize why we are here."

They see the ritual ceremony as something that assists them in becoming not just friends but, in their terms, “sisters”:

Before you go through initiation, you can be really good friends with the girls . . . but until you go through that ceremony, you are not really sisters with them. You really bond to that point so that you do feel like sisters and you understand why it is done this way. It brings you closer to those people and it helps you to understand why you are all together.

Roy Rappaport (1979) stated:

In many rituals strong emotions are engendered and consciousness altered. Not infrequently there is a feeling of ‘loss of self’ – that is, a loss of the sense of separation – and a feeling of union with the other members of the congregation (p. 138).

This coming together of the whole reinforces that the bonding between sorority members and the feeling of union can last beyond the ceremony itself. Other participants seem to have no doubt that they are “bonding” to one another because the ritual ceremony serves to remind them of the purpose of their organization:

Ritual is to remind people on an annual basis why they are there. After initiation, people seem to be a lot closer because they remember why they joined their sorority and why we do this even though people complain about the ceremony taking forever . . . they still remember why they joined the sorority.

The participants made a number of references about ritual giving a deeper meaning to the sorority: “I think ritual is beautiful . . . it is something that binds us and has a deeper meaning than what you see on the surface.”

The “hidden or secret” concept of ritual, according the participants, is part of the bonding experience they share through the ritual ceremony:

Ritual is to reveal the secrets of your sorority and only you and your sisters know those secrets. Ritual is what bonds you to one another and to the sorority because all of a sudden your eyes are just opened to absolutely everything about your sorority and nothing is secret anymore. You finally feel like you are sisters with those people.

One of the participants explained why ritual is “secret”:

Ritual is there to bond us together and it is not anything to be afraid of. It is secret because it is something that we have as a sorority, which bonds us together. It is not because we are doing something bad that we have to hide from the outside world, it is just something special that we share between us as sisters and it enhances our bond to one another.

Some participants explained ritual as a bonding experience because they perceived that ritual created continuity beyond their personal experience:

If we didn’t have ritual, we wouldn’t keep ongoing relationships with sisters because there would be no continuity and there would be nothing that would be passed down. You can only pass friendships so far, but ritual is that stuff that sororities were founded on and that is what makes the difference.

Several participants also mentioned ritual as bonding them to other women who are members of their sorority but who are members at another chapter or even older women who are no longer undergraduate members: “Ritual is what connects different generations and different chapters.”

An additional comment was made that acknowledged this as well:

Ritual is a secret that you share with one common bond. Everybody in our chapter is different, but when we do the ritual ceremony, it brings us all together. Even if you are young or old, you could even be an 80-year old member of our sorority and we all know the same thing and that is our ritual.

The theme of “connection” continued to surface as the participants described their perception of the meaning of ritual:

Ritual is to make a connection and to realize that we share something that most people will never understand . . . you realize that ritual is the only thing that every single chapter of your national organization has in common are your ritual ceremonies.

Participants indicated connection and bonding as concepts that “tied” them in some way to the ritual ceremonies. Earlier discussion suggests that the original purpose of consistent ritual was to provide traditions that could be consistent between chapters in various locations and that would live on long after the founders of the groups. These comments made by participants indicate that the original purpose is still being met in today’s sorority chapters. The emphasis on “bonding” and connection to their founding connects to the sorority women’s view of ritual as a “tradition.”

### Ritual as a Tradition

Several of the participants referred to the ritual ceremony as a tradition of their sorority that had been established years ago. The participants’ perceptions were that the ceremony was a “key tradition of their sorority” and the reason “why the sorority had been in existence for so many years.”

The theme of ritual as a bonding experience is closely related to ritual as a tradition as perceived by the sorority women. Participants made consistent references to ritual as a tradition connecting the sororities back to their founding. Some of the reference have been to bonding the current sorority women to their founders: “Our sorority ritual really keeps to our traditions . . . nothing has ever changed.” The sorority women recognize that they are connected to their founders because of the ritual ceremony:

The greater picture of ritual is probably the most important part of the sorority because of all the tradition and all of the history. That is what our founders wanted to be done years ago when they started our sorority and I think that is significant.

The constant reference to their founding indicates that the participants see the ritual ceremony as an explanation of the purpose of their sorority:

The purpose of the initiation ceremony is most definitely to show the new members what our chapter really is and what it was founded on.

During new member education, you learn the Greek alphabet, what your colors mean, who your founders are and what date your sorority was founded, but you are not learning these morals and standards that your sorority is about and what your founders founded your sorority on. The initiation ceremony is where you really learn it all . . . it all ties into the same one solid principle that overrides throughout your sorority.

Certain participants referenced the purpose of the ritual ceremony was to pass on the “tradition” and was the main reason why their sorority existed:

Without our rituals, our sororities don’t exist. Ritual is continuing what was started one hundred years ago and passing it onto the newer sisters.

One of the most interesting comments mentioned a tie between history as the “past” and the “future”:

Ritual was designed to make the sorority more meaningful and to help you to understand that what you are doing is important. Ritual is to pass on a sense of history with the group. Ritual is like a template of where to go in the future. It is taking where we have come from, where we are now and we are going.

These references to ritual as “tradition” establishes the participants’ understanding that they participate in an experience that connects them to the past and to the future.

#### Ritual as a Required Activity

Several of the participants indicated that they saw the ritual ceremonies as another activity that was part of their sorority experience. The participants perceived the ritual ceremonies as an activity that they were required do in order to be considered an active member of the sorority. Some of the participants indicated that monetary penalties were imposed on members if they did not participate in ritual:

Our rituals are mandatory so when you don’t come, you get fined. And I think that is why a lot of people feel like they have to be there and they don’t really want to be and they

shouldn't really be there anyway because it doesn't mean anything to them. The only reason they are there is so they don't have to pay a fine.

Yet another indicated the physical presence of members at ritual ceremonies, but a distinct absence of understanding the ceremony:

I know that there are definitely some people in my chapter that ritual is just not their thing. One of my friends in my sorority has anxiety and she doesn't do well with certain retreats and things like that and sitting in circles or holding hands and stuff. She can not do it because she gets so nervous and she hates it. The majority of the women in my chapter come to ritual because they have to because the initiation fine is like \$500. I doubt they really listen. I have seen coloring books in the initiation.

Participants indicated that those members who saw the ritual ceremony as merely a required activity of the sorority did not have a positive impression of ritual:

There are some members of my sorority who think that ritual is stupid and don't want to be there because it takes too long or the room that the ceremony is taking place in is too hot.

On several occasions, the participants themselves expressed that ritual was "boring":

I think that ritual is boring. Initiation is not my favorite event because it takes a long time. We have other rituals and I like the ones that are more traditional to my chapter. Rituals are good I guess, but I just think that initiation is boring and no one ever wants to go. You have to sit there for a really long time and read this stuff out of a book and it takes four hours and it is just not the most entertaining thing.

Participants who labeled ritual as a "boring" ceremony or as something "that they had to do" indicated a lack of any connection between their sorority experience and their feelings toward ritual. They may have enjoyed their sorority experience because of other aspects, such as social or what they referred to as "sisterhood," but for those participants, the ritual ceremony was not one of their favorite aspects of their sorority experience.

## Women's Development within the Sorority Experience

The third major theme revolved around the participants' perception of their personal development, as well as the development of others who were sharing the sorority experience. The perspective of the participants led to the identification of three components within this theme: (a) sorority women's length of membership, (b) sorority women's level of maturity, and (c) sorority women's level of responsibility within the sorority.

### Sorority Women's Length of Membership

Many of the participants acknowledged a developmental change in themselves as well as other members during their years in the sorority. Some of the participants indicated that ritual ceremonies became more meaningful to them as they "grew up" in their sorority. The participants indicated that their perception of ritual was better understood as they developed within the sorority. A few of the participants conveyed feelings of disinterest in the ritual ceremonies as they developed either because they no longer felt connected to the sorority in general or because they did not see the relevance of the ritual ceremony in their lives any longer.

Several of the women indicated that appreciation of ritual changed from their freshman year: "Through time, you appreciate ritual more every year. As a freshman, you don't really appreciate it as much as you do as a senior." Yet another said:

When you are a freshman or when you first join the sorority, you appreciate the ritual because it is a beautiful ceremony, but as you get older, you start understanding it. You begin to understand ritual and then you have feelings and emotions about it and the more you understand it, the more you want to learn.

