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FROM STUDENT TO “SORORITY GIRL”: GENDER, CLASS, AND PRESENTATION OF
SELF IN FORMAL SORORITY RECRUITMENT

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology
in the Department of Sociology & Anthropology
The University of Mississippi

by

CHERYL ROSE NELSON

December 2011

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I discuss how women prepare for the formal sorority recruitment process associated with National Panhellenic Conference chapters at Southern State University, a large public university in the Southeastern United States. I first examine their experiences before arriving on campus, focusing primarily on how potential new members (PNMs) use social capital to obtain necessary recommendations from sorority alumnae prior to recruitment and learn about the expectations about the sorority recruitment process at Southern State University. I then describe the bodily practices and behavioral choices of PNM's as they enter the week of formal recruitment, analyzing their interpretations of gender and class expectations within the context of the Greek system at Southern State. Finally, I examine the presentation of self by the sororities themselves and how PNM's understand the concept of "fit." I discuss the interactions between PNM's and sororities on campus, exploring the implications of sorority reputations, the perception of "tiers" within the sorority community at Southern State, and how a PNM's awareness of a particular sorority's reputation on campus will impact her recruitment experience. This study provides a stronger understanding of the individual experiences of PNM's and the impacts of social capital and the understanding of gender and class in the specific context of recruitment. I conclude with a discussion of implications for student affairs professionals and potential opportunities for future sociological research on sororities and recruitment practices.

DEDICATION

To all those who listened to me talk for hours about my frustrations—your support made this thesis possible.

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I would like to thank my thesis adviser, Dr. Kirsten Dellinger, for her assistance in every phase of my research project, and especially for her patience during the writing process. I would also like to thank the other members of my thesis committee, Dr. Ross Haenfler and Dr. Minjoo Oh, for their support and guidance.

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My parents provided endless support, both emotionally and financially. Without them, I would not have completed either my coursework or my thesis. Thank you.

“Joining a sorority is a life-long commitment similar to marriage, so it is important to get to know the women you are recruiting. Before most couples get married, they spend at least a little time dating. After they date for a while, there may come a proposal for marriage. After the proposal, more time is spent being engaged. Then, and only then, is there a wedding (and the lifetime commitment). Recruitment on most campuses is like going on three 20 minute speed dates in a week with some random person and then saying to him or her, ‘I guess you seem pretty normal. I can work on making you perfect after the wedding. Wanna get married tomorrow?’ Would you really marry someone that you had only known for a week?”

—Colleen Coffey and Jessica Gendron,

I Heart Recruitment: The Eight Steps to Limitless Possibility for Sororities

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My Panhellenic recruitment counselor knocked three times on the door of our group's sorority house on a sunny August day in Berkeley, California, and the ground shook--not from an earthquake, but from the stomping, pounding, and screaming of the women inside, excited to meet the women who might be their new sisters. It was Unity Day, the first day of formal sorority recruitment at the University of California, and I was surprised by the extreme excitement and organization at each sorority house. Over and over during the week, I felt overwhelmed and unprepared for the experience, both emotionally and in appearance. That experience made a lasting impression, and slowly morphed into a research interest.

I intend to examine the specific approaches that potential new members (PNMs) take when preparing for the formal sorority recruitment process, sometimes known as “rush.” I will look at how PNMs moderate their behavior throughout the recruitment and preparation process, find recommendations for each sorority chapter, and select their clothing, hair, and makeup styles; these topics will provide insight into the impact of social status and gender-related choices on individual recruitment experiences. Through this research, I hope to gain additional insight into the following questions. What are the varying performances of “femininity” in the context of a competitive Southern sorority recruitment experience, and what do they mean to the women engaged in them? How do the ways that rushees “do gender” relate to their social standing or class, if at all? How has the experience of preparing for recruitment shaped women’s

understandings about femininity?

Southern State University, a public university with an enrollment of approximately 17,000 students, was recently described in its student newspaper as having “one of the most intense [sorority] recruitments in the nation.” In 2011, over 1200 women sought membership in the nine National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) sororities with chapters at the Southern State campus. In addition to its highly competitive atmosphere, recruitment at Southern State differs from many other colleges across the United States in its attachment to tradition. This combination provides a unique atmosphere in which to study how women express and temper their understanding of femininity while seeking admittance to highly exclusive social networks. Sorority recruitment at Southern State is an “extreme case”—gender construction may be highlighted in a way that makes these processes easier to examine than in less competitive contexts with a reduced focus on adherence to tradition.

In this chapter, I begin with an overview of the literature on sorority life and recruitment experiences. There are two primary bodies of literature: one is focused on the relationship between attitudes and membership in Greek-letter organizations, while the other examines the social construction of gender in sororities. I follow with a description of my research methods.

Attitudes and Membership in Greek Organizations

The bulk of studies examining fraternities and sororities are found in the field of higher education, rather than the social sciences. Many of these studies look at the relationship between attitudes or specific behaviors and membership in Greek-letter organizations. Some of these studies look at Greek membership as one component influencing attitudes or behaviors, while

others focus primarily on sorority or fraternity affiliation as the cause of a particular attitude or behavior. One early sociological study (Crotty 1967) examines how the college environment affects the political attitudes of students, identifying the region students are from, urban residence, GPA, major, fraternity or sorority membership, and religion, and how these variables affected a variety of political attitudes. Antonio (2004) looks at the importance of peer group influence in college, paying particular attention to interpersonal environments and racial diversity. He discusses previous studies that examine the effects of peer groups on academic self-concepts, namely how these groups impact an individual's attitudes toward studying, earning high grades, and continuing to graduate school (Antonio 2004). Caboni et al. (2005) take a similar approach in their discussion of a normative structure of college students at one university. They seek to identify this normative structure and how the demonstration or presentation of these norms may vary based on gender, race, ethnicity, class standing, and social fraternity or sorority membership, using Durkheim and Morris as their theoretical basis. The study looks at a wide variety of attitudes, including some relating to rape, homophobia and substance abuse, and it emphasizes the overall importance of studying peer groups at universities (Caboni et al. 2005). Pascarella et al, in a comparison of students' precollege attitudes and their attitudes at the end of their first year of college, found that "joining a fraternity or sorority had a significant negative net effect" on first-year students being open to diversity, particularly for white students (Pascarella et al. 1996), but did not extensively discuss why this shift occurred.

Other articles look specifically at the relationship between fraternity or sorority membership and attitudes or values. Kalof and Cargill (2007) compare attitudes about interpersonal dominance between members of Greek organizations and independent students.

The authors found that members of Greek organizations tended to hold traditional male dominant-female submissive attitudes, while women not in a Greek organization were the least likely to hold these traditional attitudes. Basow et al. (2007) examine the differences in rates of disordered eating behavior between sorority women and unaffiliated or non-sorority women, hypothesizing that those interested in sorority membership would score higher on measures of disordered eating, body objectification, and social pressure, and those not interested would score lower. A second prediction was that the amount of time lived in the sorority house would cause a further disparity in scores. These hypotheses were nearly always suggested. A previous longitudinal study suggested a selection bias led to higher rates of disordered eating among women in sororities, rather than the sororities themselves being the cause (Basow 2007).

Callais (2002) examined the role of ritual in sorority experience, and its effect on the values and behavior of sorority women. Sororities first began as “secret societies” in 1851 to help college women develop friendships with one another; the sororities’ rituals “became a way for sororities to keep their vision consistent and to pass their beliefs on to future generations”(Callais 2002). Callais elected to focus specifically on sororities, rather than both sororities and fraternities, partly because of the differences in organizational structure and partly to look specifically at women from a theoretical perspective. Prior to her writing, limited research was available specifically on sororities, and studies specifically looking at fraternities are not always directly applicable to sororities. Callais examines the impact of ritual on women's values and beliefs. While most rituals are secret or otherwise unavailable to scholars, they may guide some of the views on femininity and womanhood that underlie expectations about how a sorority might behave. Callais mentions the argument that rituals in sororities may have been

established to keep all members the same, but it may be one element of a broader image of womanhood (Callais 2002).

Social Construction of Gender in Sororities

Several researchers have examined the social construction of gender in sororities in some fashion. One of the earliest examinations of how sororities contribute to the socialization of gender roles was performed by Barbara Risman in the early 1980s. Risman interviewed 22 women about their family backgrounds and experience with Greek life, seeking to examine day-to-day sorority life and how it impacts the worldviews of its members. In her research, she hypothesizes that sororities act as a “mechanism for traditional gender role socialization”(Risman 1982). Risman points out that, by controlling courtship and potential partners, sororities also control behavioral patterns to a certain extent—women cannot attract such partners without behaving in certain ways, and are limited in their abilities to find partners outside the Greek system. Women in sororities thus learn what would be considered “proper behavior” through their interactions within the Greek system. Although not her primary focus, Risman discusses the recruitment process and importance of image projection—while sororities do not choose women exclusively based on their looks, sororities of higher status tend to select better-looking women, and appearance came up in many conversations about recruitment. The status of the sorority that a woman joined would follow them throughout their college career; thus, the rush period and initial focus on appearance to impress women in higher status sororities is critical (Risman 1982).

Mindy Stompler's article, "'Buddies' or 'Slutties': The Collective Sexual Reputation of Fraternity Little Sisters," looks at the roles of "little sisters" or "sweethearts": undergraduate women associated with a men's social fraternity. According to Stompler, they go through a rush procedure similar to fraternity rush, followed by a pledge period if they are selected. Women join these groups for "social reasons" which includes the chance to be a part of the Greek system with less structure and fewer expenses than a sorority. In the 1980s and 1990s, the programs were associated with various types of rapes, and as a result, little sister programs at many schools and in some fraternal organizations have been disbanded. Women are not full members of the fraternity, and do not have the privileges associated with full membership. They are generally exploited, and face sexual objectification and abuse. This sexual objectification helps to maintain the dominance of men over women, and women attach their own sense of self-worth to the attention of men—specifically, men viewing them as attractive and sexually stimulating. "Men exploit little sisters' emotional labor...physical labor...and sexuality"(Stompler 1994). Little sister programs clearly show gender inequality, though not all women are "mere victims within the system fraternity men create"(Stompler 1994), asserting their own identities and using strategies to resist exploitation (Stompler 1994). Stompler's study reveals the significance of objectification in the Greek system and suggests the importance of understanding how elements of Greek life contribute to broader campus issues—in this instance, sexual violence and abuse.

A study by Lisa Handler, "In the Fraternal Sisterhood: Sororities as Gender Strategy," discusses gendered relations in colleges and how sororities are one way that women try to work through some of these relations, particularly when looking at dating and courtship. Handler examines how sororities "contribute to gender strategy...First, by joining a sorority, women

engage, individually and collectively, in constructing themselves as women. Notions of womanhood are very much shaped and bound by the sorority's needs and purpose and the sorority's relationship to Greek life and campus culture”(Handler 1995). The gender strategy provided by the sorority suggests a specific way to “do gender” for the remainder of a woman's college experience. Handler discusses motivations behind rushing, including seeking the friendship of other girls, and discusses how friendships are created through the experience of pledging. Handler ultimately indicates that women seek sorority membership because their styles, skills, and habits already match these organizations; to a great extent, my study suggests this as well, although I found that women adjusted how they demonstrated these styles, skills, and habits in their efforts to obtain membership. “Sisterhood is a vowed allegiance to a collectivity”(Handler 1995), according to Handler. She describes how sororities work to attract men while reducing direct competition between sisters; the structure of mixers and formals reinforces the idea of compulsory heterosexuality. Handler discusses the importance of recruitment in maintaining this particular form of collective femininity. During the rush process, sororities look for girls with different looks, trying to create diversity within the chapter as a strategy for recruiting new members as well as attracting men. The focus is on diversity of styles and interests, not diversity in demographics—the women in the study tended not to mention that they were seeking diversity in ethnicity or religion. Sororities select women based both on whether they seem to “fit” and how they contribute to a collective good, which includes how well they are able to attract male attention. Maintaining a specific image is important to keep the respect of sisters; many of the women judge their sisters based on appearance and whether or not someone looks and acts appropriately. Handler indicates that the collective sexuality of the

sorority is at stake—what a few sisters do affect the reputation of the group as a whole, so other sisters are quick to judge and take action if necessary (Handler 1995). Handler's discussion of image in recruitment highlights the challenges of women going through rush, as they prepare for this selection phase and attempt to show how exactly they “fit” or contribute to the sorority’s common good.

Similarly, over the past decade, more studies have looked at the experiences of underrepresented minorities in the Greek system, particularly in sororities associated with the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC). *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* included a short non-academic article providing a brief discussion about the history of African Americans in historically white fraternities and sororities at the University of Alabama as of 2001; they mention the first woman of African American descent who successfully joined a NPC sorority at Alabama, pointing out that she was accepted into her sorority before anyone knew that she was biracial, as she passed for white (*Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 2001). In a 2008 article, Julie Park looked at similar issues, expanding her analysis of racial issues in sororities to Asian Americans as well as African Americans. She mentions that, while sorority women in the Southeastern U.S. often denied any racial prejudice in the Panhellenic system, they tended to encourage Black women to pursue membership in historically Black sororities instead. Race played the biggest role in middle-class, traditionally white NPC sororities. When issues of race or diversity are presented to students, sorority women describe participation in rush as an individual choice, not as a product of social influences or perceptions of how likely a woman is to be accepted based on factors beyond one’s control, such as race (Park 2008). In a highly

competitive recruitment atmosphere, these concerns with identity and “fit” may become even more difficult for women to navigate.

In the mid-1990s, two articles by Linda Arthur examined appearance, role embracement, and the construction of a particular sort of femininity among sorority women at a Pacific Northwest university. Throughout her study of sororities at this particular college, Arthur takes a symbolic-interactionist approach, looking specifically at how new sorority members construct their understandings of femininity through organizational membership and a desire to mold themselves to the idealized image of the sorority (Arthur 1997; Arthur 1999). In “Role Saliency, Role Embracement, and the Symbolic Self-Completion of Sorority Pledges,” Arthur looks at the use of self-symbolization, “when a person’s status is legitimated by others who accept these symbols as valid status markers”(Arthur 1997), and combines it with role theory to discuss how the sorority experience produces role embracement and symbolic self-completion. In the symbolic self-completion model, people may use props such as clothing to help feel complete in their social roles. This study looks at idealized images in sororities and how members adhere to those idealized images. Arthur indicates that sororities use idealized images to show embracement of a group’s identity, with appearance and dress being the primary way that sorority members indicate their commitment to the organization. By using specific symbols of sorority identity, such as wearing clothing with large sorority letters, new members validate their sorority identities. Pledges tended to manifest symbolic self-completion “through adherence to the idealized images”(Arthur 1997) while older members were less likely to embrace such images. Arthur's second article, “Dress and the Social Construction of Gender in Two Sororities,” provides additional insight as to how women adopt particular types of fashion, styles,

and looks to match the idealized sorority image. The routine interaction within sororities, including eating meals together, attending social events as a group, and living in the same house leads to the learning of femininity and traditional gender roles (Arthur 1999). Again, new members or pledges adopt the sorority's idealized image of femininity as they “become embedded in sorority culture,” but drift from that image as they move closer to graduation and the sorority becomes a smaller part of their overall identity (Arthur 1999).

While Arthur's study focused on a single university, her research helps us analyze how new members in two different organizations understood the ideal sorority image at their university and adopted elements of that image. One sorority studied was considered a “high house,” meaning that it was larger and more popular; the other was a “low house,” smaller and not as popular on campus. Despite their differences, women from both houses had essentially the same idealized images of sorority women—young, thin, attractive, and fashionable (Arthur 1999). Women entering rush were often aware of the idealized sorority image before recruitment began. While the women studied would often wait until they moved to campus to prepare for rush, others had friends or older sisters that gave them makeovers before arriving at the university. The sororities studied expect women to remain feminine, with one sorority member indicating that girls who are not feminine will generally not go through the rush process, and that women in the Greek system tend to better fit this idealized image of “proper womanhood,” as described by sorority alumnae, than independent women (Arthur 1999).

A study of sorority rush at a large university with a competitive recruitment provides additional insight into the specific performances of femininity present. Elizabeth Boyd examined sorority rush at the University of Mississippi, describing the experience as a “proving ground of

competitive femininity cloaked in the guise of gracious hospitality and collegiate spirit”(Boyd 1999). Boyd describes rush at Southern schools as distinctive from that of other regions, as Southern rush continues to focus on formalities and exclusivity. To successfully complete the recruitment process and receive a bid requires a “particular feminine performance” combining images of the sophisticated Southern Lady with the vibrant and energetic Belle. Women seeking to join sororities perform this way to demonstrate their social value, indicating that they come from an acceptable background, maintaining the class status markers critical to the sororities’ images. Past rushees describe the experience as “cut throat” and “brutal”—indeed, the University of Mississippi, the university studied by Boyd, is perceived to have the most competitive rush in the country (Boyd 1999). Sororities want women they believe to be “an asset to the house”; rushees want to find women they identify with, yet find slightly better than themselves (Boyd 1999). Sorority members perform for the new members as well, stacking themselves at the house door, memorizing the names of rushees from before formal recruitment even begins, and calling out those names all while wearing matching dresses or outfits. Sororities present a certain air of authenticity, aiming to convince all women that they may be welcomed there, while suggesting that other sororities may not be as welcoming or may encourage members to behave a certain way—“it’s only at *their* house that you can really be yourself”(Boyd 1999). Boyd provides exceptional detail about the specifics of sorority recruitment at a competitive Southern university, with her interviews focusing primarily on the preparation and performance of the women currently in sororities, as well as some experiences of women entering recruitment.

In my research, I focus primarily on potential new sorority members, or PNMs, and the ways they sought to prepare for a fiercely competitive recruitment experience, including the

insights of women that did not perceive themselves as having a “successful” recruitment. My focus is on understanding the experience from the points of view of the women themselves: looking at what the experiences of preparation and rush itself means to them, what they learn from those experiences, and how it makes them feel.