Most of the women perceived ritual as something that changed as they grew in their sorority:

It took me near the end of my freshman year to begin to 'get it'. I am a junior and I am still realizing things about ritual and I am like, this is cool, I never realized that before . . . I am still learning every day...I see ritual like a stepping stone or a rite of passage into the

next four years. You are no longer a freshman baby anymore, now you are really a college student.

Many of the women referenced the freshman and senior years specifically. Several of the sorority women explained ritual and what it meant from the senior year perspective:

I think that ritual means different things to different people and that everyone takes something different from it. Ritual is like a poem, you can dig into it as much as you want and find what ever you want from it. A lot of seniors tell me that by the end of your senior year, you have taken so much out of ritual just because you have had so many experiences and that it means more to you than it did as a freshman, sophomore, or junior. You see the seniors get teary eyed when they recite our purpose and you know that these words have meaning to them. It's because they have had experience when they have dealt with the meaning of those words and they really understand why they are there.

The need for ritual and a better understanding of the role of ritual seem to develop as the participants became older and were possibly looking for more from their sorority experience:

I think that especially for the older women, ritual means so much to them...for them, the whole sorority is purely based around ritual but for me, there are other aspects of the sorority that are just as equally important. I think that as I get older, ritual will become the most important part of the sorority.

One of the younger participants said "I am not really sure what kind of role ritual plays in my life because I have only been a members for one semester, so I don't know what role it plays yet."

Several of the participants indicated that understanding ritual is not the same for every person:

A lot of understanding ritual has to do with as you get older . . . with 110 members, there are 110 different opinions. Last year was my third year in the sorority and I thought ritual was great, but as you look around the room during the ritual ceremony, you see some of the members who are just like let's get this over with because I have other things that I could be doing.

Comments from several of the participants indicated that many of the members of their chapters did not understand ritual, therefore, it may not mean as much to them no matter what age they are or year they are in the chapters:

I think that our chapter is split. Ritual for the members who don't really understand, it is hard for them to apply it to their lives because they just don't understand. To chapter members who understand ritual like me, you just learn more about yourself and other as time goes on.

A few of the sorority women indicated that they felt that they had outgrown the ritual and their sororities in general:

As you get older, you just don't really care about ritual anymore and I think that a lot of the older members feel that way. I have changed through my years...when I first learned about ritual, I saw it as something that I should take through my life, then I stopped listening, it just became something that I had to attend. Now that I am a senior, I get fined if I don't go to ritual, so I have to be there.

Another woman explained that other priorities had taken the place of the sorority experience:

When I was a freshman and a sophomore, I did not understand why the seniors were so apathetic towards things. I think that the time between sophomore and senior year, you are just completely older. When I was a freshman, going out was my biggest experience, now my biggest experience is having lived in a foreign country by myself for three months where I didn't speak the language. Different types of experiences are way more significant and way more difficult to accomplish than pledging a sorority and now I see the sorority and ritual as a little bit more trivial.

Another women said that she "really liked ritual her first two years in the sorority, but as a junior and senior, maybe you're tired of the repetitiveness of it."

One of the participants expressed disappointment with the way that ritual was received by the women in her chapter:

I think that there are probably only a few women in my chapter who understand ritual. It is really hard for my sorority because no one really understands ritual . . . not even the older members get it. We have lost a lot of rituals and traditions in the five years that I

have been in my chapter. I am really trying to bring the rituals back since this is my last year, but I have had a lot of resistance and people are sort of bothered by what I am trying to do.

The sorority women's reference to ritual may be more indicative of events happening in their lives than of the ritual ceremony itself. Several of the participants indicated that if ritual or something "with deeper meaning" was not a part of their chapter experience, then their interest in the sorority waned because things with more meaning took precedence in their lives.

These responses suggest that the developmental growth process of the participants did affect the relevance as well as the application of the ritual ceremony. The relevance of the ceremonies either improved or diminished as the participants developed.

#### Sorority Women's Level of Maturity

Several of the participants identified maturity as a factor in their understanding of the role of ritual ceremonies or affecting the role of the ceremonies in their sorority experience. The participants indicated that their ability to understand or appreciate the role of the ritual ceremony had to do with their personal maturity level. Some of the sorority women said that the ritual ceremony and their sorority experience actually helped them to mature: "My sorority's ritual has taught me so much as a person and has just helped me mature and it has helped me become a lady . . . and a better person." Several of the participants referenced reasons why they joined a sorority in the first place and indicated that they did not know nor did they care if ritual ceremonies were involved in sororities. If the participants did know that ritual was a part of the sorority experience, it was usually negative and something that they had learned about from others, television, or their parents. One participant even indicated "people probably see ritual as a cult thing."

When I first joined my sorority, I really didn't know anything about ritual, I did not even know that ceremonies went on...the fact that there is this side of sororities has helped me to mature. I am not saying that ritual has been a huge transition or a huge part of my life, but it is definitely played a part.

One participant said, "some of our members are very immature and they just don't get it."

Several references were made to maturity and life: "In college, you mature and you decide who you are going to be when you are an adult and ritual helps you to do that."

Ritual is not only an introduction to the sorority, it is also a turning point in your life as you become a woman. You are learning that you can choose what values you stand for...it is also an introduction to life.

Some participants' comments regarding maturity displayed disdain for other members and the reasons that those members entered the sorority:

I think it's what they went into the sorority system to find their future husbands and to party throughout college or where they are going to find a group of close friends that they would be able to carry with them throughout their life. And maybe they joined their sorority as a way to become involved with the campus, to do philanthropies and it really depends on what their ideas going into it are and what they want to get out of it. And then as far as the maturity goes a lot of times it's what year they are. You might have a member that doesn't give a flip her first three years and then all of a sudden at her senior farewell she is crying hysterically. Their time in the sorority is going to fly by and I think a lot of members don't really appreciate what they have until it's being taken away from them.

This is, again, consistent with the fact that different women have different values that they seek in a sorority. As stated earlier, many participants sought environments that had values and beliefs that were similar to the ones they held. This comment indicates that these values are not always the same for each person. It may not be the ethical standards and values expressed in ritual that some women sought, but rather some type of other value, such as friendship, popularity, physical attractiveness, or social opportunity. The comment also implies that those values may change

over time, demonstrating that the member finally appreciates the sorority experience. The participants seem to indicate that this maturation process is demonstrated near the end of the undergraduate membership period, as women realize that they will miss the sorority experience. What the participants may not realize is that the woman will miss the things she values, which are not necessarily the values expressed through ritual.

The participants indicated several times that the sorority experience helps them to develop and grow: “When you see everyone else in the chapter is developing and growing, it helps you realize what you want to do and how you can grow as a person.”

One of the participants indicated that because she joined her sorority her second year in college, that it meant something different to her than it meant to others:

I was already in my second year in college when I joined the sorority and I think that I look at it from a completely different perspective than everyone else did. I saw the sorority as a really big commitment in the way that it was explained to me. They explained ritual as a very important ceremony that you will remember forever. You are supposed to grasp the importance of what you’re doing and to know that you are committing yourself to an organization for life. I think that ritual should always be presented in a mature way and that the importance of the commitment is stressed. I am proud to be a member of my sorority, but I think a lot of my feelings have to do with the way that it was presented to me.

#### Sorority Women’s Level of Responsibility within the Sorority

The final sub theme that developed out of this theme as indicated by the participants is the effect that the level of responsibility within the sorority has on their understanding of ritual:

Because I am a leader in my sorority and on campus, people are watching me constantly. I do have to live by leadership, sisterhood, scholarship, and ritual. You have to realize that others expect you to live by those things and I expect that of myself.

As further explained in Chapter V, Gilligan (1982) expresses moral development in Levels. This realization that others are aware or “watching” is a step in progressing out of Level 1. Some of

the participants referred to other members who held officer positions in their chapter and that those women were the reason why ritual was important to them:

The president of my chapter is the real reason why I understand ritual and why I joined my particular sorority. She embodies everything and she felt ritual and sisterhood were very important. She taught the importance of ritual because it was important to her.

The participants referenced that having a position of responsibility in the chapter helped them to learn and to understand ritual:

Being an officer, ritual is really important to know it. This all goes back to the more times you see ritual, the more you know it and the more you understand it. It's hard starting out because it is a lot to take in and stuff. I definitely think it is about time and just depends on the age of the person and how willing they are to learn about ritual. I think, also if people begin to notice if you stray away from the way that they remember ritual to be done, if something is not right and if there is one difference, people notice that and they will be like, wait a minute, why did we do that this way. I think that proves to me that if somebody comes to me and says wait something is different or how come we didn't do this even if there is one small detail that was overlooked that reassures me that the chapter is kind of up to snuff and they are kind of well aware of what is supposed to be expected of them. And I know for our chapter, every year we have a national consultant and we are reviewed as to what we know about the ritual.