Doing Gender

While the previous literature did not explicitly utilize a “doing gender” framework, it does focus on the social construction of gender. My study does that as well, and I use the following framework as the basis for understanding gender as a social process. West and Zimmerman’s theoretical framework extends from dramaturgical theory introduced by Goffman (1959), analyzing how individuals portray themselves publicly in a distinct way, using costume, i.e. bodily practices, and other props to present the image they would like others to perceive. Instead of viewing gender as a naturally defined category of being, West and Zimmerman see gender as a “routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment”(West and Zimmerman 1987). By that, they mean that gender is an ongoing performance that emerges from social interactions, “both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and as a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society”(West and Zimmerman 1987). Individuals continually “do gender” through their interactions with others, and modify their own behaviors and understandings of masculinity and femininity as a result of these experiences. In my research, I will use West and Zimmerman’s basic conception of gender and how women “do gender” in sorority recruitment to explore how they construct their individual understandings of femininity within that context. I additionally examine how specific interactions related to their

family background and socioeconomic class further impact these understandings and performances, an element conspicuously absent from other analyses of sororities.

Social Capital

As part of my analysis of preparation for the formal recruitment process, I examine how social capital, specifically the connections that PNMs and their family members have to alumni of sororities and fraternities, affects the experiences of PNMs as they prepare. Social capital, a concept popularized by James Coleman, represents the value of relations that individuals share with one another (Coleman 1988). Social organization and extensive connections between individuals within a community is indicative of higher levels of social capital. Through social capital, individuals may gain access to additional information that would not be readily available to others. According to Coleman, social capital facilitates some actions and constrains others; an individual may have easier access to specific information, but must maintain strong relationships to the bearers of that information within their community. Voluntary organizations typically serve as a source of social capital for members, even as their specific involvement in and relationships with the organization change over time (Coleman 1988). Robert Putnam expanded on Coleman's work, defining social capital as "features of social life—networks, norms, and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives"(Putnam 1995). In my thesis, I will use this conceptual framework, with the definition of social capital provided by Putnam, to analyze the impact of varying amounts of social capital on the sorority recruitment preparation process for women seeking membership into these organizations.

Description of the Formal Sorority Recruitment Process

At Southern State University, sororities have a delayed formal recruitment which takes place approximately halfway through the first semester of the academic year. Approximately one month prior to formal recruitment, sorority chapters hold water parties, where PNMs travel with their recruitment groups to each of the nine houses and have brief conversations with active sorority members while receiving ice water to drink. The week before formal recruitment begins, the campus hosts a large philanthropic event, where PNMs and active members have the opportunity to mingle as a larger group prior to recruitment. Formal recruitment consists of three rounds of parties at each house, held over four days: philanthropy round, where PNMs visit all nine chapters over two nights; skit round, where PNMs return to up to six chapters in a night; and preference round, where PNMs return to up to three chapters. At the end of both the philanthropy and skit rounds, PNMs select their favorite chapters to place at the top and rank their bottom three based on which sororities they would least like to visit for the next round. From the PNM's perspective, they will ideally return to all of their top choices and not return to any of the three chapters ranked at the bottom; if they are not invited back to all of their top choice sororities, their schedule may include invitations from those bottom-ranked chapters, "bumped up" in the order of their ranking. Sororities make cuts during these rounds as well, as each chapter has a limit to how many women they can invite back for each round based on a computer model. After preference round, PNMs rank the chapters they have remaining, a maximum of three. She will then receive a bid to one of the chapters she ranked on preference night, if she chose to rank all three. If the PNM chooses not to rank one of the sororities she

visited, she may not receive a bid to any house if all chapters she ranked reached quota, the maximum number of women that each sorority can accept, before getting to her name on the bid list prepared by each sorority. Barring any unusual circumstances, every PNM attending a preference party will be placed somewhere on a sorority's bid list; however, if one sorority places a PNM low on their list and a second sorority places the same PNM much higher, the PNM may receive a bid to the second sorority, regardless of the PNM's ranking of sororities on preference night. Recruitment ends with Bid Day, where PNMs receive cards indicating the sorority they have been invited to join, and run to the sorority houses to meet their new sisters.

Methods

In this qualitative study, I used semi-structured, in-depth interviews to learn about the individual sorority recruitment and preparation experiences of each participant. I interviewed ten women who participated in the formal Panhellenic recruitment process during the last five years. Through these interviews, I examined how potential new sorority members (PNMs) prepared for recruitment. Using in-depth interviews, I detailed specifics about the experiences and backgrounds of the PNMs participating in the study, gaining an understanding of the meaning behind each individual experience from the point of view of the women themselves. Interviews allowed for additional, individualized follow-up questions that will allow me to discover the nuances and details of each woman's experience that would be lost in a survey format. While the smaller sample size of this study will limit the variety of experiences I encounter and provide only a partial view of the recruitment experience, it will still provide valuable insight and background for future, more extensive research of Panhellenic formal sorority recruitment in the

future. This methodological approach does not provide results that can be generalized to other sorority recruitment experiences; however, it allows for a much more detailed examination of an extreme case. I elected to focus exclusively on this specific approach to recruitment and its impact. Thus, my paper does not examine National Pan-Hellenic Council sororities or independent sororities that are unaffiliated with a Greek council at Southern State University, as these organizations use different intake processes to select new members.

To find interview candidates, I used a snowball sample, asking students I already know about my project and determining if they knew anyone who went through the recruitment process that might be willing to speak with me about their experience. I contacted the recommended individuals privately via email to provide them with more details and ask if they would be willing to participate. I aimed to remain sensitive to diversity, looking for women who joined different houses, as well as women who either quit the recruitment process early or were released from recruitment, i.e. were not invited to join any of the sororities on the campus. Of my sample, two students were initially released from recruitment; one of those two received an invitation to join a sorority on Bid Day despite release, while the other was not invited to join a chapter. Two of the women interviewed chose to disaffiliate from their sororities as undergraduates at some point after initiation into their respective sororities. Study participants included at least one current or former member from six out of the nine NPC sororities present at Southern State University. Six women interviewed participated in recruitment during the Fall 2010 semester; the remaining four went through the process prior to that semester. One participant is African-American, while the rest are white. All except one (Tara) participated in recruitment at 18 years old, during their first year of college. Tara, a transfer student, participated

as a sophomore and was 19 years old.

Table 1. Demographics of Study Participants

Name	Sorority Affiliation	Recruitment Year	In-state?	Currently Affiliated?	Race
Rachel	None	2010	No	N/A	White
Bree	Alpha Epsilon Nu	2010	No	Yes	White
Ashley	Eta Psi	2010	Yes	Yes	African-American
Taylor	Iota Phi	2010	Yes	Yes	White
Tara	Iota Phi	2010	Yes	Yes	White
Hilary	Upsilon Psi	2010	Yes	Yes	White
Kelsey	Gamma Gamma	2009	No	No	White
Madison	Alpha Epsilon Nu	2008	Yes	Yes	White
Christina	Mu Zeta	2007	Yes	Yes	White
Mackenzie	Iota Phi	2006	Yes	No	White

As I interviewed, I recorded conversations using a tape recorder and then transcribed them. In my analysis, I used the coding approach suggested by Esterberg (2002) to organize the answers provided by interviewees to each question. I first used “open coding” to determine key topics or themes within my research. These topics included: finding recommendation letters; help from family members; help from friends; legacies or family members in sororities; out-of-state-related concerns; race; alumnae involvement in recruitment; recruitment counselors; bodily practices; behavior of PNMs; perceptions of sororities by PNMs; and perceived tiers of sororities. I next began to develop themes from the topics noted, focusing on help from others during preparation for recruitment, bodily practices, behavioral choices, how sororities presented themselves to PNMs, and tier systems. I then engaged in “focused coding,” rereading through my data while focusing on the themes I determined, identifying patterns and organizing my quotations into subthemes. I then analyzed quotations addressing these themes, comparing and contrasting the experiences described by PNMs, and linked the themes that shared commonalities to form the chapters of my thesis. To protect the confidentiality of my subjects, I

have used pseudonyms for their names, hometowns, sororities and the university, and I have removed additional identifying information. My research proposal was approved by the Institutional Review Board before any interviews were conducted.

Outline

In this thesis, I will begin by discussing how women prepare for recruitment before arriving on campus, focusing primarily on how PNMs obtain necessary recommendations from sorority alumnae prior to recruitment and how women learn about the expectations about the sorority recruitment process at Southern State University from friends and family. In the third chapter, I will describe the bodily practices and behavioral choices of PNMs leading up to recruitment, analyzing their interpretations of gender and class expectations within the context of the Greek system at Southern State. Chapter 4 focuses on the presentation of self by the sororities themselves and how PNMs understand the concept of “fit.” I discuss the interactions between PNMs and sororities on campus, examining the implications of sorority reputations and how a PNM’s perception of a particular sorority will impact her recruitment experience. I will then conclude with a review of the implications of this study and potential opportunities for future sociological research on sororities and recruitment practices.

CHAPTER II

THE LEGACY ADVANTAGE

In this chapter, I will discuss how social capital, namely the preexisting ties that women and their families have with sorority members at Southern State University and around the country, impacts how a potential new member (PNM) may prepare for the formal recruitment process. These connections determine the strength of the letters of recommendation solicited by PNMs, the weight placed upon these letters by individual chapters, and the preparation and formal recruitment experiences of each PNM. Individuals with closer ties to Southern State and its Panhellenic community generally retained an advantage in preparing for recruitment over those with limited or no connection to the Greek community.

Letters of recommendation, commonly referred to as “recs,” are an important part of the recruitment process at Southern State. These recommendations are written by alumnae of a sorority for that individual chapter, and consist of a standardized form and optional letter of support detailing the strengths of the candidate. Thus, at Southern State, potential new members (PNMs) are seeking recommendations from alumnae of each of the nine sororities represented on campus. At colleges and universities with less competitive sorority recruitments, recruitment materials frequently state that while recommendations are welcomed, they are not necessary to obtain; in contrast, the Panhellenic Council at Southern State states in multiple documents that PNMs should have one letter of recommendation to each house, as top consideration will go to

participants with recommendation letters. Bree, a PNM from a neighboring state, describes the value of recommendations in the recruitment process:

Recommendation letters are one of the most important things you can do when trying to pledge a chapter because without rec letters you won't get a bid. Doesn't matter how amazing you are, you need at least one letter.

Most women preparing for the recruitment process relied on their families--particularly their mothers or other female relatives--to obtain these formal letters of recommendation.

Mackenzie explains her perspective:

My mom got all of my recommendations...A lot of people's parents are moms who were in sororities, who have friends who were in sororities, they know people who can write recommendations where I wouldn't really.

Mackenzie suggests the importance of social capital in securing formal letters of recommendation from sorority alumnae. Parents and their social connections play a significant role in the recruitment experience at Southern State. If a parent's friend or colleague can write a personal letter of recommendation indicating that she knows the PNM, the letter carries greater weight than a recommendation based solely on a resume or brief meeting. While PNM's may have some direct connection to sorority alumnae, such as teachers, coaches, or youth group leaders, they often rely on the social capital of family members to obtain stronger letters of recommendation. Bree and her mother took a direct approach to obtaining recommendations:

I guess the best preparation that we did was send out lots of copies of resumes...got all of my photos ready, and then my momma always had it in her briefcase. And if we were at the grocery store or, just no matter where we were, to have it on hand at all times was really helpful. You always run into someone who has a Greek affiliation...For me, my mom is actually a part time worker at Starbucks, so she's kind of a people person, talks with so many different people, she's involved with Junior League, which is, a big majority of them are Greek as well. So she did have a lot of connections and, I mean, I knew a lot of people through my mother, and any time she figured out what sororities people would be, I'd bring over my resume to them, talk to them, and gave them a stamped envelope. Simple as that.

At any time prior to recruitment, Bree and her mother were prepared with resumes and headshots, reaching out to any and all women they encountered with a Greek affiliation. Bree relied on her mother's connections through work and philanthropy to build the strongest possible combination of recommendations for each chapter. For women whose mothers had strong social ties to organizations or professions with many sorority alumnae, the process of obtaining recommendations seems easy; in those instances, the PNMs were sometimes detached from the process. As one PNM, Hilary, put it: "Yeah, for recs, [my mom] did all of that. I didn't even know half the people that wrote them." This disconnect was often reflected by PNMs indicating that they "didn't do anything" to prepare for recruitment until shortly before events began late in the fall semester, as family members often performed the necessary preparation on behalf of the PNM.

PNMs without those same connections in their families may struggle to find letters of recommendation to every house. While asking family for assistance was the most common approach taken by the students interviewed, it was not the only way that women obtained recommendations.

One woman, Taylor, benefitted from a strong local Panhellenic alumnae association in her hometown. While her family had additional connections for obtaining personal recommendations, Taylor also participated in a recruitment tea event where alumnae provided specific information on recommendations and what to provide:

I went to the tea and they told us just to turn in our resume and all that, so I put together my resume. They said to get a head shot, so I grabbed one of my senior portraits. I did that, I gave it to the woman who was in charge of the recruitment for my area, and then after that there were a couple people who [were] my mom's clients and knew me.

Beyond just the direct family connections available to most of the women I interviewed, Taylor's local alumnae association provided Taylor with the minimum necessary recommendations early in the process; thus, she was able to focus on obtaining additional personal recommendations and could readily provide the information requested by potential writers:

Even though there were already recommendation letters written by the Panhellenic alumni in our hometown, they came up to my mom or me and said, "Hey, would you like me to write you a personal recommendation letter?" And of course I immediately said yes, I would love for you to. So they said, "Send me your resume, just remind me of some of the stuff you've done."

In contrast, Ashley's family lacked the social capital of most other interviewees; out of necessity, Ashley found help from university- and Panhellenic-affiliated sources:

It was hard because the people my mom knew that are in [historically African American] sororities...she contacted coworkers and one of her coworkers, they went to Southern State, was able to get me two recs, and the woman with the enrollment office...has a Facebook and she put, if any student needs help getting recs, contact me, so I contacted her, and I was able to get the majority of my recs that way. From women in the enrollment offices being willing to do them. The other recs, I just emailed a list of people we got from our recruitment counselors.

Ashley's family did not have extensive social connections to alumnae of the sororities represented in the formal Panhellenic recruitment process; this lack of social capital placed Ashley at a significant disadvantage compared to women with personal letters of recommendation and strong social ties to these sororities. Ashley, as an African American, already perceived herself to be at a disadvantage compared to her white peers due to racial tensions; in addition, because members of her family did not know as many members of predominantly white sororities, Ashley faced additional struggles in the recruitment process.

Legacies, or the Greek affiliations of immediate family members, often played a significant role in recruitment. These preexisting connections made it easier for PNM's to obtain

more personal letters of recommendation for multiple sororities as well as to gain additional consideration due to the membership of family members in a given sorority. Legacy status varies between organizations; for example, some organizations may consider nieces to be legacies, while others do not. A PNM may also be a legacy of multiple sorority chapters, potentially affecting the dynamics of their recruitment.

The importance of continuing a legacy was stronger for some PNMs than others. Bree, an Alpha Epsilon Nu legacy, did not indicate pressure from her family to choose a specific path:

Two of my aunts were both the same sorority, my aunts and my mother were Alpha Epsilon Nus just like myself. My other aunt was a Gamma Beta and my grandmother was a Mu Zeta. And my stepsister was an Omicron Zeta. I don't feel like there was any pressure to do what a previous member...did.

While Bree ultimately chose the same sorority as her mother, she did not indicate a preference for any particular sorority based on family connections, and would mention her connections to Mu Zeta and Omicron Zeta during recruitment to the appropriate chapters. For another PNM, Christina, her grandmother's ongoing involvement with Mu Zeta as an alumna became a significant element in her own recruitment experience.

My grandmother was a Mu Zeta at Southern State, and even before I knew what a sorority was, I had been hearing about MZ, MZ, MZ. My grandmother had parties at her house all the time for Mu Zeta...I knew that it was something my grandmother wanted me to do when I got to college. She had even started taking me to the Mu Zeta parties at her house, probably when I was ninth grade or something. So I'd been planning on going out for rush for a really long time.

From Christina's first experiences with the sorority as a child, she was encouraged to follow in her grandmother's footsteps by becoming a Mu Zeta at Southern State. Beyond her grandmother, one of Christina's cousins joined Alpha Epsilon Nu at another large public university in the region. This background provided her with an understanding of Greek Life that students without a direct family connection are unlikely to experience. Christina had a distinct advantage during

the sorority recruitment process as a result of her family connections. She knew chapter alumnae personally through her grandmother's ongoing involvement with the Mu Zeta community in her hometown, allowing her to obtain multiple strong letters of support. She had an understanding of the expectations of the recruitment process beyond what a woman with more casual connections to the Greek system would likely encounter. Christina generally found her family helpful and supportive during the recruitment process; however, as Christina prepared for recruitment and made decisions about which chapters to visit during later rounds, her grandmother's involvement sometimes created challenging dynamics between them:

My grandmother was just crazy about it. Actually to the point that it was awful. She would come visit me here at Southern State and say, you can't wear that to class, you should wear dresses to class. It was completely different from when she was in it. But in all, my family was really, really supportive of me, and my mom was, if you want to do this, you can do it, but if you don't want to, you don't have to. But they were very supportive of what decision I would make. I had family members in different sororities, and they both were like, whichever one you think would be best for you.

While Christina's grandmother wanted her to become a Mu Zeta, others in the family focused more on Christina finding the chapter where she felt the most comfortable. Christina herself had reservations about choosing the same sorority as her grandmother:

She definitely had influence on it, she'd taken me to all these Mu Zeta parties where I was able to meet people, and then I had an awesome recommendation from her... The first time I got there, before I even really knew what Mu Zeta was, I was just like, do I want to go Mu Zeta because of my grandmother? I kind of wanted to go something different.