The participants seem to associate understanding ritual and knowing its importance with being an officer or holding some level of responsibility in their chapter.

### Ritual Ceremony and Behavior

While many of the comments made by the participants reflected the themes detailed in the above sections, some of the participants made direct mention of their experience of ritual impacting their behavior. Some of the participants indicated a clear connection to their behavior as it relates to the ritual ceremonies, stating, "Ritual is like making a decision in everyday life. If you are going to do it in ritual, you should believe it and do it and practice it in everyday life."

Another participant explained that ritual set ideals for which to strive:

Ritual is very much something that I try and incorporate into my daily life. It's a high standard and it's not an easy thing to obtain, but you try your best and your goal basically is just do a little bit more the next day. You can't expect to execute every principle mentioned instantaneously, it just doesn't happen. You have your shortcomings, but you just try and get a little bit better each day.

Some participants indicated that ritual could provide guidelines, a road map, by which to make decisions and to live their lives:

I think of some parts of ritual in everyday behavior more than other parts...honestly, if I am looking to try to make a really big decision about something, I look at my religious values, I look at the values that my parents taught me and I also look at the things my sorority tells me in my initiation ceremony. That is for something that is a really big decision . . . as far as what I am doing day by day, I think that the ritual that we do in our chapter meeting probably influences me more. I don't sit down and think every day well if I do this, what's going to happen? Let me think back to initiation. I think more along the lines of it becomes part of your everyday values system and you do the chapter meeting ritual more than initiation. So I think that different parts influence you a lot more but ultimately you see it all as ritual.

Others view ritual as guidelines for improving their chapter:

Ritual gives us a sense of purpose and a kind of a guideline of how to live and how to try to improve our chapter. The only way to improve your chapter is to improve your members because the quality of the chapter is dependent on the quality of the members. Ritual also reminds us that we need to help each other and that we should not be judgmental of people...ritual kind of reminds you that as much as you would like to think that you are perfect sometimes and that you couldn't possibly do something as stupid as maybe somebody else has, that everybody needs improvement. You need to try to help each other rather than criticizing each other because you know it's what we are there for to help each other, not to attack each other.

Several participants recognized their role in furthering the ideals set forth by their sorority's rituals:

The way I act when I am out, I always remember the things in our creed and the things that go on in ritual and that I am representing my chapter.

I think that ritual has made me a better person because I look to the people that initiated me as role models. They represented the ideals of our sorority and they displayed that behavior.

Our initiation ceremony has a great deal of impact on my behavior because I try to abide by pretty much everything that the ceremony says. You can't always follow everything because it is impossible, you would have to be a saint, but I try to stay focused on abiding by the values the initiation ceremony tries to show.

Some of the sorority women indicated that the ideals expressed in the sorority ritual were the same or similar to values that they had acquired elsewhere (in their family or in a religion, primarily), but that the sorority helped reaffirm those values:

Ritual is most definitely incorporated into other aspects of our lives. These aren't abstract principles that you wouldn't find anywhere else, they are principles that society values. For example if you see two sisters argue about something and its kind of stupid, you'll see somebody else kind of be like, wait now remember that our ritual basically says calm down, you are sisters and whatever it is you will work it out... this is not the end of the world and you will speak to each other again. Ritual just kind of makes you stop and pause and not say things that you shouldn't.

Even if ritual was never explained to me, I think that I exhibit what it means day to day in the way that I behave and how I interact with people outside of my sorority. These are things that you supposed to carry outside of your sorority. I like our ritual because it is very much about personal growth. The purpose of most Greek women's organizations is to better the people that are in them. It is not some organization to get all of your money and to exploit you. It is for you to grow as a person.

I wouldn't say that I carry the initiation ceremony around in my head and refer to the rituals whenever I face a moral dilemma or a question of some sort. I would say that going through our ritual which is in affect a sort of simulation of some moral dilemmas that a lot of women my age face has made me more capable of responding to those situations in a manner fitting to my chapter, my national affiliation and my own morals. That is why I joined my sorority. I wouldn't say that my initiation ceremony had a 100 percent impact on my behavior, but I would say that I was a different person post initiation and post pledging because if I had just done the initiation ceremony without everything else that I was required to do, I don't think that it would have had the same impact. I do believe that joining my sorority and then going through our initiation ceremony has changed my behavior in some ways for the positive.

A number of participants did not believe that ritual had an impact on their behavior.

Many who responded in such a way expressed that they did not understand ritual nor enjoy it:

I don't really think any of our rituals apply to my daily life. Maybe the meaning of them does I just don't understand the meaning of them. As far as what I thought of them and the stuff that I did because it was ritual, I don't ever really think about it.

If we took a vote and I said: A is ceremony, B is incorporate into your life. I would say it would probably be 60 / 40 with the majority saying ritual is just a ceremony. It is very difficult because most girls come into the chapter and they see the sorority as just what I am doing in college this is just for fun and a way to get scholarship and leadership experience.

I honestly don't really think about sorority ritual in my everyday life. I don't usually think about it except about ten or fifteen minutes past the ritual meetings but, then again, in my sorority, we don't really do everything right. We don't really do ritual that often. What we do do, we tend to down-size it a lot by making things really quicker, so for me it is hard to say ritual really stands out outside of my chapter because we really don't do it.

There are a few women in my chapter who see ritual and who see initiation and the ceremonies that we have to perform as a waste of time.

I think that are some members in my chapter that just see it as a ceremony and just think it's uhhhh. Then there are the ones that don't really come around and you know they see it more as like a pain to go to the ceremony. Then there are some that are just gung ho and they influence the girls and how much they care about ritual.

There are definitely extremes in our chapter. There are definitely the girls that could fall asleep during ritual and there are also girls who will cry because the girl sitting next to her is sleeping and doesn't feel the same way that she does.

One participant indicated that she wished that ritual did have more of an impact on her behavior:

Sometimes I wish that I would use ritual more in my daily life. When I go through the ritual again I am reminded of everything that is special to me and it kind of makes me feel a little bit guilty that I am not doing my best as a person and sometimes I wish that I could do more as a sorority member. That kind of affects me.

The reasons that the participants gave for the impact, or lack of impact, of ritual in their lives varied, but many were quite aware that ritual did make an impact, either in a big or small way. Some expressed desire for greater understanding and greater impact.

### Summary

These findings give insight for those who work with sorority women and emphasize the need to evaluate the role of ritual and its impact on the values and behavior of contemporary sorority women. Several questions were raised by the data regarding the ways the recruitment of women by sororities. Do sororities recruit women who have values that are similar to those expressed in their ritual ceremonies or do they recruit women for other reasons? Can the ritual ceremonies be a foundation to hold members accountable for their behavior? Can programs be developed to help the sorority women understand their development and use that as a means to keep them involved in their sorority? To examine the questions raised by this research, a summary of the study, discussion of the conclusions drawn from the findings, and recommendations for future research are discussed in Chapter V.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation focused on the impact of sorority rituals on the behavior and values of contemporary sorority women. Specifically, I studied sorority undergraduate women and their experiences with ritual and what impact the ritual ceremony had on their values and behavior. Sorority women and their experiences with ritual were explored through a detailed analysis of their stories as told in their own words. This final chapter begins with the summary of the study, discusses the common themes that emerged during the data analysis, and relates these themes to the current body of literature pertinent to this study. The data analysis is followed by recommendations for future research and conclusions.

#### Summary of the Study

The participants for this study were sorority women at four-year colleges and universities within the United States. The interviews were conducted as individual interviews and in focus group interviews. Nine focus groups on eight different campuses were conducted. The campuses were from various parts of the United States. I conducted 23 individual interviews on seven different campuses, interviewing 51 sorority women. The campuses were chosen based upon their geographic location, the type of institution (public or private), the size of institution (large or small), the type of sorority community that was on that campus, and my ability as a researcher to travel to that institution. The same questions were used for the individual and focus group interviews. The focus groups were comprised of two to eight sorority women either from the same chapter or different chapters on the same campus. The women were selected randomly and asked to volunteer to participate in the study either by a chapter officer, the Greek advisor, or me.