Ultimately, Christina fell in love with Mu Zeta—she enjoyed their philanthropy, had many friends already in the chapter, was aware of the chapter's strong reputation on campus and nationally, and saw a shooting star over the house before going inside one night. She ranked Mu Zeta first each night, and on bid day, told her grandmother about her decision:

I remember my grandmother came, and I told her about the shooting star, and she told me that I was going to go Mu Zeta, and it was...she was 76, and I remember that she went to her car to get the camera, and she ran to the car and they handed out the bid cards, and she wasn't there when I opened mine, but I wanted to wait for her because I knew she would be happy. And we both ran to the house together and I was the last person to get there, and it was really exciting again, and everybody cried.

Legacy status had a marked impact on Christina's recruitment week; while she looked beyond her family when making decisions about which sorority would best fit her, her grandmother's influence continued to shape Christina's understanding of Greek life through recruitment to bid day. Their shared positive experiences as sorority sisters further indicated to Christina that she made the right decision when she preferenced Mu Zeta. In describing how her grandmother reacted to the news, Christina said, "She was on cloud nine. Absolutely. It made her life."

Another PNM, Mackenzie, came to Southern State with a similar background as Christina. Mackenzie's mother joined Iota Phi at Southern State as a student and remained involved as an alumna in a large city nearby:

My mom and aunt, my mom's sister, were in sororities, and my uncle's wife. Pretty much everybody. And my mom was always active in the alumni community in my hometown. And she always talked about it...I kind of always, I think, had different perceptions than my mom did. I'm pretty sure she was one of those people--I guess I wasn't here--the way she talks about it, she lived in the sorority house, all of her friends were in the same sorority, and it was so much fun. I feel like I never really--we're like two opposite personalities and I remember coming up here. At first I didn't even know if I was gonna come here [to Southern State] for college. I decided to come here because of the program I was interested in at the time, but I remember I told my mom, hey, I don't know if I'm gonna rush, I don't really know if that's my thing, and she was like, you have to rush, what are you talking about? You can't go to Southern State and not rush

Both Mackenzie and Christina experienced a certain degree of pressure from family to become part of a sorority. In Christina's case, she embraced the experience and hoped to find the same sisterhood as other members of her family. Mackenzie remained uncertain of whether or not a sorority would be the best college experience for her, but trusted her mother's experience and

decided to participate in the recruitment process. While Mackenzie's mother did not directly pressure her to select Iota Phi, her father discussed it during the week of recruitment:

My dad was in a fraternity, and he went here too, and he was pretty gung-ho about his fraternity as well, so he didn't really do anything, but he was really interested. More interested than I thought he was going to be. He called me every night of recruitment and was like, how did it go today?... I had pretty good things to say about most of the houses. And he said, if it comes down to two places you'd be happy accepting, I think your mom would be really pleased if you did what she did. My mom never said that, but my dad said that he thought it would make her happy if I did the same thing she did.

The pressure on Mackenzie from her father was unique among the women I interviewed, as most parents reportedly encouraged their children to choose what was best for them and somewhat de-emphasized the legacy element, as Mackenzie's mother did. Ultimately, Mackenzie preferred Iota Phi as her father suggested. In Mackenzie's case, while her mother likely cared deeply about sharing this connection with Mackenzie, she did not seek to actively push her to select Iota Phi, instead encouraging her to choose her own direction.

PNMs without legacy ties to a particular sorority may have other relatives that can serve as sources of information. Tara, a sophomore transfer whose mother was not affiliated with a sorority, sought help from other family members and friends about early preparation:

My cousin Amy was a Upsilon Psi and her brother was in [a fraternity] here and he dated a girl who was in U Psi. I talked to them as well. Anytime I saw them before rush, that's all we talked about. I could not wait to sit them down and talk about it. They answered all my questions. Talked briefly to a couple of my friends who were in sororities here, but I knew I couldn't say too much, you know, you don't want to jeopardize anything. Just, I'm a questions person, I get a lot just by asking and observing... I was mainly fascinated with how the selection process worked... I asked them lots about my resume, what pictures should I send in, I even called them, I was like, get on my Facebook, look at my profile pictures and choose one that's cute. 'Cause that's what kind of pictures that they want. I was fascinated with these girls, I could imagine them all sitting in the room, two or three hundred girls in any sorority, sitting in a room together talking about me. And it fascinated me. So I asked them about that, since they'd been through it and they could tell me how it worked. Stuff like that. And of course, you know, how I should act, what I

should wear, 'cause I had tons of clothes and everything. You know, basic stuff like that. Since they already had the inside information on it.

Tara perceived an advantage among PNMs with preexisting ties to sororities, such as legacies, and tried to increase her knowledge of the selection process as much as possible during the summer before recruitment to offset those advantages. She sought the “inside information” about recruitment and selection from more distant family members that were involved in the Greek system as students. Tara wanted to give herself the best chance during recruitment, particularly using the elements she could control in advance: her resume, photographs, and recommendation letters. As the week of formal recruitment approached, Tara remained in contact with both her mother and her cousins. However, her mother’s naïveté became more of a hindrance as recruitment began, leading Tara to reduce contact with her family:

My mother was just--my mother, she's so--she has no idea what the process is like. That whole week we didn't talk. I said, I don't want to talk to you this week, like, you're going to ask a million questions and I'm not gonna be able to answer...She was a nervous wreck. She couldn't stand. She was scared of disappointment. So I didn't talk to her the entire week. I really didn't talk to anybody, but just before, mainly my mom. And those cousins, those three cousins who had already been through it were really helpful.

Tara, as a sophomore with only three years left in school, was already at a disadvantage compared to many of her freshman counterparts that would remain in school for a full four years. Additionally, Tara did not have the same strong legacy connection that Hilary, Christina or Mackenzie had. She used the family resources available to her as best she could up until the time of recruitment, learning as much as she could to prepare for the experience. Tara had what she considered to be a successful recruitment despite not being considered a legacy to a sorority.

Several women indicated the importance of family ties not just to sororities or the Greek system as a whole, but specifically to Mississippi. Rachel describes her experience as a non-legacy PNM from the Midwest:

I know sometimes that they have to meet an in-state quota so I knew I was cut from those, like, right away. And a lot of them, they had to have, like, [this state], and things like that, like Southern people, so I got cut from those too. But I think it all depends on if your parents went here. Like especially your mom has a huge effect on how you do in rush...So like my friends' moms who did, they all had like no problems with getting accepted back or getting bids or anything...a lot of them did get asked back to where their mom went.

As a freshman from out-of-state with comparatively little previous exposure to sororities and fraternities, Rachel felt that other PNMs with mothers in sororities had an advantage during the recruitment process; while they may not have been invited back to their legacy chapter, it seemed to Rachel that they were invited somewhere. Ultimately, Rachel was released from recruitment—she did not receive any invitations to return to sororities for preference night, meaning that she was not selected to join a sorority. While her Midwestern background and few family members or friends in sororities may not have directly resulted in her release, Rachel noted that she was less comfortable in chapters where door songs or other comments suggested that being from in-state or from the South was valued by the sorority. That discomfort may have played a role in her behavior and, ultimately, her release from recruitment.

Legacy status did not provide a significant advantage for Kelsey, a freshman from Cincinnati. Unlike Mackenzie or Christina, Kelsey's mother, a Gamma Beta, attended a large Midwestern university, and could not speak to the culture of sororities at Southern State. While Kelsey's mother could provide some assistance, she did not share the knowledge or connections

of students from the South. Kelsey describes trying to find recommendation letters with her mother's help:

I had some--of course, my mom had contacts with other Gamma Betas around the country. I didn't get any recommendation letters from [this state]; they were all pretty much Cincinnati area stuff. But I felt like the whole process of recommendation letters was also kind of fake. Because to find one, especially for sororities that aren't that big in Cincinnati or in the Midwest, you would go online and ask a random person to write you a recommendation letter.

Kelsey's mother did not provide direct assistance or advice beyond the process of obtaining letters of recommendation; Kelsey instead sought information from her peers when attending classes at Southern State during the summer before her freshman year. When asked what other students told her about recruitment, Kelsey said:

I think people almost said it was too late for me, because I was coming from out-of-state, and I didn't know anybody who was in-state, so people were saying that it would be really hard to go through the recruitment system. So I went into it a little bit more scared than anything.

Before the semester started, Kelsey's lack of preexisting social connections to Southern State and its students created a perceived barrier to successful sorority recruitment. This disconnect outweighed the potential influence of legacy status for Kelsey; despite strong recommendations for Gamma Beta and other sororities with a larger alumni presence in Cincinnati, she perceived herself to be at a disadvantage compared to students who grew up in-state. An incident at the Gamma Beta house during the second round of formal recruitment indicated that her perception was correct:

I was left out in front of Gamma Beta, and I got to watch as all these girls would come out and call their names of their friends from high school, and they would run and have sweeping hugs with each other, I remember feeling, too, you're almost like stressed out, that you've been left out and forgotten. And the girl I talked to was totally disinterested and stuff. But I ranked them very low. I was frankly pissed. And I had to call my mom that night and tell her. And she was really okay with it though.

While Kelsey had the possible advantage of being a legacy to Gamma Beta, they did not show interest in her as a potential new member during recruitment, instead leaving her outside alone. In contrast, all other women attending the recruitment party were invited in by a member of a sorority calling their name, and the women often knew each other and hugged before entering the house. Kelsey was left out of this experience, and had to knock on the door herself to explain the situation after everyone else was invited into the house by a member of the sorority. Once inside the house, little attention was paid to her despite her mother's membership in that organization and the mishap at the door. From Kelsey's perspective, she was unwanted by the chapter. Without local alumnae connections and previously established relationships, Kelsey's legacy status had little weight.

Bree, from an adjacent state in the South, indicated that she was not negatively affected by her out-of-state status. She did, however, acknowledge that other out-of-state PNMs likely had a different experience when asked how being from another state impacted her recruitment:

It did not impact me. And I think I was the exception to the rule, and I'm very thankful to it. But my mom and a lot of her family are from [this state], so I had a connection when it came to [local] recs. And I think that might've helped. And I had a friend who was a Upsilon Psi... and her sister currently works on staff at Southern State. Who is also a Upsilon Psi. So that was very helpful, was the fact that they had an active alumni who worked on campus still and could write a strong rec for mine as well as the rest of her family. And for AEN, the way I made it through that, but that's having my legacies, I mean, like, I knew a couple of juniors, and then just, I made the best impression I could during rush.

One element that distinguishes Bree's experience from Kelsey's is the connection to sororities before arriving at Southern State. While both women were legacies of prestigious sororities on campus, and both women's mothers attended a school other than Southern State, Bree had stronger initial connections locally than Kelsey. Bree's connection to Upsilon Psi could provide a

strong, personalized recommendation as well as information about the campus culture—something Kelsey could not determine until arriving on campus in the summer, when she was informed by peers that it was already “too late” for her. The addition of local recommendations may have contributed to Bree’s recruitment experience also, as both collegiate members and alumnae may recognize the writer and give more weight to the recommendation provided. Madison, who served as a recruitment counselor, summarizes the challenges for out-of-state students without anyone locally to fight for them: “If you're from Houston, there's lots of people from Houston, so you should be fine. But if you're from Montana, and a single person--you don't know anyone here, how does anyone know to rush you if they've never met you before?”

Conclusion

Connections that PNMs have with sorority members, particularly with Southern State sorority members and alumnae, play a critical role in the recruitment experience. First, these connections (or lack thereof) impact both the quality and quantity of recommendations received on behalf of a PNM. Without these recommendations and letters of support, a PNM has limited potential to succeed in the formal recruitment structure at Southern State. Legacy PNMs, particularly those whose family members are alumnae of Southern State chapters, retain a general advantage over their non-legacy counterparts; they are more readily able to obtain recommendations for each house. Women from out-of-state are disadvantaged in the preparation process at Southern State. While they may still have additional ability to find personal recommendations over non-legacy candidates, a legacy from out-of-state generally does not know as many women in the chapter, and the recommendations she receives may lack the weight

of those written on behalf of in-state residents. Future research may consider examining legacy status as a specific element of the recruitment experience and pursue a more detailed look at how legacies from different regions prepare for recruitment at a given university.

CHAPTER III

BLACK DRESSES AND THE THREE “B”S

When preparing for the formal sorority recruitment process, potential new members (PNMs) often focus their attention on bodily practices, including clothing, makeup, and hairstyle choices. However, these practices comprise only a portion of a PNM’s presentation of self. From the time school starts at Southern State University until Bid Day in late September or October, PNM’s remain cognizant of their behavior on campus and in the community, recognizing that they must present themselves as optimal candidates for sorority membership to ensure success during the recruitment process. In this chapter, I will examine how PNM’s navigate their presentation of self leading up to and during the formal recruitment process—how they “do gender” in the context of sorority recruitment at Southern State.

Bodily Practices

In preparing for the recruitment process, all women I interviewed carefully considered their clothing choices for each round of recruitment—philanthropy round the first two nights, followed by skit night, and finally preference night. Most women also gave extra attention to makeup choices and hairstyles during the formal recruitment process. In addition to the formal recruitment week, women also tended to consider their overall look for water parties, an informal opportunity to meet each sorority that occurs approximately one month prior to recruitment. Several women also looked beyond the events themselves, ensuring an appropriate wardrobe for

classes and other campus events during the semester, such as football games. Ashley talks about her wardrobe shift when preparing to attend Southern State:

Before we came to the campus, I had a completely new wardrobe. A lot of people do. At my school, Nike shorts weren't really popular and people wore fitted tees more, so I got those before I came to campus. I got my first North Face backpack before I came to campus. And I definitely started wearing my sneakers more when I got here. Running shoes.

At Southern State, women typically wear a specific style of Nike athletic shorts and oversize t-shirts, paired with athletic shoes or, during warmer months, flip-flops. Typically, sorority members wear t-shirts they have collected during their membership, advertising their participation in recruitment, philanthropy events, formals, and swaps or date parties with fraternities. This style allows members of sororities to demonstrate their ongoing participation while seemingly unconcerned with their casual approach to fashion. Ashley, believing that adopting this particular campus style was important to fit in, chose to revamp her wardrobe when preparing to attend Southern State; she began to select what she would wear for recruitment while making these wardrobe adjustments. Beyond adopting the fashion of her new peers, Ashley also focused on the significance of labels, specifically identifying the brand of shorts favored by students at Southern State as well as the new backpack she purchased for the school year. Similarly, Mackenzie also purchased a significant amount of new clothing to begin her time at Southern State, with the blessing of her mother:

She [my mom] doesn't use a personal shopper all the time, but she has a personal shopper that she uses if she has a wedding or something, so she got him to go get outfits for me. He brought an entire store worth of things. He had to set it up in the den... We got a lot of clothes for rush, and my mom also wanted me to have dresses to wear to football games, things like that. So it was sort of like a get your clothes ready to go to college thing, but I thought it was a little excessive. I could just run to the store, and I really don't like football that much.

While Mackenzie thought that hiring a personal shopper to establish her collegiate wardrobe was somewhat extreme, she also recognized the importance of purchasing many of these outfits. At Southern State, football games provide an opportunity for women to “be seen” in public during the fall semester, and students planning to participate in formal sorority recruitment often use the tailgating experience prior to the game as a way for them to be recognized as well-groomed and well-behaved by sorority members in the area. Mackenzie’s mother felt that starting college, with football games and recruitment parties, was significant enough to justify using a personal shopper to select ideal outfits and combinations for Mackenzie; Ashley and her family did not take that step, but did choose to invest a significant amount of money in clothing that would help Ashley to fit in better with students at Southern State.

The prevailing clothing trends on campus carried over to the various rounds of sorority recruitment, with women wearing t-shirts and shorts or jeans with sneakers or flip-flops during casual recruitment events, and selecting dresses for later rounds. Taylor summarizes the clothing suggestions provided by her recruitment counselors:

They [the recruitment counselors] told us that we would be given our shirts for philanthropy round and water parties, so they had the shirts for those. And then they told us, skit night, be dressy, church--contemporary church-like, like an average church. And then Saturday was a little dressier--not necessarily semi-formal or cocktail, but somewhere between church and that.

The first two rounds of recruitment provided a degree of uniformity among PNMs, intended to reduce a possible focus on clothing or other indicators of socioeconomic status rather than conversation and finding a “good fit” from a personality standpoint. Later rounds provided the opportunity for creativity and personal style, albeit informed by campus trends and the opinions of recruitment counselors, who offered to review the clothing choices of PNMs. Hilary briefly describes her clothing choices for different recruitment rounds:

Philanthropy was very relaxed. I think I had some Converse and stuff like that. Shorts, t-shirt. Skit night, I think everyone wore skirts on my floor. Or a dress. I don't remember exactly. But, like, flats instead of heels that day. And then obviously prep night is heels and all-out, like people were going to get spray tans. It was intense... For pref, it was the most planned out, obviously, because it was formal. It was probably like two and a half weeks in advance when I bought the dress, and decided what accessories I was going to wear. Philanthropy I just kind of picked out that day. I was like, what says me? And I just wore something to that effect. And then skit, same thing. It was probably like a week maybe at best.

Hilary took a comparatively relaxed approach to preparing her outfits for formal recruitment. She discusses the interpretation that she and her floor had of the recruitment outfit suggestions, beginning with the philanthropy round. The first two nights roughly mirrored what many women at Southern State wear to class, giving them a chance to feel more relaxed before the intensity and pressure of dressing nicely for later parties. Despite the trend towards conformity during philanthropy round, Hilary found ways to make the outfit her own, giving her the opportunity to show off her personality through accessory and shoe choices. The skit round was slightly nicer, with women tending to wear dresses or skirts—no one interviewed mentioned seeing anyone wearing slacks or trousers, and all women interviewed wore dresses or skirts. Hilary differentiates between the formality level of skit and preference rounds using shoes, where a lack of heels indicates that the round is less formal. High-heeled shoes represented an important part of the recruitment experience for many women, and are seen as a given by recruitment counselors and friends of PNM's, who regularly advise them to bring flats or flip-flops for running from house to house between parties. This combination of dresses or skirts and heels represents a specific understanding of femininity among women seeking sorority membership. If a PNM chose not to wear these markers of womanhood, she would stand out from her peers. She may be perceived as not fitting with the chapter—her style would significantly differ with that of the sorority members she encountered at each house, most of whom wear dresses and heels to the

events if they will interact with PNMs. Thus, most women choose to adopt the standard presented by recruitment counselors, friends, and family, despite the physical limitations of traveling between houses in high-heeled shoes. Taylor describes how shoes became frustrating for her during recruitment, even as she followed the suggestions of her recruitment counselor:

I definitely wanted to be remembered, in a good way, so I didn't--it wasn't one of those things where I kept going, if I don't look like this they're going to cut me, but at the same time I didn't want to look like I didn't appreciate their time either. I tried to find that balance...I do remember that I tried, they told us to run to the houses in flip-flops, and I believed them. Instead of wearing my heels, I switched out of my heels to flip-flops to run, because they randomly put you which house you go to at which time. So I had to go from one side of campus to the other. I put on the flip-flops and I slid and twisted my ankle.

Taylor wanted it to seem that she was not overly concerned by her appearance and its potential impact on her recruitment, but did not want to give any indication that she did not care enough about the chapters or the recruitment process to maintain a polished appearance. PNMs have only a few minutes in their schedules to run between houses during recruitment, and may have to travel several blocks away depending on their schedules. Despite these challenges, PNMs are expected to arrive at each party on time so that the sororities they visit can greet them outside, invite them in, and interact with them for the entire length of the party. In her effort to maintain the illusion that she looked effortlessly put together, Taylor hurt herself by running in flip-flops—shoes lacking the appropriate support or structure for running—that were selected because they could be changed quickly and would limit the greater potential problems of running or jogging in high heels. Because of the importance of being on time and well-dressed to each party, lacing up sneakers was not a viable option for Taylor.

Tara, in selecting her outfits for recruitment, attempted to balance comfort and fashion, focusing both on what items improved her appearance and what items were the most comfortable. She describes the basis behind her choices:

I wish I could say that I am very unique in the way I dress, and in a way I am, but I'm also very plain. Like, I'm plain, I don't own all these fancy things that girls put on to go out in, that's not me. So I had two girls that were friends from before from my recruitment group come to my apartment after one of our recruitment meetings and they actually helped me pick out my dresses. And so I laid them all out, for each category, and was like, you know, I'm feeling this one over this one, put them on and modeled them for them. Another big thing is comfort, because you never know. You may be, when you're in the house, you may be sitting in the chair, and the girl that's talking to you may be down here, and that's awkward if you're uncomfortable and your dress is up to here. So you've also got to take that into consideration. High heels, when they lead you in, you may have to step over a million girls. So, you know, obviously picked out, there's only one night I wore a really uncomfortable pair. And you bring flip-flops, because you have to run to get to each house on time. So take into consideration, something that's you, and also something that's comfortable, and, you know, no wardrobe malfunctions. You don't want your boobies to show, you don't want your booty to be hanging out. You want everything to just kind of fit perfectly. That's what I was looking for. The stuff that I ended up choosing, over style. Which I always do anyway.

Tara describes her shoes, choosing to wear an “uncomfortable” pair for one night of recruitment. For her, like many PNM, fashion outweighed the functionality of shoes at some point during recruitment, and she chose to experience discomfort rather than sacrifice her appearance. The vast majority of women involved in the Greek system recognize that the style choices many of them make can lead to physical discomfort or pain—a PNM wearing truly comfortable shoes during recruitment would likely not need to change into flip-flops before heading to the next house. PNM choose to adopt this standard of high heels, despite the pain inflicted by the shoes, so they can match the standard of femininity they perceive from the sororities at Southern State. Tara also mentions the importance of avoiding “wardrobe malfunctions,” ensuring that PNM do not show too much skin for the recruitment environment.

Beyond shoes, other accessories appeared important in the context of recruitment at Southern State. Christina mentions how she opted to accessorize based on her perception of sorority life:

Second night I wore a peach satin dress with pearls. I heard that it was really important to wear pearls, to be in a sorority, so I wore my pearls.

Necklaces and other jewelry tended to help PNMs feel as though they fit the role of “sorority girl.” For Christina, she heard from other students that pearls were essential to a successful recruitment. While Christina did not indicate a specific reason why pearls would be considered necessary as opposed to other jewelry, such necklaces are often worn by members of some sororities on formal occasions and are symbolic for some Greek-letter organizations.

Traditionally considered expensive and luxurious, pearls suggest that one is demonstrating their membership in the upper-middle or upper class. Taylor describes a similar approach to jewelry by others during recruitment, directly tying jewelry and accessory choices to the demonstration of affluence:

One of the important things when you first go through rush, they don't want you to have that distinction of where you're from. They [Panhellenic] don't want to have the labels associated. So everybody wears the same thing, so you don't have that--granted, there are a few girls who put on their designer jewelry and things like that. They try to make it as discreet as possible as far as that goes... There were girls who had said, oh, I'm going to this house, they care about how your status is... Let me put on my Tiffany necklace, I know we can't carry purses because those are status symbols, they'll notice my jewelry.

While the goal of matching t-shirts is to reduce the significance of socioeconomic status markers in the earlier rounds and instead focus on conversation and mutual interests, PNMs continue to perceive the importance of displaying visual indicators of wealth. Jewelry provides one vehicle for PNMs to show chapters that they are of a higher socioeconomic status, while simultaneously choosing to incorporate another element of traditional femininity—accessorizing appropriately

with jewelry, particularly a “statement necklace” calling attention to the expensive jewelry itself rather than the simple t-shirt for the philanthropy round.

For some PNM, appearance only mattered in specific contexts, as opposed to remaining a constant influence. For Bree, appropriate dress, including shoes and accessories, was essential—but only in the presence of active sorority members involved in membership selection:

I only cared about what I wore when there were people I could meet around. So, there were some events where only recruitment counselors were there, and those I didn't really care about... Water parties, we had to wear a t-shirt, so along with that I wore jeans, I wore one of my favorite pairs of jeans, and I did my hair and makeup, pretty easy. For philanthropy round they gave us a t-shirt, which I wore with jeans, warm boots Thursday night because it was cold. I got compliments on that. I mean, you can twist to fit your own personality. Friday night I had a pink dress, so I wore a pink dress, and I borrowed some shoes for that and I went and bought some jewelry. Saturday I had bought a dress for, like, a semi-formal dress, and I ended up wearing that one...I didn't stress too much about it. It's an outfit. I think presenting yourself well physically, and with whenever your garments of choice, is very important, but there isn't, it's not like there's a perfect outfit, there's no outfit that will make someone rank them higher. But there is an outfit that can make people think you're someone who's not serious. So that you would want to avoid. I wouldn't wear shoes where the soles were falling out, or little things like that.

Like other PNM, Bree used shoes and accessories to show creativity during casual rounds, and expanded that creativity to the entire outfit during skit and preference rounds. She sought to demonstrate that she was thoughtful and serious about the recruitment process. Bree briefly mentions the “little things” that could have a negative impact on recruitment, highlighting the importance of appearance and seeming well put-together. Shoes matter. Clothing with imperfections or showing visible wear might suggest to sororities that a student does not take the recruitment process seriously. While no women directly indicated that any outfit they chose was “not serious,” the concept of selecting the “wrong” outfit remained a concern for the PNM I interviewed. Beyond Bree’s analysis, shoes or other items in poor condition could serve as a

marker of lower socioeconomic status, casting a PNM in a negative light and perhaps indicating to sororities that the PNM may struggle to meet financial obligations to the chapter. This intersection of gender expectations and social class reveals the importance of a middle- to upper-class performance, what might be described as traditional feminine values in previous research (Risman 1982; Arthur 1999). This particular performance requires a well-maintained appearance indicating that the individual has the spare time and finances to ensure that clothing, shoes, and accessories remain in good repair. PNM's understand the importance of demonstrating this “polish” in their interactions with sororities, as demonstrated by changing shoes and wearing high-quality jewelry during the recruitment process.

Another element of the idealized femininity expressed during recruitment is the rejection of an overly sexual look, instead favoring a balance of sexy and demure. This is expressed by Madison as she discusses selecting her outfits for recruitment:

Philanthropy, you get a t-shirt. I wore the t-shirt and Nike shorts with flip-flops. And then skit wore a going-out dress, sort of. Nicer than church, but pref was more of a cocktail dress...As the nights progress, it gets more and more serious...I went home before rush started and I went shopping with Mom...I guess I felt kind of stressed. Not stressed, but I kind of freak out about what I wear sometimes. I have to look perfect. So in retrospect, I don't think I would pick those dresses I wore... I don't think it matters, to be honest. As long as you don't look like a tramp, it doesn't really matter what you wear. As long as you put some makeup on, and you don't look gross.

Madison's commentary highlights the conflict between sexy and demure. A PNM shouldn't look like a “tramp”—someone who goes beyond the level of sexuality perceived as acceptable for a woman—yet still is expected to wear makeup and ensure that she is visually appealing to others. In discussing clothing choices and levels of formality, the idea of a “church dress” is mentioned by several PNM's. This comparison point further suggests the balance that women aim to strike during the formal recruitment process between the image of a religious “good girl” and a

flirtatious partygoer, without being too much of one or the other. This distinction presents ongoing challenges for sororities themselves as well, as chapters must maintain a positive image to maintain strong relationships with fraternities and retain their exclusivity by attracting as many interested PNMs to their chapter as possible. PNMs understand that it is in the best interest of each sorority to select women that uphold the balance between modest and sexy; they ultimately seek to portray themselves as “fun” without crossing the line to “trampy.” Tara sought the advice of friends prior to recruitment in order to maintain this balance:

There was a dress, actually, that [my friends] really didn't want me to wear. It was perfect up top, but too short on bottom. It was such a unique dress, and I wanted to wear it, but part of me said, you know, standing up, it would look fabulous, but when I sit down, it's immediately, it's coming back, and you know, this is pref night, it's too fancy, it's too formal for that. I don't need to go in there looking like that...They were really helpful. They were honest. Sometimes you need brutal honesty and stuff like that, so I'm glad they were there.

In the formal context of preference night, Tara’s friends voiced their concern about her initial dress choice. While appropriate for another type of event, the dress had a tendency to ride up—showing too much leg and creating potentially awkward situations if the sorority members speaking to her are kneeling by the chair or if Tara is asked to perform another sort of activity that might cause the dress to ride up further. Tara did not trust her own judgment, and wanted to ensure that she did not cross the line within the recruitment context by asking her friends for advice.

As PNMs prepared for recruitment events, they sought assistance from multiple sources, including friends, parents, and recruitment counselors. For Tara and Hilary, friends provided valuable insight about what dresses to wear for preference night, the most formal night of

recruitment, as well as general tips. Hilary describes the advice she received from a particular friend prior to recruitment:

I had one friend who helped me pick out my pref dress. Just, she was like, this is too formal, this is too casual, you know, she just kind of helped me pick something out. And then, the other days, too, you know, like helpful hints. For the first round, philanthropy, she said to wear tennis shoes, because you were going to be running from house to house. Like, sprinting. Because of the way they're going to write your schedule. So it was like, okay, good to know.

Friends acted as a source of tips and advice, helping women to navigate the formal recruitment process from preparation (discussed in Chapter 2) through Bid Day. Hilary sought this advice from a trusted friend. Like Tara, Hilary wanted to ensure that her preference dress matched the expectations set by sororities for the recruitment process, asking if particular dresses were appropriate and ensuring that she presented the image that she felt active sorority members wanted to see at preference night. Others, like Taylor, sought suggestions from family, asking for suggestions and opinions when unsure of what to wear or crunched for time:

I wasn't sure what to wear to pref night, because I didn't bring anything semi-formal with me. So I called my mom and said, hey, can you send me one of my dresses from home, and she said, I can do one better than that, I found one that was really cute that I'll send you, and I tried it on and thought, okay, this is the perfect dress. It's this pretty red dress, it was conservative but it was still nice, and best of all, it came off the sales rack. Because I'd gotten it via package, I made sure it was steamed out so it wouldn't be all wrinkled, but as far as--that week before I showed it to my recruitment counselors, because I knew it was going to be a hectic week...So I had it picked out, not because I was trying so hard to impress, but because of the time factor.

Taylor, recognizing her struggles to balance school and recruitment and acknowledging the challenges she faced in selecting a dress, generally trusted her mother's judgment when selecting a dress. However, in addition to the dress suggestion from her mother, Taylor utilized another resource available to her—the recruitment counselors assigned by the College Panhellenic

Council to the floor of her dormitory—to ensure that her mother’s recommendations aligned with the expectations of sorority members at Southern State.

Recruitment counselors provided the greatest amount of support and suggestions for the women interviewed. These counselors are current sorority members selected by the College Panhellenic Council at Southern State to serve as mentors and friends for women preparing for and experiencing the formal sorority recruitment process. They provide information on the structure of recruitment, last minute ideas for finding letters of recommendation, how to dress for each round, and appropriate behavior during and prior to recruitment. Recruitment counselors also respond to any questions or concerns that arise from PNMs in their assigned recruitment groups, and offer to review the outfits selected by each woman for the recruitment process.

Ashley describes her clothing choices and the information she received from her recruitment counselors:

For my skit night dress, I got this Lilly [Pulitzer] purple dress that had flowers at the collar from Belk. For pref, I'd gotten a real kind of black satiny dress that had roses going down one of the shoulders. [The recruitment counselors] told us what you would and you wouldn't wear. I had that in mind, like a little short cocktail dress was fun, and then for pref a dress that was a little bit more formal. And they told us, you don't have to wear black, but I wanted a black dress, so yeah.

For Ashley and others, recruitment counselors played a critical role in dispelling myths about the recruitment process, such as one about the importance of wearing a black dress to preference night parties, and helped PNMs to feel confident with their outfit choices for each round of recruitment. Christina also noted the rumor that everyone must wear black during the preference round, and how her recruitment counselors actively addressed that misinformation:

I heard before going in that you have to wear black. I'd heard from all of my friends if you do not wear black, they will not let you in. I heard that from every single person. And then the recruitment counselors cleared that up. You don't really, it's okay if you don't

wear black. I did wear black. I wore a black dress, strapless, with a little bow on the front of it.

While friends can provide helpful suggestions for PNMs going through recruitment, they can also be a source of incorrect information, adding to the stress of selecting outfits and presenting what PNMs perceive as the ideal “sorority girl” image. Recruitment counselors allow PNMs to seek advice from sorority members that are temporarily disaffiliated from their sororities, providing what most PNMs perceive to be an impartial voice of reason as they prepare for recruitment during the fall semester. Taylor, concerned about the colors of her dress suggesting that she favored one sorority over another if she chose to wear one chapter’s official colors, asked her recruitment counselors for suggestions:

One of the things with each sorority, when you're going through recruitment, you have recruitment counselors. You don't know what affiliation they are, but they kind of help you. I pulled out two dresses and said, which one do I go with? I went with the black and gold one, because I remembered that some of these sororities have certain colors...I was trying to decide between a blue leopard and a black and gold dress, and I ended up going with the black and copper colored one.

Recruitment counselors provide a sounding board for PNMs concerned about presenting the best possible image during recruitment. While they do not select clothing for women, they provide the opportunity for PNMs to receive feedback on what sorority members would find appropriate for each party and whether or not the particular dress flatters the PNM. Taylor continues to describe the role of the recruitment counselors in her group:

They were just asking girls, what do you have picked out, what do you have picked out? I said, I really don't know what I'm wearing, so they said, would you like to show us?...Not so much let me tell you to wear this, but let me be your friend for a moment and let me see which looks good on you...it was to make sure it was appropriate, it was the right level of dressiness, because some girls had dresses that were a lot shorter, so they said no, just keep it classy. Just things like that.

In helping PNMs prepare for recruitment, recruitment counselors guided women in balancing between “fun” and “trampy,” providing an additional voice from sororities about appropriate outfits and how the wrong choice could negatively impact a woman’s recruitment experience. As noted earlier in the chapter, too casual of a dress could indicate that a PNM does not take the recruitment process seriously; too formal also suggests that she does not understand the appropriate attire for different social situations. Dresses that are too short or otherwise too revealing don’t look “classy” and could result in a chapter seeing the PNM as “trampy,” potentially denying them membership into that organization. Hilary elaborates on the advice she received about clothing choices:

They made sure we had, like, things were very professional. Don't wear too much cleavage, stuff like that. Don't acknowledge any other Greek affiliations. Some girls had, like, their mom's jewelry and stuff. And things like that. Heels for the last two nights-- preference and, not preference, skit—they told us to bring flip-flops instead because we would also have to run between houses. So, just little things like that.

Recruitment counselors helped to prevent PNMs from unintentionally committing a recruitment faux pas. For example, wearing jewelry that displays a symbol important to a specific chapter, such as an image from their coat of arms or sorority badge, could indicate to other sororities that the PNM is uninterested in them as a possibility while suggesting to the specific chapter represented that the PNM is overconfident and disrespectful of the sanctity of their symbols. An excited PNM may not realize the potential problem of wearing such jewelry; a PNM that is less familiar with the Greek system might not know the symbols that could upset a chapter.

Recruitment counselors also reiterated the importance of using shoes to show the formality of the event, suggesting heels for the last two recruitment rounds and promoting flip-flops as a way to reduce pain and potential injury from running in high heels. This reinforcement from sorority

members indicates the importance of presenting a specific, uniform image of femininity during recruitment, despite problems with functionality of shoes or outfits.