This study included both private and public institutions with enrollments ranging from 1,200 to 35,000 graduate and undergraduate students. Chapter sizes ranged in membership from 10 members to 210 members. Some participants lived in sorority facilities such as houses or residence halls, and others were commuter students. I planned interviews with this criteria established in order to create a range of various sorority experiences. The criteria included sorority women from various size campuses from different parts of the country, various size chapters, as well as residential and commuter campuses. Some of the chapters were older, more traditional chapters, while some were young and growing. Some of the chapters were part of large national/international sororities while others were part of smaller national/international sororities. The sorority women ranged from sophomores to seniors. They were officers, committee members, and regular members who do not hold positions in the chapters. Some of them were older members while others were newly initiated members.

### Discussion of Common Themes

In this section, I present and discuss the findings that appeared to be significant to my study. In structuring this section, the major themes the participants identified when discussing their understanding of ritual are: (a) sorority women's beliefs and values; (b) sorority women's perception of ritual; and (c) women's development within the sorority experience.

#### Sorority Women's Beliefs and Values

The first major theme captured the participants' perception regarding their beliefs and values, as well as the impact, if any, that ritual has on those beliefs and values. Two primary components framed the participants' feelings about the ritual ceremony and their beliefs and values: (a) previous beliefs and (b) religious beliefs. Several of the participants stated that they valued the ritual ceremony experience because it was similar to religious types of ceremonies that

have been important to them, even going as far as to use words such as “sacred” and “spiritual” to describe ritual.

One distinguishing characteristic that continued to emerge was that the participants entered the sorority with an established value system. For most, their parents instilled this value system in them. Some of the sorority women voiced that they did not join a sorority with the expectation that the sorority was going to teach them values. The expectation was either that the sorority would reaffirm or compliment the values that they held or that the sorority experience was going to be something that they would enjoy and values did not enter into the decision process. Participants did not expect sorority membership to change their prior beliefs and values. Several of them indicated that their personal beliefs and values were similar to the “standards” of their sorority, but that the ritual itself did not form those values for those women. None of the participants indicated that they expected the sorority to provide a value system to them.

Some women indicated that the values expressed and demonstrated by the sorority helped them in choosing which sorority to join. They decided to join a group that had values that were similar to their own. Values stated and displayed during membership recruitment by the sorority members made an impression on those women who were deciding which group to join. These values were expressed either during the sharing of sorority creeds and mottoes or were demonstrated through the words and actions of the members.

The participants who indicated that they were aware of the sorority values prior to joining indicated that those values did have an impact when deciding which sorority they ultimately wanted to join. This process clearly illustrates Heider’s attribution theory, as explained by Aronson et al. (1999). The women seek a like-minded group of women and desire to join a group with a similar value system either because they want to behave in a certain way because of their

internal value system or they know they will be held to a certain behavior by the situation in which they place themselves. They seek a group that will reinforce the beliefs that they hold to be important.

Several of the participants indicated similarities between sorority ritual and religious types of ceremonies that have been important to them. Some of the participants used words such as “sacred” and “spiritual” to exemplify the parallels that they perceived between the sorority ritual and religious ceremonies. Several of the participants related the ritual ceremony to that of a church service with some of them using the analogy of some type of Catholic service or ritual specifically. These participants see ritual as solemn, contemplative, and formal. The ritual atmosphere, including candles, singing, and recitation of some type of vows or promises, invokes thoughts of weddings or other religious ceremonies. The participants’ association between religious beliefs and the ritual ceremony was not unexpected as some of the sororities were founded on religious principles and many incorporate religious symbols into their rituals. For many of the participants, the very nature of the ritual in a ceremonial context invoked association with religious ceremonies, even if they did not see themselves as “religious” or “spiritual” women.

#### Sorority Women’s Perception of Ritual

The second theme conveyed by the participants’ descriptions was the sorority women’s perception of ritual as a bonding experience, as a tradition, or as a required activity. The sorority women stated that participation in ritual serves to remind them of the purpose of their organization. They indicated that ritual made them focus on what was important and some went as far as to state that people actually treated other members with more respect after participating in ritual. Victor Turner (1969) noted this “restoration of behavior” as part of his investigation of

ritual from the performance perspective. Further, his theory that ritual can be looked at in five different ways explains the participants' references to ritual as a connection that bonds them together. Turner theorized that one way of viewing ritual is "as a structure, connecting with formal qualities and relationships." This connecting of relationships is clearly experienced by the participants. They indicated ritual as a connection of sisters within the chapter, chapters with other chapters, and even today's members with the (deceased) founding members of their organization. Turner also stated that ritual can be viewed "as experience, as what a person individually or as part of a collective feels." This, too, is supported by the women's comments. They spoke of ritual giving a deeper meaning to the sorority. One participant echoed Turner's description of ritual "as a performance process" by stating that the way that the ritual is presented makes the difference in if it is understood.

Several of the participants indicated that they saw the ritual ceremonies as activities that they were required to do in order to be considered active members of the sorority. Some of the participants indicated that monetary penalties were imposed on members if they did not participate in ritual. Participants who labeled ritual as a "boring" ceremony or as something "that they had to do" indicated a lack of any connection between their sorority experience and their feelings toward ritual. They may have enjoyed their sorority experience because of other aspects, such as social or what they referred to as "sisterhood," but for those participants, the ritual ceremony was not a meaningful experience.

#### Women's Development Within the Sorority Experience

The third major theme revolved around the participants' perception of their personal development, as well as the development of others who were sharing the sorority experience. The perspective of the participants led to the identification of three components within this theme: (a)

sorority women's length of membership, (b) sorority women's level of maturity, and (c) sorority women's level of responsibility within the sorority.

Throughout this study, the participants' personal development was constantly interwoven with their views concerning ritual. Most of the participants shared a belief that personal development had occurred throughout their years as members of the sorority. Several of the participants based their responses on their perceptions of themselves and others based their responses on their perceptions of other members of their chapters. Most often, the participants attributed their personal development as the reason behind the increase in their understanding and appreciation of the ritual ceremonies. The participants did not seem to attribute this development so much to women's development as they referenced their development as students. Though unaware of it themselves, the participants clearly exhibit Gilligan's (1982) Female Stages of Moral Reasoning. At Level 1, the participants show that they make decisions based on what is best for them. They chose a sorority that can provide to them those experiences and values that they seek. As they progress through the Levels, Gilligan's (1982) First Transition finds them with an awareness of responsibility. The sorority women realize that they have a responsibility to attend the ritual ceremonies, even if it is because of the threat of monetary penalties for nonattendance. The progression to Level 2 occurs as the sorority women develop a societal perspective. They began to see their role in passing on traditions to the younger members. They realize that they have a responsibility, not because of monetary penalty, but because of their role in the traditions and history of their organization. They develop the realization that they are a key connection between the sisters of the past and the sisters of the future. As they move into Level 3, they can begin to focus on the dynamic between themselves and others. At this point, they are willing to become an active and valid participant in decision-making processes. They become

officers and leaders of the group. For several of the participants, serving as an officer or having responsibility in their chapter created a deeper understanding of the ritual ceremonies and greater sense of understanding the role of ritual in the lives and in their sorority experience. What was particularly interesting was that most of the participants who indicated that they were officers referenced the ritual ceremonies and what role the ceremonies had on their awareness of their behavior, values, and the decisions that they made as the leaders of their chapters. The participants emphasized the importance of their officer position and the expectations of the other members of their chapters as it related to their behavior.

Conversely, several of the participants expressed that the importance of the ritual ceremony had actually decreased as they developed and matured. Some of the participants attributed these feelings of less connectedness because they were not close to the “younger members” of their chapter. A few of the participants felt that the younger members did not understand or feel the same way as they had when they were younger in their chapters. The ritual ceremonies, therefore, were not central to their relationships with the other members of their chapters. In evaluating these comments in light of Gilligan’s (1982) theory, it would indicate that these participants have not progressed past Level 1. They are still preoccupied with self-interest and still making decisions on what is best for themselves, without consideration for others. They blame their lack of interest on others and do not accept responsibility for what they ought to do.

The focus of sorority life must be on the quality of the experience that the sorority is providing to its members. In order to operate some chapters, especially those maintaining large living facilities, the size of the organization sometimes becomes the most important factor. More important is that the chapter provides a positive experience for its members and that the members understand the ritual aspect as well as they understand the social aspect. Some would argue that

when an 18-year old woman joins a sorority she is not looking for ritual, but the entire premise from which members are recruited is fundamental to the potential development of that member. I have been asked if sororities help women be better women or do they help sorority women be better sorority women. Based upon some of the responses that I received from the participants in this study, it appears that sororities have the potential to help make women better women and not just better sorority women; however, some the students' responses indicate that, in many cases, they separate themselves as to when they are on sorority time and when they are not. Responses such as "when I am wearing my letters, I know that I am representing my sorority" and "when I am at a sorority function I know that I supposed to behave a certain way" indicate that, for some women, they see themselves as sorority women sometimes and at other times, they are on their own time. Sororities can help women be better but they must educate their members in the context of being better women and not just being better sorority women.