Beyond recruitment rounds, PNMs reported that some individuals dressed differently for regular classes during the week of recruitment, preventing the possibility of making a poor impression on the women they had just met. Christina chose to dress up slightly for classes that week:

I probably definitely did [dress differently during recruitment week]. My grandmother, I told you that she would always get upset with me for wearing a t-shirt and shorts, and I probably wore something like I'm now, khakis and a polo. That's probably what I did wear. I probably put on a little more makeup that week than usual, and tried to fix my hair a little more to be presentable, but that week was really stressful. I probably did do that.

As Christina prepared for recruitment, her grandmother frequently commented that she needed to dress well for class, rather than wear the t-shirts and shorts common around the Southern State campus. She ultimately chose a look closer to business casual during the week of recruitment, and spent more time on hair and makeup than at other points in the semester, showing to any active members she encountered that she spent time on her appearance. Tara did not dress substantially differently, but did make some minor adjustments:

You know, I don't think that [dressing differently for class] ever really crossed my mind. I still wore my Nike shorts, my leggings, my tees. I can't really remember what the weather was like that week, but I definitely was in class. I couldn't miss class that week...Honestly, I didn't come to class, like, oftentimes I'd wake up and just throw my hair in a bun, and I didn't do that that week. I wanted to look, especially my makeup and hair, to look a little more presentable, but no, I didn't just go all out. But now that I think about it, I remember girls that did, bless their hearts. But I was still me.

While initially stating that she didn't dress differently, Tara recognized that she did spend additional time on hair and makeup that she would not necessarily have done during a different week of the semester. Beyond that, when saying "bless their hearts," Tara indicated disdain of

those women who did “go all out” by dressing much more nicely for classes that week, suggesting that their efforts indicated a sort of inauthenticity. Tara wanted to look nice that week, but also sought to avoid seeming fake or like she was changing her habits for the purpose of joining a sorority. Her understanding of looking just “a little more presentable” was relatively common among PNM’s interviewed. Taylor reflects on her similar experiences:

I had my hair down, makeup normal. I didn't go like I was going to class where I was rolling out of bed and just running across campus. But I just looked probably about like I do right now, that kind of thing. Nothing too special...Some of them were doing the blowouts on their hair, and doing extra makeup, and all that sort of thing. Oh, the girls all wear oversize t-shirts here, I'm not going to wear a t-shirt that actually fits me, I'm going to wear one that looks like a dress. I mean, I felt that was good for them, but I was kind of in the mindset of, well, if they don't like me for who I am, then I'm not going to bother. I just kind of thought, I just kept looking and, why are you all doing this? I mean, there are some great girls, that doesn't mean they're going to completely isolate you if you're not in their sorority.

Both Taylor and Tara acknowledged trying to look their best without overdoing it. While they spent time ensuring that they looked “presentable,” they maintained their standard routines for ideal days, not spending excessive amounts of time dressing up for classes. Taylor mentions how other PNM’s she encountered made a conscious effort to look better than normal for the week of recruitment, and suggests that they are attempting to mold themselves to the sororities, rather than finding their fit within the Greek system. This notion of wanting a sorority to accept new members for who they are resonated with Hilary as well; when asked if she dressed any differently during the week of formal recruitment, Hilary stated:

No, definitely not. I was just like, you know, I'm going to be with these people for four years, they're going to accept me for who I am.

For both Hilary and Taylor, finding a chapter that fit with their personalities meant that the sorority should accept them even when they do not dress any differently than normal or spend additional time on hair and makeup. The women that Tara and Taylor observed may have sought

to fit into their ideal sorority choice, rather than the other way around; however, most women interviewed for this project did not spend extra time improving their appearances for classes, potentially indicating that the pressure to look nice is less significant in the classroom than at outside events.

While clothing was often the focus of discussion about appearance in the context of recruitment, most women also paid extra attention to makeup and hairstyles throughout the formal recruitment period. Mackenzie describes her own approach:

I did my own hair and makeup. I *did* my hair and makeup. I didn't get it done or anything...A lot of times, I don't wear a lot of makeup. Going out, I'll wear my hair down, but usually I wear my hair back. But I don't know. I don't remember what I did. Straightened it or curled it or something. And I actually put on makeup...I feel like I would've felt really out of place if I hadn't done my hair and makeup.

Outside of the recruitment environment, Mackenzie seldom wore makeup and typically pulled her hair back into a ponytail. For recruitment, however, she opted to apply makeup and fix her hair differently than normal. While not the way she would typically choose to present herself, she mentions that she would feel “out of place” without placing this extra attention on her appearance—she “does gender” in a different way than she does when attending classes, matching her perception of sororities’ expectations for PNMs. Madison describes a similar experience:

I had to wear my hair down every night. I just had on normal makeup. I'm not really that much of a makeup wearer. I mean, I put on more than I do going to class. I put on eyeliner. I put some bronzer on. I don't know. I mean, not too much, but...

The PNMs interviewed tended not to prefer heavier makeup, with some mentioning the importance of looking natural and others stating that they typically did not wear makeup to class. In the context of recruitment, however, all mentioned putting on some amount of makeup,

further suggesting its perceived importance to the sororities evaluating PNMs for potential membership.

Regardless of whether or not makeup is required, PNMs perceive its application to be important, affecting their possible acceptance into their preferred chapters. Tara, however, describes the inner conflict when selecting makeup and hairstyles for recruitment:

I believe in the very natural look. So I wanted them to--I can't stand to see a girl whose face is just caked, and you get a lot of that here. Even a girl who I can look and tell, she doesn't normally wear her hair that high, or her lipstick that bright. Actually, no, I brought a little compact of powder with me, I brought some lip gloss, and my big thing--my big thing--and this is my big tip, is curling my eyelashes. They are always curled. I brought my eyelash curler, mascara, powder, and lip gloss. That's literally all I needed. I think I wore a little bit of eyeliner, not much at all. I believe in really neutral makeup. And so that way, the girls who match their eye color, their shadows, to their dress or whatever, I would never worry about that, because neutral stuff like nudes and browns and light pinks, they go with everything. I wanted them to see me as I really am. I didn't want to look like a different person, because I knew a lot of the girls...I wanted them to recognize me when I came in. I didn't want them to go, wow, she's really dressed up, because that's not me. In real life, I just wanted to be me. I wanted them to recognize me, that's what I'm trying to say. I did not try to be somebody I wasn't during rush.

In her discussion about “dressing up” for rush, Tara voiced concerns about sororities thinking that she is someone she’s not, or that she felt the need to try harder or go out of her way to impress women during recruitment. Her comments illustrate the delicate balance of her recruitment strategy—she wanted to impress the women she met without appearing that she was trying too hard to be accepted. This balance is similar to what PNMs tried to achieve with their approaches to clothing when selecting outfits and accessories for recruitment. Ashley, the only African-American PNM interviewed, also pointed out the potential importance of standing out from the crowd, and how makeup can help:

For the second round of philanthropy, I had one of my friends put on mascara and eyeshadow. Because usually I just maybe wear lip gloss and have on some foundation. That was about the extent of it...I felt like [recruitment] was a little bit more important because a lot of girls, they wear makeup, especially philanthropy night, but they change it

over the years. It used to that you could wear a dress for that, but then they made it where everyone has to wear a t-shirt that they provide you with, and then you might wear jeans or Nike shorts with it. So wearing makeup and jewelry would be a way to stand out. A lot of girls make sure their makeup is done very nicely, because you don't have anything to differentiate you...I guess I didn't have to worry about being memorable like other girls, because it was kind of like, you know, I'm me. But if I was just, like, white, or brunette or blonde, I would have definitely felt a lot more pressure to stand out.

In Ashley's case, she felt that she already stood out from the crowd of PNMs—less than 2% of PNMs at Southern State in a given year are African-American. Ashley described makeup as one way to show individuality during water parties and philanthropy round, where all PNMs wear identical t-shirts and similar outfits overall. However, despite already feeling like she stood out, Ashley asked a friend to help her apply additional makeup that she did not typically wear, suggesting that she also perceived that wearing makeup was important during recruitment; in her case, makeup may have allowed her to “fit in” where she felt like she stood out due to her race. Kelsey, a PNM from Cincinnati, did not feel the need to use makeup to stand out—but began to question herself about whether she should focus more on her appearance:

I don't wear a ton of makeup, so I just added a little bit more, but I always do natural makeup. I just replenished myself with my drugstore makeup...I know that style-wise I felt like I was definitely one of the less made-up girls. My style is just a lot more natural and laid-back, so I was comfortable with that, but I was kind of--I never really experienced the Southern culture of big hair, big makeup. Girls were outside teasing their hair before they walked into each house, and I was just--I brushed my hair once before I left. So I felt, when I was going through recruitment, kind of like, gee, should I be more worried about my appearance? I kept trying to tell myself that that's not the most important thing.

Kelsey was the only PNM to discuss the possibility of differences between the South and other parts of the country in terms of makeup and hairstyles, identifying one element, teasing, that she identified with Southern hairstyles as opposed to Midwestern; in addition, she felt self-conscious about her appearance because she did not choose to have “big hair” or “big makeup” for recruitment. While Kelsey identified the difference as “Southern,” other PNMs from the South

indicated that the focus on hairstyles and makeup was somewhat peculiar to the recruitment process, and was not the focus at other events. PNMs did not typically understand their approach as a specific sort of “Southern femininity,” but instead as generally feminine and fitting the standards of what sororities expected at Southern State in particular. Hair and makeup trends in the South certainly influence the styles chosen by PNMs, however, and women from outside the region may experience a different understanding of femininity in the context of sorority recruitment at Southern State than their counterparts that grew up in the region.

Behavior

While bodily practices are significant elements in the presentation of self during the formal sorority recruitment process, the behavior of PNMs, particularly how they maintain an idealized “sorority girl” image both on- and off-campus, also plays an important role. Unlike many universities, where recruitment begins before or early in the fall semester, Southern State has a delayed recruitment: the week of formal recruitment does not typically begin until late September or early October, depending on the sports schedule that year. During weekly meetings with recruitment counselors in the early portion of the fall semester, PNMs learn about behavioral expectations and what they should not do prior to recruitment. Madison briefly describes these expectations:

So really we went over a lot of rules. A lot of act classy rules. Don't smoke standing up. Don't dance on tables. Don't get a MIP [minor in possession of alcohol violation]. Don't get a DUI. Don't get a strike [campus alcohol violation]. All those.

The last three “rules” mentioned by Madison relate to legal issues involving alcohol; if a PNM is known to blatantly disregard the law regarding alcohol, sororities may perceive her as likely to violate chapter risk management policies and hesitate to offer her a bid. Beyond legal concerns,

however, Madison also mentions that PNM's shouldn't smoke while standing up, a behavior considered by some to be unladylike, and that they should not dance on tables when they go out dancing, a behavior often associated with stripping. Christina suggests why abstaining from "unladylike" behavior may be problematic for PNM's:

I definitely remember [recruitment counselors] saying, don't go out and get completely wasted and make a fool of yourself at the bar. I think most girls don't want to do that anyway. Especially at that time, don't want to scare off any sorority or anything.

As mentioned previously, women seeking sorority membership often balance their presentation of self between sexy and demure, without being too much of one or the other. In that negotiation of personas, PNM's can easily appear too sexual or unrefined after drinking excessively, creating not only risk management concerns for the sororities they may join, but also image problems—sororities perceived to be "wild" tend to have a weaker reputation at Southern State as a result of being identified with that label. A woman thought to be "too wild" early in her college experience could potentially "scare off" a sorority that is concerned about maintaining its reputation.

Along the same lines, Tara elaborates on the behaviors considered unacceptable according to her recruitment counselors:

No elevated surfaces at the bars. No drunkenness. Football games had obviously already started, so put your drinks in a red Solo cup. No beer bottles. Those football games, sorority girls are everywhere in that student section. Don't do anything stupid... The three B's. No booze, no boys, no bars. Don't go out. I mean, don't drink. No boys come over, don't go see any boys, especially at their frat houses. No bars. That's it. That was our main rule. The three B's. Booze, boys, and bars... You're not really supposed to go out and get crazy drunk. People are watching you. So girls that did get crazy, they had so many questions [about] what we could and couldn't do. Is it safe to go sing at karaoke night? Obviously it's not, you know? You're not supposed to get up on stage, apparently. Lots of rules. Lots of things you should and shouldn't do.

Again, the rules described by recruitment counselors suggest that behaviors associated with sexuality, both directly (“boys”) and indirectly (“booze” and “bars” that enable PNMs to “get crazy”), may have a negative impact on the image presented by a PNM during the formal recruitment process. By receiving this information upfront during recruitment meetings, however, PNMs have the opportunity to show restraint, changing their behavior prior to recruitment in order to demonstrate that they can restrain themselves from being “too wild” as necessary. Bree describes the content of her recruitment group’s weekly meeting with their recruitment counselors:

They really stressed, don't be bad girls, don't be the one to make a fool of herself downtown, or swear too much, or flirt with too many guys, or make questionable decisions, you know. You want to keep your record as clean as you can. Because reputation follows.

Maintaining a reputation that is acceptable to sororities is a high priority for many PNMs, including the majority I interviewed. These women used the information received from their recruitment counselors, friends, and families to identify the traits they perceived to be valued by sororities, and modified their behavior accordingly so as not to sabotage their chances at joining a sorority before recruitment even began. Reputation expands beyond behavior on-campus and at bars; it also includes the online presence of PNMs. Bree suggests that anyone interested in going through recruitment needs to make sure that their social networking presence portrays them in a positive light:

Clean up your Facebook...I was raised that ladies don't take pictures with cups in their hands. Whether there's alcohol in it or not, you don't. So some pictures I'd remove myself even if there were just cups around in the picture. I mean, I was at a party was some friends, and there was no alcohol involved, but they were still plenty of Solo cups, and it looked like something else. Yeah, you know, things like that. You should always avoid using swear words publicly on Facebook. Write like your grandmother and your teachers at school are going to see it.

In determining what is appropriate and inappropriate for social networking websites such as Facebook, Bree uses social mores from before she came to college; her approach is consistent with the tendency against visible consumption of alcoholic beverages at Southern State, as discussed by recruitment counselors at meetings with PNMs throughout the semester. Facebook and similar social networking websites were not a primary concern for most PNMs interviewed, and several already maintained a “clean” public profile for parents and high school administrators.

Interaction with active members creates interesting situations for PNMs around campus. Prior to recruitment, sorority members have limited contact with PNMs outside of the classroom and organized recruitment-related activities, such as water parties, to prevent any misconceptions about the rush process. PNMs are asked not to contact sorority members during their meetings with recruitment counselors. Once formal recruitment begins, PNMs may not communicate with affiliated sorority members; they will continue to communicate with their recruitment counselors throughout the process. Bree provides her memory of these restrictions, as given to her by her recruitment counselors:

Don't talk to actives, don't eat with actives, don't Facebook actives, don't text actives, definitely try your best to not ever leave a paper trail. Definitely not a public paper trail like Facebook.

Beyond the poor image presented when a PNM disregards the request not to communicate with active members, the sorority could potentially face penalties as a result of the communication outside of the formal recruitment setting. Thus, violation of these guidelines could have a significant impact on a recruitment experience, as it indicates a lack of discretion on the part of the PNM. Christina reflects on this lack of communication:

We weren't supposed to talk to anybody, either. Until rush, we weren't supposed to talk to anybody at all in the sororities. You could say, like, hey to them on campus, but I remember walking around, not wanting to say hey to any of my friends that were older than I was. I was so afraid that I was going to get in trouble and not get into a sorority or something, but it was kind of silly...It was weird because I had a lot of older friends, you know, and most of my friends were older. It was kind of hard for me not to be able to hang out with them and call—especially being a freshman in college, and just having to get into this whole new lifestyle, it's hard to—and especially when they're all your friends and you can't just pick up the phone and call them if you need anything. It was hard, but it was a good learning experience. I got to meet a lot of cool girls on my floor, and that was a lot of fun.

The restrictions on communication prevent sororities from performing additional “behind-the-scenes” recruitment, leveling the playing field somewhat for sororities and PNM's, but may create a situation where a PNM is perceived in an unflattering light and has no opportunity to explain the incident before it turns to gossip. Beyond the potential damage to a PNM's reputation, not being able to contact close friends that are a year or more ahead in school could have a negative impact on the early collegiate experience of the PNM. In Christina's case, the restriction encouraged her to meet other students on her floor; a more introverted PNM might face challenges meeting new people without the benefit of her preexisting social connections.

Once recruitment parties begin, PNM's and sorority members have the opportunity to meet one another and talk within the context of the party. Hilary describes the first interactions she had with sorority members during early recruitment rounds:

There's always like the standard questions, where are you from, what's your major, stuff like that, but it's just more like what you were trying to get out of the Greek system, and things that interested you. Obviously, there are some sororities on campus that like to party more, some sororities that like to do philanthropy events, etc. Just kind of like, what I wanted to get out of the Greek system was in the forefront.

Particularly in earlier rounds, conversations tend to follow a general script, with “standard questions” as Hilary describes. These conversations are intended to allow PNM's and active members the chance to meet one another, find common interests, and start to determine if that

particular chapter matches those interests. While the conversations tend to be free-flowing based on what women have in common, recruitment counselors provide guidelines for PNM's prior to recruitment, as reported by Taylor:

They [our recruitment counselors] told us that some things that you probably wouldn't necessarily want to talk about in a recruitment round. Not that there were bad things to talk about, but you're not supposed to talk about the 3 B's: bars, booze, or boys. Because that's just something that's kind of looked down upon, because they want good girls in their sorority. Even though you can be a good girl with those, that's not the kind of image you want to convey. So they just kind of reminded us that you just want to keep that clean image in mind, remind us to keep Facebook clean, and basically to just encourage us.