### Ritual Ceremony and Behavior

While many of the comments made by the participants reflected the themes detailed in the above sections, some of the participants indicated a clear connection to their behavior as it relates to the ritual ceremonies, stating, "Ritual is like making a decision in everyday life. If you are going to do it in ritual, you should believe it and do it and practice it in everyday life."

The participants expressed that their experience concerning the ritual ceremonies varied based upon several components. The participants shared that the members of their chapter's attitude toward ritual often times varied from their personal perspective. At the same time, they provided insights about how their own beliefs affected what role the ritual ceremonies had in their lives.

Some of the participants described ritual as strictly a ceremony and that, outside of the time spent in the actual ceremony, it did not have an impact on their lives. Several of the participants indicated that they felt that the ceremony was boring and had no relevance in their lives and that it was just one part of their sorority experience. More often, however, participants provided indications that the majority of the members in their chapter did not understand the meaning of the ritual ceremony. For those members who don't understand the meaning of ritual, the ceremonies seemed to be something that was a part of their sorority experience, but was not connected to their life outside of the ceremony.

While most participants who referenced ritual as impacting their behavior provided specific reasons for that connection, as detailed in above sections, others acknowledged the impact of ritual but did not connect it to a specific reason. They seemed to realize that the symbolism of the ritual ceremony represented, in some ways, the growth process of "real life," even if that understanding was at a level of which that were unaware. That is to say that they internalized the symbolism and allowed it to affect their everyday behavior, even if they didn't understand how the two concepts fit together.

It is most interesting that the participants' answers seemed to fall into three distinct categories regarding the impact of ritual on their behavior. For most of the sorority women, a clear distinction existed. Either they believed that ritual impacted their behavior or they believed that ritual did not impact their behavior. Other participants realized, upon reflection, that the values expressed in the ritual did impact their behavior, they had just never realized it prior to the research questions. Eisenhart's (1990) idea of acquiring a peer group culture, or "drawing to their own situation, and condensing its meaning for their own use" applies here in that "condensing its meaning for their own use" takes on a significant role in this process. For ritual to impact the

behavior of sorority women, it must first be understood by them. Once the meaning is made clear, ways of incorporating that meaning into their life must be provided. This meaning is not something that is understood by all women simply from participating in the ceremony.

The rituals were written during times that were very different than today. In order to maintain connections to that original foundation, sorority women need be taught practical applications of ritual in their lives. The responses from participants indicate that contemporary sorority women are not being taught that ritual is the foundation of their sororities. The underlying foundation of ritual as the purpose of the sorority must be reinforced, strengthened, and taught. Sorority women need to understand that ritual is not just a part of sorority life; rather, all other facets and activities of sorority life stem from ritual.

### Summary

The conclusions drawn from the findings in this study are summarized in this section. The following themes are directly related to and grounded in the research findings.

#### Sorority Women's Beliefs and Values

- \* For several of the participants, having a sense of their own beliefs and values prior to participating in the sorority in general and then in the ritual ceremonies had an impact on their feelings concerning the ritual ceremonies.
- \* Religious beliefs were perceived as important to a few of the participants' connectedness to the ritual ceremonies.
- \* Some of the participants described themselves and others as not having a sense of values and beliefs that was connected to the ritual ceremonies in any way.

### Sorority Women's Perception of Ritual

- \* Ritual was perceived as a ceremony only and did not have an impact outside of the ceremony on some of the participants.
- \* Participants felt that ritual was just one of the activities that they had to participate in as part of the sorority.
- \* Many of the participants indicated that they viewed ritual as a tradition that connected the chapter to the sorority's beginnings.
- \* Ritual is a ceremony, symbols, creeds, poems, mottoes, traditions, bonds, and friendships that encompass the meaning of sorority for some of the participants.
- \* Some of the participants felt that ritual is not understood or valued as an integral part of the sorority experience.
- \* Several of the participants perceived ritual as standards and thought that they should live their lives according to these standards.

### Women's Development Within the Sorority Experience

- \* Development from freshmen to senior year within the sorority was a key element in the participants' understanding of the ritual ceremony and the sorority experience as a whole.
- \* The participants noted a transition in their behavior and attitudes toward ritual and in their sorority experience as a whole.
- \* Maturity is perceived as an important factor in the participants' attitude towards and understanding of the ritual ceremonies of the sorority.

- \* The level of responsibility and / or office position held has an impact on the participants' understanding of the role of the ritual ceremony in their experience and the overall experience of the chapter members.

### Ritual Ceremony and Behavior

- \* Ritual strictly performed as a ceremony influenced the way the participants perceived the role of ritual.
- \* Participants' perceptions of the role of ritual on their behavior is based upon their understanding of ritual as more than a ceremony.
- \* Participants who enter the sorority experience with a sense of personal values and beliefs exhibited a greater appreciation for the meaning of the ritual.
- \* Participants who understood the meaning and importance of ritual wanted ritual to be more of an integral part of their sorority experience.
- \* Many of the participants indicated that they had to participate in the ritual ceremonies several times to understand their meaning.

### Recommendations for Future Research

The initial foray into scholarly research on the impact of ritual on the behavior of contemporary sorority women opens the door for future research on this topic. Further research could explore how ritual impacts sorority women all from the same chapter at various stages in their development. Does the age of the sorority chapter affect the impact of ritual on its members? It would be interesting to know whether the sorority women from older chapters, founded seventy years or more, and the sorority women from younger chapters, founded within the last several years, are learning about sorority life differently. Further study could examine the ways that sorority chapter members are educated during their new member education program to

determine if that affects their perception of the role of the ritual ceremonies. Further research could be conducted to determine if the results are consistent in chapters from various geographical regions.

Qualitative study could be conducted on women who are members of historically black sororities from the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) to determine if they have the same perception of ritual ceremonies as the sorority members of National Panhellenic Conference (NPC).

The recruitment process of new members of sororities could be studied to determine the ways that the recruitment process affects their perceptions of the role of ritual ceremonies in the sorority experience.

Further research would be warranted on many aspects of sorority life. How is the lifetime commitment of sorority women impacted by the ways in which they were taught the meaning and performance of the ritual ceremonies? What role does ritual have on the chapter's discipline processes (i.e. standards board, discipline board, etc.)?

This research study created a foundation from which other studies on other populations and other aspects of sororities could be conducted. Future studies on similar populations would allow researchers and other entities to generalize their findings to other situations outside of this study. By broadening this study, greater generalizing would be achieved and would benefit the general body of knowledge concerning sororities and similar populations (i.e. other single sex organizations, other organizations that use ritual as part of their process, students of color, fraternity men).

In the future, other studies could incorporate their findings concerning the impact of ritual ceremonies on the overall sorority experience. These findings would provide future opportunities

to evaluate sorority women and the role of ritual in their sorority experience and in their development as women.

### Implications for Practice

The major implication for this research is the lack of prior studies concerning sororities in general and the ability to generalize these findings. With this in mind, it may be that sorority women need to be taught the meaning and purpose of the ritual ceremonies in their sorority experience. Another aspect that may strengthen the sorority women's understanding of the ritual ceremony may be for national sororities to facilitate and encourage discussion and develop workshops that would address the purpose of the ritual ceremonies and the ways in which they can be used to enhance the sorority member's experience.

### Undergraduate Sorority Women

Evidence in this study suggested that sorority women understand that ritual is a part of their sorority experience, but do not usually understand why. Chapters might consider implementing orientations for new members to address this conclusion. The orientations or workshops would stress the importance of the ritual ceremonies in the overall sorority experience. These activities would allow the new members to better understand how they should expect the ritual ceremonies to enhance their sorority experience and to help them to develop a connection to the members of their chapter as well as to the sorority itself.

### Sorority Advisors and Alumnae

Similar to undergraduate sorority women, sorority advisors and alumnae might consider creating opportunities for undergraduate members to form relationships with them which would allow the undergraduate sorority women to better understand ritual and lifetime commitment to their sororities. These opportunities might be formal or informal interactions. These interactions

would allow the undergraduates to ask questions of the advisors and alumnae as to why they have stayed committed to their sorority. They could also share common experiences and their feelings about the ritual ceremonies. Advisors and alumnae would therefore have a greater awareness of the important roles that they have in educating undergraduate sorority women about the importance of the ritual ceremonies.