Again, presenting a "good girl" image is considered important by recruitment counselors, who then pass these concepts to PNM's. The balance between having fun and being too wild can be challenging for PNM's to interpret, particularly if they do not have as much familiarity with Greek Life. Rachel, a PNM from the Cincinnati area with little previous exposure to sororities or fraternities aside from the mass media, struggled to determine this balance, and ultimately had an unsuccessful recruitment experience. When asked what she would change about her recruitment, Rachel stated:

I'd probably talk more to them, but more about stuff that they wanted to hear... like, normal stereotypical stuff that they would want to hear. I don't know. Like partying, but I don't do that, so I'd just make up stuff.

As a result of her struggle to determine how to present herself to sorority members, Rachel felt that she did not seem "fun" enough for the sororities at Southern State. When reflecting back on her experience, she indicated that she hadn't played the appropriate role—her conception of sororities was more conservative than what she determined Southern State was like by the time she was released from recruitment. Her approach represented a dramatic difference from all other PNM's interviewed, who insisted that maintaining a clean image was critical to their success.

Rachel's challenges in recruitment and thoughts about the experience afterward reveal the challenges that PNMs face as they struggle to balance their understanding of what sororities want and the ways that they can present themselves within the recruitment context to match their perceptions of how sorority women should behave.

Some PNMs hoped to guide the conversation during recruitment, giving them the opportunity to highlight their strengths if possible. Tara describes her approach to the conversations during each round:

Just talking, I mean, asking them questions. Everyone likes to talk about themselves. Asking questions about the sorority. During recruitment, I wanted them not only to be interested in me, but I wanted them to know that I was interested in them. Even, you know, and talking to Gamma Beta. I think it was mainly Gamma Beta, Mu Zeta, and Alpha Epsilon Nu, three houses that I just knew I wasn't really interested in, I still put forth an effort, really engaged all the girls in conversation. Recruitment here has always been very, very cutthroat, but, you know, I kept my cool the whole week. There were no freakouts. There were no mental breakdowns. It's just four nights. Going back, and going back, and going back. It takes lots of patience. But yeah. Really engaging the girls, and putting forth my best face, and getting to know them as well. Not just them getting to know me, because I wanted to show that I'm interested in them, too.

Tara used the recruitment experience as a way to show active members that she wanted to be a part of their chapters, and attempted to maintain conversations even at houses she did not enjoy as much as others. This approach gave her a chance to demonstrate her interest in each sorority while maintaining the image she intended to present to women at each house: friendly, thoughtful, and kind. Another PNM, Christina, describes her preparation for the conversations she anticipated encountering at each house:

My roommate and I and some of my friends had talked about it—and we had heard from recruitment counselors what kind of things they would probably ask you, but yeah, I definitely did that. I don't remember rehearsing anything, but I remember thinking about different questions in my mind and how I would approach it. I remember when recruitment went on, I probably didn't answer anything like I rehearsed it in my mind, so yeah. I definitely did that.

While Christina's ultimate answers to the questions posed to her during recruitment may have varied, she spent considerable time going over the possible questions in her head and considering what her answers might be. Christina's approach was informal, but gave her an opportunity to consider how she portrayed herself during early interactions with each sorority. Bree used research she conducted prior to recruitment as a way to guide the conversation, giving her something to say if the conversation stalled for a moment:

Every house I went to, I would say, oh, you all got best grades last semester, oh, you won this, oh, one of your girls is on ASB, awesome, incredible, what was the election process like? Even if I ran out of things to say, I would say it, oh, I've heard you had the best food on campus! Even if I didn't really hear that, I could kind of continue conversation. Compliment their sorority, and kind of get the feedback about what they love about it... I did my best to make them as comfortable as they could be, kind of make the pressure less for them to keep the conversation going... It was more like little things I would think of, like that I would definitely want to know about the sorority.

Another PNM, Kelsey, sought suggestions from family, who provided only the most basic of information:

My mom said to go into it and be yourself... I didn't do any crazy practice rush programs or stuff that I heard about... I've heard that, especially girls whose parents were really big into the Greek system, I've heard of people hiring rush counselors to teach the girls how to talk, how to act and what to wear and sit, what brands to wear for recruitment, like crazy stuff. I know they're in the minority, of course, but it's just stuff I've heard.

I did not encounter any PNMs who used a recruitment coach among my sample; however, professional "rush consultants" exist, providing PNMs that use their services with mock interviews and roleplaying prior to recruitment. PNMs using such services at Southern State may aim to ensure that their own perception of what a sorority woman is and how she should behave matches with that of the sororities. This gives those PNMs an advantage over their peers that did not use such services, who may struggle, as Rachel did, to determine a balance between being too wild and too conservative.

Conclusion

Prior to and during the formal recruitment process, PNMs aim to present themselves as excellent candidates for sorority membership within the context of Southern State: friendly individuals that both demonstrate they care about their appearance and balance having fun with remaining “ladylike” and not “too wild.” PNMs attempt to accomplish this goal through “doing gender” in a specific way. They maintain “good” behavior on- and off-campus, avoiding a reputation of being too “wild,” and do not discuss their experiences dating or going out to bars at the sorority houses they visit with sorority members or in online or public forums. They further accomplish this through bodily practices, including dress, makeup, and hairstyling. In their outfit choices, PNMs sought to demonstrate that they were of the same background—the same class—as women currently in sororities, indicating that they could afford the expenses inherent in the Greek system and maintain a polished look at events. Each sought to impress their preferred sororities by adopting what they perceived to be the ideal image at the time of recruitment and ensuring that they maintained a “clean” reputation both among their peers and in the online world.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHOREOGRAPHY OF RECRUITMENT

Both sororities and potential new members engage in a mutual selection process during formal recruitment. While PNMs strive to leave a positive impression on the sororities they visit, these sororities themselves seek to present themselves as high-quality chapters with strong sisterhoods. In this chapter, I will look at how sororities present themselves during the formal recruitment process, including through conversation and choreography of parties, and how the presentation of sororities affects how women determine their preferred chapters. I will also examine how the reputations of sororities among the student population at Southern State University impact the recruitment experiences of PNMs and their understanding of how they “fit” with a specific sorority.

Presentation of Sorority Life

Different elements of the recruitment process, including structured conversation and pairing PNMs with women they already know, played a role in how PNMs perceived the houses they visited. The formal recruitment process is highly structured and choreographed, and often plays a role in how each chapter is perceived by PNMs. Mackenzie describes her initial reaction to her first interactions with sorority members at water parties during her recruitment:

I remember being really surprised at water parties and the first house, how excited the people were, like, in your face. It was a little overwhelming...I'm not that touchy-feely with people I don't know. They would come up and grab you and pat you on the arm and just kneel beside you and look up at you and talk and talk and talk and talk and talk.

Talking to individual members contributed significantly to individual experiences at each sorority, with current members rotating from PNM to PNM in a particular pattern and ensuring that all PNMs have the opportunity to talk to multiple women. From the earliest steps in the recruitment process, the conversations tended to follow a set pattern, as Christina discusses:

I remember the girl that picked me up at one of the doors. It was just kind of general conversations, you know, oh, where are you from, what's your major, what house do you live in, what's your roommate like, what's your roommate's major, what do your parents do. Questions like that, to try to get to know you. It was mostly—it was never you asking them questions. It was them asking you questions.

While these questions may seem casual, they provide the first basis for PNMs determining whether or not they feel comfortable at a given house. At the same time, current sorority members can begin to determine whether they perceive a particular PNM to be a good fit for the house as well. Different elements of the conversation could have either a positive or negative impact on their experience at a given house, and could highlight where a PNM's background clashed with how members of a particular chapter presented themselves, as Rachel experienced:

There were some that I just wanted to get out, but others I felt really comfortable...They know how much your parents make and all that, so ones that had like really expensive people or rich people, I didn't feel comfortable there, because they were like, "I drive a Mercedes!" but I don't know. It just felt weird.

Rachel, as an out-of-state student whose parents were relatively unfamiliar with the Greek system, became uncomfortable at houses where she didn't seem to "fit"—chapters where the members discussed wealth in direct or indirect ways. This sort of discomfort, where a PNM feels that she is too different from how a house presents itself, can discourage PNMs from returning to

a given chapter and could potentially lead to her sharing negative feelings about that sorority to others. To combat this sort of experience, sororities may take several different approaches.

Rachel describes another chapter and the conversations there:

I went to Lacombe, Louisiana, which is a small town...and the person [talking to me] said, "Oh, I've been to Lacombe!" and I was like, really? And she was like, I played tennis, too! And then I was like, oh, this is just strange. Because they do everything that I did. Someone memorized me...People I talked to said the same thing happened to them too. One girl was quoting her Facebook page. Which was kind of stalkerish.

Prior to PNMs visiting chapters for recruitment, sorority members at Southern State University spend an extensive amount of time examining the resumes and social networking profiles of PNMs. Several interviewees reported that chapters make some initial recruitment decisions as early as March, such as particular individuals they know that they do not plan to invite back for the second round of formal recruitment. Mackenzie, who participated in sorority recruitment as an active member of Iota Phi for two years, reflects on how her chapter expects sorority members to behave during initial parties:

You're supposed to act like you like everybody, even if you don't like them, which doesn't let people know who they should be looking at. Because you know, we decide somewhat, we have meetings the spring before that fall. There's people, at that point, we've decided we're not asking back after the first round. So we're supposed to be nice to them, tell them to come back, and so I felt like if the sororities were more honest about who they do and don't want, not in a mean way, just so that people know better who to spend their time looking at, because you don't want to waste it on someone who's not even going to invite you back. It was nice meeting you rather than I hope I see you again or things like that. You can't tell. Everyone's nice to you.

Even in cases where a chapter has already decided that it will not invite a PNM to the next round of recruitment, sorority members are asked to treat all PNMs as if they want them to return for the next round. They aim to present themselves as appreciating everyone that begins the recruitment process, and try to encourage all women to feel as though they could belong, using

phrases such as, “I hope I see you again.” While this approach can perhaps help women to feel more comfortable and welcome overall during the recruitment process, it may also result in the PNM feeling alienated after receiving her invitation list for the second round of formal recruitment, where she is not invited back to a chapter that seemed to encourage her to return during the philanthropy round.

The choreography of recruitment becomes apparent early in the recruitment process. From the moment each PNM walks through the door of a house, current sorority members will rotate around her, matching PNMs with women that share something in common with them. During formal recruitment rounds, PNMs are typically paired intentionally with someone they know; during water parties, which occur prior to formal recruitment, the pairing is typically not structured. Taylor had unusually good fortune in knowing many women that picked her up during water parties, and talk about the effects of knowing the women:

What was really funny for me was that the first four houses I went to, I knew the girls who picked me up. And that's not--it's a completely random pairing [at water parties]. The later nights [beginning with the philanthropy round], they kind of have it prepared of who they want you to go with, but the first initial meeting, they just put you with random people. So I was kind of nervous about water parties, and then I went to four houses in a row where I knew girls and I just thought, okay, I can be myself around them. I know them, and even if I don't have girls I know at the next few houses, I can still be comfortable, because I've kind of gotten that awkwardness out of my system.

For Taylor, the comfort of already knowing the women she spoke with during the first few water parties contributed to her attitude throughout the day, improving her confidence and leading to an experience that was likely more positive overall. By making early first impressions through pairing women as effectively as possible, a sorority can help a PNM to feel like she will fit with the chapter—that she can “be herself” around the members at that house. These initial interactions can impact how a PNM perceives herself in the recruitment process, and whether or

not she feels as though a particular chapter is “home” for her. If a chapter pairs a PNM with someone who does not know her or a member that is not as extroverted as others in the Greek system, it can lead to negative feelings or reactions by some PNMs. Madison discusses her experience at water parties:

It was kind of sad because if you got a girl who wasn't talkative, it was a poor reflection on the house. And so I didn't really like Omicron Zeta because she didn't really talk to me. I mean, every sorority has girls who are talkative and nice, and then girls who are just duds, are shy or don't want to be there or talk. It can be a bad reflection because the other rounds, whoever picks you up knows you. And if they don't, if someone who doesn't know you picks you up, you're gonna get cut from that house anyway. So, I mean, it doesn't--it's a poor reflection on the house.

For Madison, an important element of fitting into a house was whether or not the women she encountered there were talkative and energetic, characteristics she perceived as important elements of friendliness and being nice. While she recognizes that water parties are random pairings, rather than intentionally matched, Madison formed a negative opinion about Omicron Zeta based on her experience with a “dud”—a woman who did not match her understanding of how a member of a sorority should behave—and carried that opinion with her throughout the recruitment process. Madison also points out the importance of knowing who picks you up during the formal recruitment rounds. If a sorority has made the effort to pair a PNM with someone they know, often from high school or classes, it indicates that the chapter is interested in the PNM. If not, the chapter may indirectly send a message to a PNM that suggests they are unwanted. As previously discussed in Chapter 3, Kelsey, a legacy to Gamma Beta, describes her experience outside the house during skit round:

I was left out in front of Gamma Beta, and I got to watch as all these girls would come out and call their names of their friends from high school, and they would run and have sweeping hugs with each other, I remember feeling, too, you're almost like stressed out, that you've been left out and forgotten. And the girl I talked to was totally disinterested

and stuff. But I ranked them very low. I was frankly pissed. And I had to call my mom that night and tell her. And she was really okay with it though.

In Kelsey's case, she was left outside the sorority that her mother had joined as an undergraduate at another university, whereas all other PNMs attending the party were individually invited inside and given hugs and attention by a Gamma Beta member that they knew. Kelsey was ignored and had to knock on the door to ask for help after all others had gone inside the house. While sororities typically take steps to ensure that PNMs feel welcome, particularly at chapters where they are a legacy, Kelsey's experience led her to feel uncomfortable and unwanted. Kelsey likely went into recruitment with a relatively positive view of Gamma Beta, based on her mother's experiences; post-recruitment, she remained angry and frustrated about her experience with the chapter. The impressions left by the formal recruitment process were lasting for the women I interviewed, shaping their views on the sorority experience.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, PNMs are advised by their recruitment counselors to avoid the "three B's"—bars, booze and boys—both in practice and in conversation. Similarly, sorority chapters risk alienating the PNMs they meet when bringing up those same topics. Rachel describes her impressions of chapters after formal recruitment:

I don't really like to party, and that's all it is, is partying... They asked what I did on the weekends, what I do Friday nights, and one person asked me if I like to go to the bars and I was like, I'm 18, I don't... All the houses they asked me, like, what are my favorite places to go to downtown, like bar-wise and stuff. It was kind of awkward.

Based on the information received from recruitment counselors at Southern State, Rachel did not expect current sorority members to bring up partying in the recruitment setting. Rachel's discomfort with questions suggesting alcohol and parties may have been reflected in her behavior at the houses; ultimately, Rachel was released from recruitment and did not receive a

bid. In contrast, Hilary expected some sororities to demonstrate a stronger “partying mentality.” She describes how the PowerPoint slideshows presented during the Philanthropy Round helped to confirm for her a sorority’s tendency to party:

The sorority my mom was in here is very much one of the party sororities, and that was not what I wanted, not why I went Greek. And so I was expecting crazy party. I could kind of see it in the slide shows that they run through, you're like, oh, look at all these parties that you all are at, as opposed to some of the other videos...

The choice of images, including many photographs taken at formals, socials and other events, impacted Hilary’s understanding of the chapter and the women there. However, Hilary was impressed by the same chapter’s philanthropy video and the women she met, who did not match the image represented by the earlier slideshow and the chapter’s reputation on campus:

[Their video] was very much more directed towards philanthropy than I anticipated, and the girls I talked to didn't seem like they were the kinds that went out every weekend. They were very much not a part of what I thought that sorority was.

Hilary’s shift in perception of the sorority she visited was not unusual for the women interviewed. Elements of how the organizations presented themselves in each round and how those elements affected their thoughts about a given sorority peppered their descriptions of formal recruitment events. The experience of a PNM at each chapter was impacted by the specific approach that chapter took when structuring the party. Bree describes the different strategies houses used during parties:

I think every sorority has a different focus. One sorority, it was all about shaking hands. It was all about meet people, meet people, meet people. Not necessarily make connections. But some sororities were really about, okay, I'm going to talk to this person for a long time and get to know them. Sororities go as far as to have like a circuit, they've got four people that go around in a circle. And they go, "Oh what's your major? Oh, me too!" Like, come on. It's not chance. They do their homework. They know just like you do.

While several PNMs interviewed indicated that they didn't realize how choreographed recruitment parties could be, Bree points out the differences that she noticed and comments on the lengths taken by chapters to ensure that PNMs experience a common connection with members of the sorority during the short time that the current member and PNM will chat. The first chapter Bree mentions focuses on having the PNM initially meet as many women from the sorority as possible. Bree appeared dissatisfied with the approach, as it did not allow her the time to find commonalities between herself and the women there; others may have felt more comfortable during later rounds as a result of already meeting so many women from the chapter, at least briefly. The different strategies used by chapters help PNMs to determine if they fit well with the chapter, as Bree acknowledges:

You learn what the sorority's focus is. And there's a lot of things that I may not have agreed with, in the slideshow or what they found funny in the skit, I might not have found funny. You know, there's plenty of people who probably found certain things offensive. And that was just something that helped to judge whether or not you could handle being in that sorority for the next four years. You know, recruitment's the first time you get to talk to all the actives without any restrictions. So take advantage of it, you know?

In addition to meeting with women one-on-one, sororities make a formal presentation of some sort during each round of recruitment. Bree suggests that PNMs have the opportunity to determine if their attitudes and values align with each sorority through their reactions to these formal presentations. These elements can significantly impact a PNM's perception of a given chapter, sometimes becoming the defining element for a woman choosing between two chapters.