### National Sororities

One of the most important conclusions of this study was that most of the participants had not been taught about ritual except by participating in the actual ceremonies. In addition, many of the participants indicated that they would like to understand ritual, not only as a ceremony, but how what is expressed in the ceremony can assist them in their lives by the way that they make decisions and choices. National sororities can develop programs and create opportunities for ritual to be taught not only from the performance aspect, but how it can be applicable to the lives of their members. These opportunities could help sorority women find balance in their experiences between social interaction, development of relationships, and the ritualistic aspect of sorority life. The national sororities might sponsor discussion nights when ritual is explained and dialogue about the meaning of ritual ceremonies would occur. Many of the participants indicated that they only participated in the initiation ceremony once a year. The national sororities might develop a program that explains all of the ritual ceremonies of their organization and what they mean to the overall sorority experience.

### University Administrators

Based upon the participants' expressed desire for a better understanding of the ritual ceremonies by their chapter members, university administrators who work with sororities might want to provide support to those chapters that want to have a deeper understanding about who

they are and what role ritual has in their sorority experience. Part of this support might be to provide resources such as videos, written information, educational speakers and programs as well as to assist in educating the sorority women as to how to facilitate discussion about ritual. The concern by the national sororities may once again be the secrecy of the ceremonies, however, this study is an example that it is possible to discuss the meaning of ritual and how to incorporate it into other aspects of the participants' lives without revealing the individual organization's secrets. Providing support and an opportunity for dialogue may be all that some of the sorority women need to open these discussions with their chapter.

In summary, sorority women, sorority advisors and alumnae, national sororities, and university administrators need to increase their understanding of their role regarding the education of the ritual aspect of sorority life. It might be that sorority women have gotten so focused on the social and competitive aspects of sororities that they have lost sight of the purpose of the ritual ceremonies. Perhaps, sorority advisors and alumnae perceive today's sorority women as very different from themselves and have no common bond with them, therefore, making it difficult to find a connection. It might be that the national organizations have taken for granted that chapters understand the ritual ceremonies, that they perform them correctly and with care, and that the chapter members are teaching one another the importance of ritual. Furthermore, it may be that university administrators have perceived the education of ritual to be a chapter or national responsibility and have assumed that the role of ritual is understood within the chapters.

One of the interview questions asked: "What are some of your suggestions as to how ritual can be taught?" Many of the participants indicated that they did not believe that ritual could be taught, "it was something you learned by just going through the ceremonies". Several of the women from the same affiliation indicated that their national sorority had implemented a

program in 2001 that would teach ritual and its importance to the chapter experience and in their daily lives. They said that the program focused on sophomore members.

Some of the participants expressed that ritual was “boring and long”. Several of them indicated it might take all day to initiate some of the large groups of new members. The rituals were written at a time in the history of these organizations when the groups were much smaller in size than some of the chapters have become today. It may be that the National organizations need to evaluate if the rituals written in the early days of the sororities can apply to groups the size of some of the current chapters. The ways in which these ceremonies are taught to the chapters and how they are performed based upon the size of a particular chapter is a crucial aspect of the performance of ritual. Ritual should be explained and taught to the chapters possibly by a national officer or a local alumna. Sororities cannot assume that ritual is understood to be an important part of an undergraduate chapter’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.

As stated in the Implications for Practice section of this research, advisors, alumnae, national officers, and even university administrators can be involved in the education of the meaning and purpose of the rituals of sororities as well as the importance of the performance. The reason that the students do not understand ritual may be that they have never been taught the ritual’s role in their sorority experience.

One of the challenges facing sororities today is that the groups are larger than most would have ever imagined. As few as one or two members or as many as ten to twelve members founded the NPC sororities. Today, most of the national sororities have chapters that are well over one hundred members, some even exceeding two hundred members per chapter. The

numbers vary from chapter to chapter and differ among campuses. Some chapters have as few as ten members with many averaging between twenty-five to eighty members. It may be that the structure of sororities has changed so much since their founding that the application and value of the ritual to the current generation needs to be evaluated. Individual sororities need to assess the understanding of the ritual by their undergraduate members. If sororities are indeed the values-based groups that they purport to be, then all aspects of the sorority should exemplify what has been stated in their ritual. Additionally, sororities must evaluate the way that they recruit and educate members. In 1991, NPC began to promote and encourage a “no frills” recruitment process as a way to demonstrate to potential members what sorority life encompassed. The intent was to eliminate what was considered to be more entertainment rather than informative. While many campuses and chapters implemented these changes; others continue to stage elaborate performances and are very “showy” in their recruitment process. Some campuses have implemented philanthropy events and fraternal values events that actually promote not only the social aspect of sororities, but also the community service and values aspect as well. In order for women to really understand that sororities are more than social organizations and focus more on the real meaning of why they were founded, the recruitment and new member education programs need to be evaluated and further developed to incorporate those types of expectations.

### Summary

The National Panhellenic Conference is currently addressing the need for assessment of the sorority experience and, in the near future, will make decisions as to ways that this can be accomplished (M. Williams, personal communication, March 8, 2002). In recent years, colleges and universities have begun implementing internal assessment programs on individual chapters to determine whether or not they are in fact what they promote themselves to be. The National

Panhellenic Conference recognizes the need by universities to evaluate the organizations that they host on their campus; however, NPC does not always agree with the type of information that is being assessed. Further, NPC is concerned that pursuit of some of the information infringes on the sovereign rights of the national organizations. In the future, more studies may be conducted involving sorority women and assessing the impact that the sorority experience has on undergraduate sorority women.

The challenges presented in this study are critical to the overall quality of the sorority experience. Organizations such as sororities that promote themselves as value-based organizations must have a balance between the social aspect and the deeper experience. So the question remains, does ritual have an impact on the behavior of sorority women or not? This study demonstrates that ritual might have an impact on behavior; however, it does not always appear that there is a clear understanding by the sorority women as to what role ritual may play in their daily lives. It seems that in some ways the ritual is a part of the sorority experience. The way that the women believe in the sorority and what it stands for is not always because of the ritual. In some ways, to the sorority women, it is more about the sorority experience as a whole and not necessarily the values stated in the ritual. Sorority members understand various aspects of the ritual, but it may be that the standards or the rules of the organization guide behavior more than the ritual. By offering programs and assistance that would educate undergraduate sorority women as to the role that ritual has in their overall experience, the balance of the experience may be more meaningful for them. To many in and outside of the sorority world, the sorority experience is often superficial and social. The ritual ceremonies are the bonding component that establishes the individuality of a particular sorority. If sororities are going to continue to contribute to the lives of their members, then teaching the importance of the ritual ceremonies and the richness

that those ceremonies can bring to the overall sorority experience is crucial. Teaching the meaning of ritual and placing emphasis on its importance could be one of the main aspects that sororities are missing and could make the difference in the sorority experience have a deeper, more lasting meaning.

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APPENDIX A  
CONSENT FORM

**Appendix A: Interview Consent Form**  
**INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM**  
College of Education, Louisiana State University-Baton Rouge

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**Title of Research Study: Sorority Rituals: Rites of Passages and Their  
Impact on Contemporary Sorority Women**

**Principle Investigators: Mari Ann Callais W: (985)549-2248  
H: (985)345-7999**

**Becky Ropers-Huilman, Ph.D. W: (225)388-2892**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to be interviewed by Mari Ann Callais for purposes of dissertation research. I understand that I may be asked to reveal information of a personal nature during the course of this interview, and that every effort will be made by the investigator to protect my confidentiality. Any identifying information will be eliminated from the research report, and transcripts and audio-tapes of this interview will be stored in a secure location with access limited to the principle investigators.

I also understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, and I may withdraw consent and terminate participation in all or part of the interview at any time without consequence. In addition, I will have an opportunity at the end of this interview to discuss any concerns and ask questions that I may have. I will also be entitled to a copy of the final research report if I so desire.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*I have been fully informed of my rights, and I give my permission to be interviewed.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Subject's name (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Birth date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Subject's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Today's date

\_\_\_ **I would like a summary copy of the final research report. If yes, please give  
address: \_\_\_\_\_**

\_\_\_ **I do not wish to have a copy of the final research report.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**TO BE COMPLETED BY INVESTIGATOR**

**Case ID No.** \_\_\_\_\_

**Number of Tapes** \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX B  
PROFILE QUESTIONS



APPENDIX C  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## **Focus Group and Individual Questions**

First, I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. The purpose of this study is to examine the role of ritual. Since most sorority members when referring to ritual, specifically refer to the initiation ritual, the focus of this interview will be that ceremony. You will hear the word initiation and ritual both used. If you need to clarify what your initiation is, that is fine. The following questions have been developed to open dialogue about your feelings and impressions of the impact that the initiation ritual has on you as an individual and your chapter.

Please complete the Undergraduate Sorority Member Profile Questions (USMPQ) and the Interview Consent Form. The interviews will be taped and coded. Your identity and affiliation will be kept confidential.

### **Interview Questions**

- |                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b><i>Opening</i></b>      | 1. Why did you join a sorority?  |
| <b><i>Opening</i></b>      | 2. What are some of the positive and negative aspects of being in your sorority?   |
| <b><i>Introduction</i></b> | 3. When you hear the word "ritual," what comes to mind? What was your first impression when you heard the word ritual or initiation?                   |
| <b><i>Transition</i></b>   | 4. Suppose you had to talk to someone outside of your sorority on the topic of ritual, without revealing any secrets, what would you say?              |
| <b><i>Key</i></b>          | 5. How did you learn about your sorority's ritual?   |
| <b><i>Key</i></b>          | 6. What do you believe is the general purpose of your sorority's initiation ceremony and the other ritual ceremonies of your sorority or sororities in |

general? What would you say that the membership of your chapter believes is the purpose of your initiation ceremony?

**Key** 7. What do you see ritual as? What do you believe that the members of your chapter see ritual as either something that they do as a ceremony or something that they incorporate into others aspects of their lives or do they see it as something else? Please explain.

**Key** 8. What role do you believe ritual, specifically your sorority initiation ceremony has in your life? In the life of your chapter members?

**Key** 9. Have you ever read your ritual book? If you had to say what percentage of your chapter or how many people have ever read your ritual book, what would that be?

**Key** 10. To what extent do you believe that you know and understand your sorority ritual ceremonies? To what extent do you believe that the members of your sorority do?

**Key** 11. To what extent do you believe that your sorority's initiation ceremony has an effect on your behavior?

**Key** 12. Do you like or dislike participating in your sorority rituals? Are there members of your sorority that like or dislike participating in your sorority rituals? Please explain.

**Key** 13. Think back to when you first joined your sorority. What in your sorority experience has influenced you the most and why?

**Key** 14. What aspects do you think are beneficial about your sorority experience as it relates to ritual? Is there anything that you would change?

*Ending* 15. What are some of your suggestions as to how ritual can be taught?

*Ending* 16. Do you have any other advice for me as I continue conducting these interviews?

Summarize briefly what has been discussed.

In closing, I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Your responses are greatly appreciated. Once again, I would like to assure you that your identity will be kept confidential.

APPENDIX D

(LETTER TO THE GREEK ADVISOR OR UNIVERSITY OFFICIAL)

Letter to Greek Advisor or University Official

Dear Greek Advisor or University Official,

I am writing to you to ask for your assistance. I am a Doctoral Student at Louisiana State University and I am in my dissertation phase. I have also been serving as the Student Organizations/Greek Life advisor at Southeastern Louisiana University for the past nine years. My research topic is based upon the research question-"Do sorority rituals have an impact on the values and behavior of contemporary sorority women? "I have received approval from the National Panhellenic Conference Research Committee and submitted my research questions to them.

I would like to ask for your assistance with this research. I would like to schedule a visit to your campus to conduct individual and focus group interviews with 3-5 of your sorority members. I would need the following in order to randomly select the women for this study:

1. I will need a list of NPC sorority women on your campus listed by academic year, sorority affiliation and name. You could either email or mail the list to me.
2. I would then randomly select students and send you the list of names. I would ask that you contact the students and ask if they would volunteer to be a part of this study.
3. I would then confirm with you a schedule of individual and/or focus group interviews.
4. I would need your assistance in securing a room that would be conducive to interviewing.
5. The National organizations would have already been notified of my visit.
6. I would work with you to finalize all necessary arrangements.

I will contact you to discuss the possibility of your assistance with this study. Thank you for your time and I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Mari Ann Callais, Doctoral Candidate  
Louisiana State University  
macallais@aol.com

Becky Ropers-Huilman, Ph.D., Major Advisor  
111 Peabody Hall, Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
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APPENDIX E

NATIONAL PANHELLENIC CONFERENCE CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondence I

Mari Ann Callais  
412 East Charles Street  
Hammond, Louisiana 70401  
(504)345-7999  
(504)549-2248  
macallais@aol.com

To: Shelia Barnes, Chairman  
Sally Grant  
Amy Kates  
Jamie Pyne  
Eve Riley  
Linda Root  
Ellen Vanden Brink

From: Mari Ann Callais

RE: Dissertation Topic and Permission for Research

Date: February 12, 1999

**Introduction and Overview**

As many of you know, I am currently serving as the NPC Delegate for Theta Phi Alpha and have been Director of Student Organizations/Greek Life at Southeastern Louisiana University since 1991. Since 1991, I have been involved in the Greek Community on local, regional and national levels. I have been influenced by so many of the men and women that I believe have truly moved Greek Life in this Country forward.

During the past four years, I have been pursuing a doctoral degree in Higher Education at Louisiana State University. I have completed all course requirements as well as passing the general exam. At this phase, I now must have my dissertation proposal approved by my graduate committee. Before I submit that proposal, I would like to also ask for approval from this committee to pursue my area of research. I have been working with my committee for the past

six months doing literature research to support my field research and to develop a plan to accomplish my goal of the completion of my dissertation and graduation.

I would like to ask permission of this committee to conduct my study as it solely relates to sorority women. I will provide an overview of my study as well as a list of proposed questions that will be used for the study.

### **Research as It Relates to Ritual**

For years we have been telling our women that the ritual is the foundation for which all of our groups were founded. In recent years, many of us have been developing programs, bringing in speakers, and teaching our women at national and regional conventions and conferences that we must go back to basics--back to our foundation, back to our ritual. I have talked with many of the leaders of the NPC groups and have asked their thoughts and opinions concerning ritual and what it means to our collegians and our alumnae. One woman said something to me that has truly had an impact on the direction and the focus of my study and I quote: "My Fraternity's ritual truly was written more for our women today than it ever was for our founders." The concepts encompassed in our ritual are so visionary and speaks of a time that is more present than past. They were not afforded many of the opportunities that our women are today and yet they provided a framework for modern day women and also provided a set of standards that are possibly much more challenging today than they were back then." This statement has helped me to really think of ritual and how our women today view ritual, and truly practice ritual in their daily lives.

With this in mind, I would like to conduct a qualitative research study that will involve face to face interviews, conducted by myself asking a list of questions that relates to what role ritual plays in their individual behavior and what they perceive, as to how it relates to the chapter

as a whole. Do they make decisions that help them to be better women, better students, better citizens and does ritual as the basis for who they are as sorority women play a role, any role, a significant role in that process? Do our rituals have an affect on their behavior today? Are sorority women understanding our creeds, ritual, mottoes, etc. and are these having an impact in their daily lives?

I believe that for some, ritual does not have a significant role in their experience because they were never taught the significance of the meaning--the performance is the primary focus. I do believe, however, that many of our women are "getting it" because they are being taught that ritual is what sets them apart from everyone else and that if ritual is used as a foundation for the decisions that they make as people and as a group, then the benefits of this impact will be greater than they could have ever imagined.

My question is are we teaching them about our foundations? Are we leaving up to the chapter members to teach one another? I think that these are difficult questions but these questions may become at least part of the solution to some of the challenges that we are facing today. I do not in any way want to conduct research that will harm the sorority community--all of us have to deal enough with outside people who wish to do that for us. I would like for this dissertation to matter--for something positive to come from this research. Maybe we do need to develop true programs that teach our women how to appreciate and apply ritual to their lives. I tell students wherever I am that if we all followed our ritual, we would not need risk management policies, hazing policies, insurance, etc. Fraternities and sororities would have waiting lists because so many people would want to join.

I have also made it very clear to my committee during my general exam oral defense that I do not want to violate the secrecy of any group's ritual. I will provide a brief description of

common knowledge similarities--the fact that all of the NPC groups were founded based upon some religious concept--that each are value based, general information that in no way would expose any of the secretive aspects of our rituals.

My study will primarily be conducted in the Southeastern part of the United States at a variety of different campuses based upon the willingness of the Greek Advisor or chapter advisors to assist with setting up random interviews. I hope that my fieldwork, if approved, will begin in late February and end by the beginning of May.