Tara describes her experience at her third and final party during preference round:

But then at Iota Phi, the big deciding factor was at Iota Phi's ceremony, we prayed before and after the ceremony. And the songs that they sang were so beautiful. The girls that I got were great. So many girls came back to me at Iota Phi and said, we're so glad that you're here, we're thrilled to death that you're here and you're back again. And just the

fact that we prayed, we didn't pray at Alpha Alpha Xi or Eta Psi, that was probably the main deciding factor for me, because that's very important to me.

Religion played a role in determining Tara's final rankings on preference night, resulting in her placing Iota Phi first. For a less religious PNM or one with a different approach to prayer, however, the same experience likely would have resulted in alienation from the organization.

The centrality of God and religion in Iota Phi's creed, presented at preference night, has a lasting impact on PNMs who value spirituality and maintaining ties to religion through organizational memberships. Bree brought up a similar religious element in her initial research of the sororities at Southern State, stating, "On the shield of [one sorority] is the cross. Technically you can't be in [that sorority] if you're not Christian or you don't believe in Jesus because it's a founding principle." While I could not independently verify a religious requirement, the religious imagery on chapter insignia may be perceived by PNMs as an indication that women who are not practicing Christians will feel uncomfortable in the sorority. Religious elements of sorority activities and rituals may help to form bonds between women in the sorority who share these beliefs, but may leave other members feeling like outsiders.

Finding a Sorority Home

The concept of finding the right "fit" or "home" among the sororities at Southern State resonated with the women I interviewed. Several different women spoke about how they identified the chapters that best matched their personalities, frequently based on conversations at houses, presentations made by the sorority, and their understanding of the reputations of a given chapter. Bree talks about her initial feelings about formal recruitment and determining her favorite chapters:

The way the girls interacted with each other, you know, there were just the, it's difficult to describe the way that you find where you fit. They jump up and down, they woo, they scream, they show a slide show... I loved the slide show, because that was just like my research. It was just like, these girls are in this club, and these girls are in this club, and we won this, and we won this, it was like a fast paced course. I wish I could've been taking notes. I mean, that's something that I really enjoyed... The biggest thing I learned about them is the houses where I encourage myself to smile, and had to push harder to enjoy it, were probably be my bottom three.

When preparing for recruitment, Bree took a structured approach, examining the websites and available information for each sorority at Southern State. In her research, she studied the accomplishments of each chapter as well as its members, ranging from academic to philanthropic to extracurricular. For her, the slide show and information about awards reinforced the information she had already studied about a given chapter and helped to emphasize its importance. Beyond that, however, Bree also used the energy of the women at each house to help her determine if it was the right place for her. Seeing the interpersonal interactions of women at each house gave Bree insight into what she perceived as the strength of their sisterhood. Chapters where women seemed especially comfortable with one another when interacting or that were larger and had more people that knew one another appealed to Bree; chapters where women seemed somewhat more distant, as well as smaller chapters, were not as appealing to Bree. Beyond the interactions of women at the house, Bree also mentioned the importance of the decoration and structure of the house in making her decision:

I think the way the house is decorated actually tells you a lot about the sorority. And not necessarily like, oh, the centerpiece, but like the bone structure of the house. Does it feel like a room, or does it feel like a home? That was a big impact to me. Not for the fact of material advantages, but the fact I felt more comfortable in the home because it reminded me of my house.

In determining what made a given chapter feel like home for her, Bree looked at houses and considered whether or not they reminded her of where she grew up—her family's home. Both

layout and decoration had a significant impact on her experience. While Bree was the only woman interviewed to explicitly indicate the importance of the aesthetics of a chapter's house, several others mentioned status markers, such as comments about cars or designer clothing, as impacting their experience. House decoration can play a similar role for PNM's; the choices of decoration, furniture, and room layout can suggest class differences to PNM's, subtly indicating if one will ultimately feel more or less comfortable at that house. When combined with favored topics of conversation, a given house can present a unique image that may appeal to some PNM's more than others. Tara similarly discussed the importance of feeling at home:

I got this feeling, like, could I see myself here? Could I see myself leaving class and coming to lunch here every day? Coming back for supper every night? Stuff like that, you know, if I could see myself coming back to that house everyday.

For Tara, the desire to feel at home—to imagine herself spending spare time at the chapter house and eating with her new sorority sisters—helped her to determine whether or not she fit with a given chapter. She wanted to select a sorority where she could imagine herself walking in each day and feeling comfortable, enjoying the company of her self-selected family. While she had difficulty defining what attributes specifically made one sorority a better fit than another, the sense of home and belonging Tara perceived at some houses contributed to her attitudes about sorority life and her choice of which chapter to preference.

Hilary had a similar experience, looking for a chapter that felt like a new home when deciding on her final ranking of chapters. When asked about how she knew that Upsilon Psi was her top choice after skit night, she responded:

Just the atmosphere, like the feeling when you walk into the house and it's like home. Which is exciting...I go home twice a semester, if that, so I needed a home away from home. And it really is like that. All the people I talked to, it's like a gut feeling, you walk in there, and you're like, this is where I belong. It was just...it was a really good night for

them, I guess. They were on their A game. And girls I talked to were really fun, and the skit was really fun, and it just felt right.

For Hilary, the feeling of home reflected her views of the conversations she had and the energy that she felt at the house during the first two recruitment rounds. She felt like the sorority was “fun”—a trait she found very important when determining how to rank chapters—and enjoyed spending time with the women she encountered at the house. Several women spoke about “gut feelings” or instincts about a particular house as they entered; while a sorority cannot easily control the preconceptions PNMs have about them based on gossip or individual research on a chapter, they can try to create as welcoming and positive an experience as possible, affecting many of the “gut feelings” that women have upon entering and returning to the house. These feelings are a large part of what create a sense of “home” in one’s mind—while decoration and individual conversation play extremely important roles, PNMs often decide whether they will have a positive or negative experience, particularly in later rounds, before they walk through the doors of the house.

Chapter Reputations and Tiers

More than just the feelings created by women from a chapter impact these “gut feelings” and how women perceive a particular sorority. While Hilary spoke of feeling at home when entering Upsilon Psi, she also mentioned the importance of the women at different houses and how each chapter was perceived on campus when asked about how she ranked sororities:

Obviously there were some ones that I knew girls in, so I kind of naturally gravitated toward those, and the upper tier definitely influenced my decision on some of them. And then there were some that I did know girls in that I knew I didn't want to go. I guess that's probably about it. Knowing people in the sororities, and then knowing their reputations.

While Southern State's College Panhellenic Council trained their recruitment counselors to limit gossip and encourage women to "keep an open mind" throughout recruitment, PNMs still considered the reputations of every chapter on campus. For Hilary, an understanding of the reputations of sororities at Southern State influenced whether or not she would choose to return to a chapter. For Hilary, reputation did not dictate her choices, but did have a considerable impact on whether or not she wanted to return to a given house the next night, and were not entirely offset by knowing women at a given sorority. Chapter reputations played a substantial role in the recruitment of nearly every woman interviewed. Kelsey reflects on her experience with gossip in her recruitment group:

I guess one of the biggest things I wasn't prepared for was how much girls in your group, going through with them, how much they shit-talk houses. When you go into a house that has kind of a bad reputation, and then all the girls, they'll come out and say, "Awww, they're so sweet, but I could never see myself at those ones." And so it definitely influenced your opinion, what other girls were saying between each round.

All nine houses at Southern State currently have established campus reputations, and these reputations play a role in students' perceptions of chapters and their desirability. At Southern State, the nine sororities are often perceived in terms of tiers, with some sororities considered to be more desirable than others. While these reputations remained relatively consistent for all students, PNMs also understood that some towns or cities favored different sororities.

Mackenzie, a PNM from a larger city in the state and a legacy of Iota Phi, describes her understanding of sorority reputations:

I feel like everyone in my city feels like the two sororities to be in are Gamma Beta and Mu Zeta. I know a lot of people are like, a lot of my mom's friends are Iota Phis, so I feel like it's not as big of a deal for people who live and breathe the city. What they think is probably different from what people in another town think. I feel like now—while a lot of our parents and stuff were Iota Phis—that Iota Phi, AEN, and U Psi are good, but it's not Mu Zeta. And then I didn't really know anything about Alpha Alpha Xi or Gamma

Gamma really except that you don't want to...no one from my city is in those sororities. Eta Psi, I just heard that the chapter here is not up and running, not where it should be, and that a lot of the bad girls from high school go to OZ.

While Mackenzie's mother was an Iota Phi, like many other women in her city, the inclination was for women to "move up" to a more respected sorority if possible. To accept a bid to a highly respected sorority is one way to improve social standing and connections within the broader community, potentially extending far beyond four years on a college campus. As briefly noted previously in the chapter, one PNM, Hilary, reflects on how her recruitment experiences affected her understanding of campus stereotypes:

You hear about these upper-tier sororities, so, you know, those are the good ones you want to be in, and you hear, those are the crazy ones, you don't want to be in those, they're partiers, and the other ones are kind of quiet. I think going through recruitment kind of teaches you. It proves some of them, and it disproves others. Some people who I had notions of before just, they surprised me. They were really good during rush... The sorority my mom was in here is very much one of the party sororities, and that was not what I wanted, not why I went Greek. And so I was expecting crazy party. I could kind of see it in the slide shows that they run through, you're like, oh, look at all these parties that you all are at, as opposed to some of the other videos, and theirs was very much more directed towards philanthropy than I anticipated, and the girls I talked to didn't seem like they were the kinds that went out every weekend. They were very much not a part of what I thought that sorority was.

Going into the recruitment process, Hilary understood that different sororities had different reputations, with some being more respected than others. She mentions that some are described as crazy or wild, all about partying, but comes to her own different conclusion about their focus as an overall organization. However, the impact of the tier system extends beyond the chapter's values as an organization or the events they choose to hold. Hilary further describes how tiers were described by her male friends:

I talked to some of my guy friends, and they have their own tiers, too. These are the girls you want to marry, top tier, and then the girls you would kind of date maybe in the middle tier, and you don't want to go to the bottom tier kind of thing...The guys kind of

stuck to basic principles. You know, I'd want to marry a girl from this sorority, I'd want to date these girls, I'd just want to party with these girls.

The impact of perceived reputations extends beyond the recruitment process and into the rest of a member's collegiate life outside the sorority. Before a woman is asked on a date, the individual asking her has likely already considered her sorority and its reputation, assuming that she will fit those perceptions to some extent. Members of sororities with a reputation for wild partying or having fewer "smart girls" are labeled as the girls that college men should only want to "party with," rather than date or ultimately marry, even if an individual woman does not demonstrate these perceived negative qualities associated with their chapter. Thus, dating and relationships can become more challenging for women in sororities perceived as "bottom tier" than for women not in sororities at all, as an unaffiliated woman does not automatically share the specific negative stereotypes associated with the sorority chapter.

The history of the sorority on campus contributed significantly to the perceptions of that chapter. All five chapters chartered prior to 1930 at Southern State were described by my interviewees as "old row," top- or middle-tier, and the three most recently chartered chapters were often described as "new row" or lower-tier. Four of the five chapters originally chartered prior to 1930 are located on one street, while most of the houses of newer chapters are on a different street nearby, leading to the "old row" and "new row" terminology. Newer chapters, including Alpha Alpha Xi, Omicron Zeta, Gamma Gamma, and Eta Psi, all tended to be described as middle- or lower-tier—some were "wild," others "boring." The PNMs interviewed tended to focus primarily on one sorority, Eta Psi, when discussing the lower-tier sororities and chapters to avoid.

Eta Psi had a consistently low reputation among the women I interviewed. The chapter is the youngest on campus, having only chartered in the 1970s, and its shorter history on the Southern State campus contributes significantly to its ongoing membership-related struggles.

Madison voices her attitude about Eta Psi from recruitment:

Well, I heard Eta Psi was just bad. You don't go Eta Psi... They're small. As bad as that is, they're just kind of, like, not socially adept I guess. But I didn't really enjoy—I was so relieved when I didn't enjoy their round. The girl who picked me up was kind of like... I don't know... she was not a fun girl. And the conversation was really blunt, which isn't, like I said, an accurate impression, but just the fact that they didn't have many girls, so it was kind of like, a few girls jumping and clapping or whatever. I don't know. It's just kind of like, you know that they're not a good sorority and you just don't fit in there.

Sorority size played a significant role in determining reputations for the PNMs interviewed at Southern State. In Madison's eyes, the smaller size of the sorority helped to shape her opinion that Eta Psi was not a good sorority or fit for her, as they could not express the same level of excitement or energy as larger chapters on the Southern State campus. Tara describes how she perceived Eta Psi during the recruitment process, and why she believes their reputation is weak:

Eta Psi, I hate to say it, I would just label them as not cool. And it's because they're the youngest sorority. They catch a lot of hate for being the youngest sorority. They kind of get the leftovers. I hate to say it. And I hope that this pledge class that they just had really tries to turn them around, because Eta Psi in other places is awesome. In Texas? Oh my gosh. It's amazing. Texas and West Coast states.

When describing Eta Psi, PNMs tended to be apologetic about their attitudes toward the chapter at Southern State, and would often mention the positive reputation of the sorority at other colleges. These women recognized that chapter reputations have a considerable impact on sorority members and attempted to soften the blow somewhat, but continued to portray the Eta Psi chapter at Southern State in a negative light compared to other sororities on campus.

Mackenzie describes her experience at Eta Psi during the philanthropy round:

I felt sort of uncomfortable at the Eta Psi house because the groups of girls that comes through are so big that—they have a really small chapter—not anywhere near enough people to get to everybody... So there were at least twice, maybe three times as many of us [in our PNM group] as there were of them... People make excuses... So I'm sure only three-quarters of their chapter was there and their chapter's small to begin with.

In Mackenzie's case, a lack of personal attention due to the chapter's smaller size contributed to her discomfort toward the house; when combined with the preconception that the chapter "isn't up and running," she concluded that it was not a good choice for her, and ranked it at the bottom of her choices after the first round. Other PNMs had similar experiences, and hoped not to go back to Eta Psi each round. Tara witnessed a rude reaction by another PNM, who did not want to be invited back to Eta Psi and chose to mistreat the active member assigned to her during the preference round. Tara describes her own concern at Eta Psi on preference night and how the other PNM's behavior affected her:

At Eta Psi, I was like, very, not rude—the girl we were partnered up with, there's not many Eta Psis, the girl that was partnered up with me, she was very very rude to our girl, to our pref girl. And so I couldn't make myself be rude. I didn't—I knew that Gamma Gamma would probably rank me high, so I probably wasn't going back there, but that's still nerve-wracking, when you go to a house that you don't want, and that you really don't like.

Some women, in an effort to ensure that they will be low on the bid list of a sorority they do not wish to join, may consider behaving disrespectfully toward the members of that sorority. This negative impression reflects badly on the rude PNM as well as the recipient sorority, turning what should be a positive experience that encourages women to choose that chapter into a poor experience for anyone who witnesses this behavior. To a certain degree, Greek organizations depend on collective effervescence during important ceremonies and rituals, including the events on preference night. If someone disrupts the sense of energy and belonging created at a house,

other women there will not experience that feeling, and are more inclined to preference a house where they did experience that collective effervescence.

PNMs are aware of the lasting implications of their sorority choice, and sometimes choose to drop out of the formal recruitment process rather than accept a bid from a lower-tier sorority, as Madison describes in a discussion of her experiences as a recruitment counselor:

My floor [where I was a recruitment counselor] had a lot of out-of-town girls, and a lot of girls who I wasn't going to be surprised if they were cut from everything. But they got Eta Psi. A lot of them. So I had, in pref night, when they got their cards with their schedule, and they only were going back to Eta Psi, I had to convince them, beg them, to stay in the system and to not withdraw from recruitment. Because that's what they were gonna do. Like, so many girls. I had at least six or seven girls who were just like, I'm going home. Like, I'm not. I quit. I'm not going to Eta Psi rush. And I had to beg them, like, please, wouldn't you rather be Greek than not be Greek at all? But a lot of them dropped out. Some of them did stay.

This attitude towards Eta Psi creates an ongoing cycle for the chapter at Southern State. The sorority does not have as many women, creating challenges for them to recruit successfully in a formal, structured process. As a result, fewer women accept bids to Eta Psi than to any other sorority on campus, and they remain markedly smaller. The next year, during formal recruitment, they again seem significantly smaller than other sororities, and are unable to recruit as many women. Until this cycle is broken, Eta Psi will likely continue to struggle with membership numbers and negative perceptions. Madison sums up the thought process that women can experience when preferencing chapters during the recruitment process, and how it impacts their choices and understanding of the experience:

I thought, hey, I could go anywhere...I don't care, I just want to be in a sorority. When it came down to it, I thought, you know, that's not true. Because reputation is so much, unfortunately...Deep down I wanted to keep telling myself it doesn't matter, that every sorority is good, I'd rather be in one than not be in one at all, but I know I wouldn't have been happy if I wasn't in a top-tier sorority. As so vain as that sounds.

While women hoped to “keep an open mind” and tell themselves that every sorority on the Southern State campus would provide a good experience, many struggled with their feelings about potentially joining a lower-tier sorority, and pointed out their concerns about how joining those chapters would impact how others perceived them on campus.

Beyond a chapter’s campus identity, reputations impact the experiences and self-esteem of PNMs and sorority members as well. Ashley, who received a snap bid¹ to Eta Psi, reflects on how reputations and stereotypes impacted her understanding of the sorority system at Southern State and where she fits on campus:

People go on stereotypes a lot here at Southern State. Southern State is a school with tradition, which is really good in some aspects, but in other aspects it's harmful because my sorority, being the newest on campus, doesn't have the legacy of other sororities. One sorority's been here over 100 years, another one was founded nearby. So people, for that reason, take it to mean that it's not as good, and it won't ever be as good as what they call “old row.” So that was hard for me, I guess...I was actually hurt that I got cut from them during rush because people are so mean and they're like, “That's the worst house, everybody got asked back, they're desperate.” And I was wondering, “Okay, but they didn't think I was good enough.”