I am enclosing a list of proposed questions and welcome any suggestions, additions, or deletions that you feel would enhance this study. I am open to any suggestions.

Maureen Syring and Ed King have been working with me to understand how to approach this study and I hope that they will sort of serve as my Greek Advisors throughout this process. I value their experience and expertise and look forward to working with them.

I have also been doing research in the area of adolescent development into young adulthood in females which has been a very interesting journey as well. I hope to incorporate some of that information in the development in sororities and how the sorority structure enhances their growth process.

Please let me know your thoughts. I hope to move forward as soon as possible and as I stated earlier, the questions, as they are finalized will truly guide the process. If approved, I assume that the 26 NPC groups will be notified and if they have concerns, they will let you or their chapters know. Many of the historians for the sororities have already been very helpful in providing information concerning their historical development. I have found that each of us have our own history documented and NPC's history is documented, but how they all tie into one

another is not, at least not through my research. Hopefully, some of this information will assist with compiling a more comprehensive historical picture of the development of sororities.

I look forward to hearing from you and appreciate your consideration.

## Correspondence II

To: Shelia Barnes, Chairman of the NPC Research Committee

From: Mari Ann Callais

Re: Dissertation Research Questions and Permission for Research--Final Approval

Date: March, 2001

First, I would like to thank each of you for being patient with me. This process has been very complex and much more than I would have ever imagined. I have taken your suggestions and the suggestions of my committee and incorporated them into my study. The following are the changes based upon both committees' recommendations:

1. Due to expense of traveling and because of my dissertation committee's concerns about research at campuses where I am speaking, I have chosen most of the campuses in the Southeast, but tried to select Universities that differ due to the type of students that attend. For example, Tulane may be located in the South, but typically attracts a more diverse student population. The campuses that I have selected at this time are:

University of Dayton

Ramapo College

University of Dayton

Florida State University

University of South Alabama

University of Alabama Birmingham

University of Southern Mississippi

Tulane University

Loyola University

Louisiana State University

2. I clarified the founding purpose of the groups not to state or imply that all groups were founded on religious principles.

Several other modifications that I have made are as follows:

1. Focus group interviews have been added. My intent is open dialogue with several women in order for their discussions to assist me with my understanding of their thoughts, but also to create an environment that helps them to begin talking about the impact of ritual.
2. I will ask the Greek Advisor or university authority to assist me with setting up individual and/or focus group interviews. I will ask for a list of the sorority women on campus on that particular campus and then randomly select them and ask if they would volunteer to be a part of this study. This will ensure a non-biased relationship between myself as the researcher and the participants.
3. Attached you will also find a copy of the Interview Questions as well as the abstract that I will submit to LSU.

I would like to once again emphasize my commitment to this research having an educational outcome. My intent is for this dissertation to explore whether ritual has an impact on sorority women's values and behavior. I hope that my findings will assist National organizations with the education of undergraduate women and the effects of ritual. I also hope to find ways that they feel ritual can be taught and a greater emphasis may be placed on ritual.

My timeline is the beginning of April, 2001 through August, 2001 to conduct the interviews. I hope to compile the responses, and to complete my analysis to defend my dissertation at the end of October, 2001.

I truly appreciate your guidance and cooperation with my endeavor. I really feel that this project will be beneficial to the mission to educate contemporary sorority women.

I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

APPENDIX F

LSU IRB (INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FORM)

**Application for Exemption from IRB (Institutional Review Board)  
Oversight for Studies Conducted in Educational Settings  
LSU COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

Title of Study: **Sorority Rituals: Rites of Passage and Their Impact on Contemporary Sorority Women**

Principal Investigator: **Mari Ann Callais**  
Name (Print)

Faculty Supervisor: **Dr. Becky Ropers-Huilman, Ph.D.**  
Name (Print)

(If Student Project)

Dates of proposed project period: From **Spring, 2001** to **Fall, 2001**

ITEM	YES	NO
1. This study will be conducted in an established or commonly accepted educational setting (schools, universities, summer programs, etc.	<b>X</b>	
2. This study will involve children under the age of 18.		<b>X</b>
3. This study will involve educational practices such as instructional strategies or comparison among educational techniques, curricula, or classroom management strategies.		<b>X</b>
4. This study will involve educational testing (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement).		<b>X</b>
5. This study will use data, documents, or records that existed prior to the study.	<b>X</b>	
6. This study will use surveys or interviews concerning content that is <b>not</b> related to instructional practices.	<b>X</b>	
7. This study will involve procedures other than those described in numbers 3, 4, 5 or 6. If Yes, describe:		<b>X</b>
8. This study will deal with sensitive aspects of subjects' and/or subjects' families' lives, such as sexual behavior or use of alcohol or other drugs.		<b>X</b>
9. Data will be recorded so that the subjects cannot be identified by anyone other than the researcher.	<b>X</b>	
10. Informed consent of subject 18 and older, and/or of the parents/guardian of minor children, will be obtained.	<b>X</b>	
11. Assent of minors (under age 18) will be obtained. (Answer if #2 above is YES)		
12. Approval for this study will be obtained from the appropriate authority in the educational setting.	<b>X</b>	

Attach an abstract of the study and a copy of the consent form(s) to be used. If your answer(s) to numbers 6 and/or 7 is (are) **YES**, attach a copy of any surveys, interview protocols, or other procedures to be used.

**ASSURANCES**

As the principal investigator for the proposed research study, I assure that the following conditions will be met:

The human subjects are volunteers.

Subjects know that they have the freedom to withdraw at any time.

1. The data collected will not be used for any purpose not approved by the subjects.
2. The subjects are guaranteed confidentiality.
3. The subjects will be informed beforehand as to the nature of their activity.
4. The nature of the activity will not cause any physical or psychological harm to the subjects.
5. Individual performances will not be disclosed to persons other than those involved in the research and authorized by the subject.
6. If minors are to participate in this research, valid consent will be obtained beforehand from parents or guardians.
7. All questions will be answered to the satisfaction of the subjects.
8. Volunteers will consent by signature if over the age of 6.

**Principal Investigator Statement:**

**I have read and agree to abide by the standards of the Belmont Report and the Louisiana State University policy on the use of human subjects. I will advise the Office of the Dean and the University's Human Subject Committee in writing of any significant changes in the procedures detailed above.**

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Faculty Supervisor Statement (for student research projects):**

**I have read and agree to abide by the standards of the Belmont Report and the Louisiana State University policy on the use of human subjects. I will supervise the conduct of the proposed project in accordance with federal guidelines for Human Protection. I will advise the Office of the Dean and the University's Human Subject Committee in writing of any significant changes in the procedures detailed above.**

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Reviewer recommendation:**

\_\_\_\_\_ exemption from IRB oversight. (File this signed application in the Dean's Office.)

\_\_\_\_\_ expedited review for minimal risk protocol. (Follow IRB regulations and submit 3

\_\_\_\_\_ full review. (Follow IRB regulations and submit 13 copies to the Dean's Office).

\_\_\_\_\_ Name of Authorized Reviewer (Print) /Signature \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_ Date

## VITA

Mari Ann Callais was born in 1965 to Karen and Evan J. Callais, Jr. and lived in Buras, Louisiana, until she moved to attend college in 1983.

Mari Ann graduated in 1987 from Loyola University in New Orleans, Louisiana, with a bachelor's degree in political science. In 1991, she received a master's degree in education administration and supervision from Our Lady of Holy Cross College in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Mari Ann has attended Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where she is pursuing doctoral work in educational leadership, research, and counseling.

Mari Ann was employed as the Director of Student Organizations/Greek Life at Southeastern Louisiana University, in Hammond, Louisiana, from July of 1991 until August of 2001.

Mari Ann is currently on the faculty at Mississippi State University in Mississippi Starkville, Mississippi. She is the Program Coordinator for the Student Affairs program in the Educational Counseling/Educational Psychology Department.

Mari Ann is the recipient of numerous honors and awards: Theta Phi Alpha Fraternity's National Achievement Award, Southeastern Interfraternity Conference Advisor of the Year 1996 & 2001, Balfour Fellowship recipient, Theta Phi Alpha Fraternity Scholarship recipient, Order of Omega Fellowship recipient, Leadership Youth Seminar Lifetime Achievement Award, and Sigma Sigma Sigma National Sorority Advisor of the Year Award.

Mari Ann is a member of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, Association of College Personnel Administrators, and the Association of Fraternity Advisors.

Mari Ann is a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy to be awarded May 24,  
2002.