While reputations certainly impact the number of new members choosing to return to a chapter and whether or not that chapter ultimately meets quota, these same attitudes and comments can impact how an individual woman views herself during the recruitment process. In Ashley’s case, she was dropped by the chapter that was understood to take everyone. While the vast majority of PNMs entering the formal recruitment process at Southern State receive a bid to a sorority, some women are ultimately released from recruitment without bids. For these women, being cut by the chapter where “everybody got asked back” can be detrimental to their self-esteem and result in the woman feeling that she does not fit at Southern State in general; Rachel, who was released

¹ A bid from a sorority that is received on bid day by a woman who was released from recruitment. Only sororities that fail to reach their quota of new members may offer snap bids.

from recruitment after the second round, transferred to another university for her sophomore year. Although Ashley was frustrated by the gossip about chapter reputations and where she fit into the Greek system after being released from recruitment, she chose to accept a snap bid offered to her by Eta Psi. She pointed out that the chapter offered her leadership opportunities earlier in her academic career that, in other sororities, were often taken by upperclassmen. Ashley held a chapter leadership position during her sophomore year.

Conclusion

Overall, many different factors, ranging from individual concerns such as religious compatibility to a broader understanding of where a sorority was “ranked” in the campus tier system, played a significant role in women’s perceptions of sororities and how they chose which houses to preference during the formal recruitment process. Despite a strong push by the College Panhellenic Council and its recruitment counselors to “keep an open mind” and form opinions about chapters based on their experiences at the houses during recruitment rather than rely on preconceptions, women tended to incorporate the reputations of sororities into their decision-making process, recognizing their own desire to belong to a group recognized as “top-tier” when compared to others on campus.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This thesis examines the specific strategies used by potential new members (PNMs) when preparing for the formal sorority recruitment process for National Panhellenic Conference chapters at Southern State University. Using qualitative in-depth interviews with ten women, I explore what sorority recruitment means to individuals going through the process. I sought to answer several research questions: first, how does social standing or class impact the recruitment experiences of women at Southern State University? What are the varying performances of “femininity” in the context of a competitive sorority recruitment experience, and what do they mean to the women engaged in them? Lastly, how has the experience of preparing for recruitment shaped women’s understandings about femininity?

Social standing or class affect the recruitment experience in three different ways. First, social capital plays an important role in obtaining recommendations as part of sorority recruitment, as described in Chapter 2. The connections that PNMs have with sorority members and alumnae, especially those who initiated into their sororities at Southern State, are perceived as essential to a successful recruitment for the women I interviewed. Recommendation letters and forms from sorority alumnae introduce PNMs to the chapter and provide additional background for chapters when determining who to invite back for skit and preference rounds. These recommendations must be submitted by alumnae of the chapter that a PNM wishes to join;

thus, PNMs without social connections to a broad range of women in their community may experience challenges securing letters for every chapter at Southern State. In my study, even PNMs with higher amounts of social capital experienced challenges obtaining personalized recommendations from alumnae they knew for all of the sororities at Southern State, and sometimes relied on local Panhellenic alumnae associations to supplement what they were able to gather themselves from family, teachers, and friends. Without strong recommendations, a PNM has limited potential to succeed in the formal recruitment structure at Southern State. PNMs needed strong social connections, often formed through parental involvement in their communities; women whose parents were not involved in a Greek-letter organization or have fewer connections to sorority alumnae tended to struggle when obtaining recommendations, affecting their recruitment experience.

Second, legacy PNMs, especially those whose family members attended Southern State, tended to have an advantage over non-legacy candidates, creating an elevated social standing for these individuals in the context of the Greek system. Because of their family's connections, legacy PNMs experienced less difficulty obtaining the necessary recommendations for most chapters. Legacy PNMs were also frequently able to meet more sorority alumnae as they were growing up, ultimately leading to personalized recommendations that were less accessible to PNMs that did not have family ties to the Greek system. Out-of-state students tended to be disadvantaged in the preparation process at Southern State. While these PNMs may successfully find personal recommendations, women from out-of-state often did not know as many students or alumnae from the specific chapter at Southern State. Thus, the recommendations she receives may lack the weight of those written on behalf of in-state residents, even if the PNM is a legacy or has strong social capital within her home community. To further examine the impact of social

standing and social capital in the Greek system, future research may consider looking at legacy status as a specific element of the recruitment experience and providing a more detailed look at how legacies from different regions prepare for recruitment at a given university.

Third, socioeconomic status can play a role during the week of formal recruitment as well. In Chapter 3, I discuss how women adjust their appearance and behavior to match the expectations of the sororities they wish to join. At Southern State, the College Panhellenic Council actively seeks to reduce the impact of visible wealth on recruitment, requiring PNMs to wear identical t-shirts during early, more casual recruitment rounds and banning women from carrying purses or handbags while visiting sorority houses during the recruitment process. The matching t-shirts are intended to reduce the significance of socioeconomic status markers and instead focus the attention of sorority members and PNMs on conversation and mutual interests. However, PNMs still perceive the importance of displaying visual indicators of wealth, choosing to wear designer jewelry and nicer, well-maintained shoes to demonstrate their social status within the confines of the recruitment outfit requirements. The intersection of gender expectations and social class, demonstrated through clothing expectations, suggests the importance of a middle- to upper-class performance of a sort of “traditional femininity.” This performance requires a well-maintained appearance, indicating to sorority members that a PNM has both the time and financial resources to ensure that clothing, shoes, and accessories remain in good repair.

In response to the research question regarding the varying performances of “femininity” in sorority recruitment and their meanings for the women engaged in them, I examined how women present themselves during the formal recruitment process. From the start of the fall semester through the week of formal recruitment in September or October, PNMs seek to dress

and behave as sorority members do at Southern State. Women hope to display themselves as friendly individuals that balance wholesomeness with flirtatiousness, appearing both sexy and demure without seeming either too wild or too prudish. PNM's tried to impress the sororities at Southern State by adopting what they perceived to be the ideal image of a sorority member at the time of recruitment, based on the understanding provided by family, friends, and recruitment counselors. They further ensured that they maintained a "clean" reputation both on-campus and online; social networking sites such as Facebook result in additional levels of scrutiny for PNM's, a challenge impacting presentation of self that previous generations did not encounter. Several women interviewed improved or altered their wardrobe for classes and other campus events aside from recruitment during the semester, such as football games, ensuring that they would maintain an idealized image throughout the semester. Their new clothing choices tended to reflect the trends on the Southern State campus, allowing them to better fit the fashion of current sorority members on campus. They talked about "being themselves" and not making a tremendous effort to look better during recruitment, but did state that they wanted to look as though they paid attention to their appearance for classes.

I further examined how the experience of preparing for recruitment shaped women's understandings about femininity. As they prepared for sorority recruitment, the PNM's interviewed carefully considered their clothing choices for each recruitment round, and often focused more on makeup choices and hairstyles for classes during the week of recruitment than they would during non-recruitment weeks. During recruitment, PNM clothing choices generally mirrored trends on campus—women wore t-shirts and shorts or jeans with sneakers or flip-flops during casual recruitment events and selected dresses and heels, as opposed to slacks and flats, for more formal rounds. A combination of dresses or skirts and heels suggests a specific

understanding of femininity among PNMs. Women sought to fit with the chapters they visited through appearance choices; most of the women in sororities at Southern State wear dresses and heels to recruitment events if they will interact with PNMs, and PNMs, while not required to wear dresses, fashioned themselves to match. The women interviewed generally chose to adopt the standards of dress presented by recruitment counselors, friends, and family, despite physical limitations of running between houses in high-heeled shoes. In my sample, the clothing choices between women were very similar; however, each sought to display their own individual style through accessories, shoes, and dress choices in some way while adhering to the expectations presented to them by recruitment counselors and guidelines from the College Panhellenic Council. Instead of seeing guidelines as confining, PNMs found the opportunities to express themselves through their physical appearances, using the opportunity to dress up and express a femininity not readily available in other contexts. The experience of “dressing up” for recruitment was generally positive for the women interviewed; they liked having the chance to pick out new outfits for the events, despite the stress of the events themselves.

In addition to my initial research questions, I examined the interactions between sororities and PNMs, as interpreted by the new members, looking at how the perceptions of a chapter’s prestige impact the recruitment experience and how this prestige related to class. Presentation of self, as described by Goffman (1959), was not exclusive to PNMs or individual sorority members; the sororities as organizations also attempted to present themselves in specific ways, highlighting their strengths to present the best possible image to PNMs so that they would gain the attention of their top choices for new members. At Southern State, sororities tended to fall into three general “tiers,” with the most competitive sororities in the upper tier and the least competitive in the lower tier; women sought access to the upper tier sororities, perceived to be

“higher class” due to their exclusivity. A variety of factors, ranging from individual concerns, such as religion or shared interests, to broader concerns, like a sorority’s “ranking” in the tier system popular among Southern State students, played a significant role in how women perceived sororities during recruitment and their choices of which houses to preference prior to Bid Day. Despite encouragement by recruitment counselors and the College Panhellenic Council to “keep an open mind” and form opinions about chapters based on their experiences at the houses during recruitment, as opposed to preconceptions, women still tended to incorporate the reputations of each chapter into their decision-making process. Women generally realized their own desire to belong to a group recognized as “top-tier,” and selected their preferred sororities accordingly.

This study of the experiences of sorority PNMs provides valuable information about what potential best practices might be within the formal sorority recruitment process. PNMs tended to favor houses where they felt that they received individual attention. To reduce the impact of smaller chapter size on the recruitment experience for PNMs, several approaches are available. First, the College Panhellenic Association could consider increasing the length of recruitment or restructuring days to allow for the creation of smaller recruitment groups. While this approach would increase overall workload for all chapters, it would give all chapters a chance to provide individualized experiences to PNMs. A second approach would be for a struggling chapter to request members of their sorority from a nearby institution to visit for recruitment, increasing the number of women present and creating a better environment for developing the “collective effervescence” described by PNMs in this study. Ongoing opportunities to interact with the chapter providing assistance, potentially through socials or philanthropic projects, could provide new members an opportunity to connect with the sisters from other schools that they met during

recruitment and give them a chance to feel part of a larger national organization. A third approach could be to focus on recruitment possibilities outside the structure of formal recruitment. Spring informal recruitment events, reaching out to women that could contribute significantly to a smaller sorority but had reservations about the Greek system, could provide additional new members that would not be likely to join sororities through the formal process. A student that is more introverted but has strong potential leadership skills may never consider joining a sorority through the formal recruitment process, with its focus on extensive short conversations and meeting many women in a very short period of time. Instead, that individual may be best recruited through more in-depth conversations and stronger connections to a few women met during an informal event.

My research provides insight into the experiences of women preparing for recruitment, an approach seldom taken in current sociological literature available on the Greek system. It provides a valuable discussion not only about how PNMs present themselves to sororities, but the ongoing interaction between PNMs and sororities at Southern State prior to the beginning of formal recruitment—a context uncommon at most universities with highly competitive sorority recruitments. I take a different theoretical perspective on preparation, looking at the influence of social capital on the experience of obtaining necessary recommendations and advice from family and friends, as well as how the “doing gender” theoretical perspective described by West and Zimmerman is reflected in the appearance and behavior choices made by PNMs prior to and during formal recruitment.

Beyond this study, there are numerous opportunities for future sociological studies of the experiences of women in sororities, as well as the Greek system as a whole. My study was limited by the small number of PNMs interviewed. A larger study, focused on a single

recruitment cohort rather than a five-year range, could provide additional insight on the different experiences of women entering recruitment while reducing some of the variation inherent when interviewing PNMs that went through recruitment during different years. The unique experiences of women from out-of-state provided a different perspective that my study had limited opportunities to examine. A focused examination on the experiences of women from in-state and out-of-state at a particular university could provide interesting insight about the different challenges and benefits that PNMs from each group face as they prepare for recruitment and determine whether or not the experience was a success for themselves. My research also provided only a minimal look at the potential experiences of women of color as they navigated the formal recruitment experience at Southern State, a school with a small percentage of non-white members of NPC sororities. Future research on the unique experiences of these women, both at campuses with a history of segregation and at campuses with a history of diversity, would provide an opportunity to understand the complexities of how race impacts the recruitment experience in many different ways, from effective preparation to perceived differences in cultural norms between racial groups.

Sororities may benefit from a more thorough examination of how the perception of “tiers” among chapters affects recruitment outcomes. A look at the perceptions of both women and men on a given campus could provide insight about what factors influence the understanding of sorority rankings among students and provide possible solutions for addressing the concerns voiced by students about “lower-tier” chapters. Additional research on the expectations that PNMs have of sororities and the bonds between sorority sisters, as perceived during recruitment, may provide additional insight as to how chapters can improve both recruitment numbers and the retention of new members beyond the first year of sorority membership. When entering the

recruitment process, PNMs expect sororities to provide specific experiences; these expectations are reinforced through the structured nature of formal recruitment and the behavior of active members during the parties, where they tend to lavish attention onto new members. One PNM in my study mentioned her disappointment at the lack of ongoing attention after Bid Day by older members; future research could identify ways to address this change and help new members feel a stronger sense of sisterhood, even in larger chapters such as those at Southern State, by better incorporating all members, both new and returning, into the chapter's social structure.

Understanding the experiences of women going through sorority recruitment provides additional insight into the college experience for sociologists as well as student affairs professionals. Without a firm grasp on the issues and concerns faced by potential new members as they enter sorority recruitment, universities will struggle to provide the information and support necessary to ensure that students will have a successful collegiate experience. By understanding what draws women to the Greek system and how they adapt to the expectations of that system, we can ensure that the proper resources are available to support them both academically and socially, whether or not their recruitment experience is considered "successful." Additional research on the individual experiences of sorority members or potential new members will provide that understanding and insight necessary to improve campus resources.

Greek-letter organizations frequently contribute positively to colleges and universities. Despite concerns about these organizations having a negative impact on a student's academics, the ongoing GPA requirements of sororities and fraternities encourage higher student performance. Beyond that, minimum standards set by Greek councils and individual chapters for membership prevent struggling students from joining until their grades improve. Highlighting the

academic expectations for Greek-letter organizations can help women to have a better recruitment experience, as initial cuts of PNMs by sorority chapters can sometimes be attributed to weak GPAs, and can simultaneously encourage higher levels of scholarship by pointing out what high-achieving chapters are doing well rather than focusing primarily on chapters struggling to improve their average GPA.

At Southern State, women who do not have successful sorority recruitment experiences sometimes choose to leave the university rather than continue without joining a sorority. Sometimes this occurs immediately; other times it does not happen until the following year, as women do not feel like they “fit in” at the school. While not joining a sorority may only be one reason that a student chooses to leave a university such as Southern State, the school may be able to improve retention rates by providing additional support for students going through sorority recruitment, particularly providing additional resources after Bid Day for women who did not have a positive experience—those released from recruitment or who did not receive bids from houses they wanted to join. By working with these students, one can determine if their struggles at the university are purely a result of the recruitment outcome or if they are additionally influenced by other challenges, such as poor grades, feelings of isolation, or a perceived lack of belonging to the campus community. Given the high percentage of women that go through recruitment at Southern State and similar universities, campus staff has an excellent opportunity to reach out to students that may be struggling to find their place on campus. Additional research is needed to determine the best approach to this post-recruitment interaction, but it provides a valuable avenue for improving retention.

Sociologically, this study of recruitment at Southern State University provides a unique look at the sorority recruitment experience and how women “do gender” within this competitive

context. While my thesis touched on the intersection of gender and class in recruitment, additional research should be done in this area to better understand the interplay between them. Additionally, looking at the Greek system and how organizations present themselves gives an opportunity for sociologists to examine how an organization, particularly with a defined leadership structure, can engage in a specific “presentation of self” when interacting with potential future members of these groups. This approach may help researchers to better understand the perpetuation of stereotypes about specific student organizations and the impact on different demographics of the student body. For example, an understanding of how organizations choose to present themselves may contribute to further research on race-related issues, such as discrimination and self-segregation, and provide insight as to how organizations can take steps to reduce or eliminate these issues in ways that individual members cannot as well as how universities can work with organizations to improve diversity.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Interview Guide

Preparation:

- When did you first learn about sororities and the Greek system?
- How did you learn about sororities and the Greek system at Southern State University?
- When did you first decide to rush? How did you know that joining a sorority was right for you?
- When did you first begin preparing for sorority recruitment?
- How did you go about preparing? What kinds of things did you do to get ready for the experience?
- How did your family help you to prepare?

On-Campus Prep:

- What kind of preparation for recruitment did the university provide to everyone?
- Tell me about meetings with your recruitment counselor. What did you all talk about?
Was it helpful? Why/why not?
- Was the information from the university different from what you heard from other people? [if so] How was it different?
- What kinds of outfits did you choose? Did you plan them in advance? How long in advance?
- Did you do anything special with your makeup for rush? How about your hair?

- Did you dress differently for classes that week? [if so] How so?

Formal Recruitment Process:

- Tell me about the formal recruitment process here. What all did you do over the week of recruitment?
- What impressions did you have of each sorority before coming to Southern State?
- Did your ideas about sorority life or the recruitment process change after you came to Southern State?
- How did you know which houses you liked best?
- When did you know that [your new house] might be a good fit for you? How did you know?

Other:

- What do you hope to gain from your sorority experience?
- What would you have changed about your recruitment? Would you have done anything differently, if you could do it over again?

VITA

Cheryl Rose Nelson was born in Santa Monica, California. She received a Bachelor of Arts with a major in sociology from the University of California, Berkeley in May 2006. She entered the graduate program in sociology at The University of Mississippi in 2009. She worked as a teaching assistant at The University of Mississippi in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology from 2009 to 2011.