

THE TRANSITION AND SENSE OF BELONGING EXPERIENCES OF FIRST YEAR
WOMEN WHO DO NOT BECOME MEMBERSTHROUGH FORMAL PANHELLENIC
RECRUITMENT

by

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(Under the Direction of Georgianna Martin)

ABSTRACT

This study is about the experiences for first year women who take part in the Formal Panhellenic Recruitment process but are not accepted for membership. The participants narrate their experiences with Formal Panhellenic Recruitment as well as how the process affected their transition to their institution and how the process changed their path to find a sense of belonging on campus.

INDEX WORDS: recruitment, Panhellenic, not matched, first year, sense of belonging, transition, not in sorority, withdraw, Formal Recruitment, Panhellenic Recruitment, stress, support systems,

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Student affairs professionals in higher education know that sense of belonging is a key predictor of success, engagement, and well-being for college students (Gopalan & Brady, 2019). Higher education faculty and staff continue to create programming and workshops in addition to creating new offices and more staffing to assist in students' sense of belonging, yet when students do not find belonging it can lead to diminished interest in engagement or ordinary life activities (Strayhorn, 2019). Sense of belonging has been discussed as a need in all humans. Although there are differing strengths and needs of belongingness, it is impossible for a culture to eradicate the need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Sense of belonging refers to students perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers (Strayhorn, 2019). With this knowledge on belonging, it should not surprise anyone of the stress and anxiety of not belonging to a group can cause college students, especially first years when they are not accepted into a group.

The National Panhellenic Conference is comprised for 26 women's only sororities. The purpose of the Panhellenic Conference is to promote common interests within the 26 organizations creating strong partnerships with colleges and universities (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020). Panhellenic organizations in combination with their university or college have different types of recruitment based on chapter sizes and institutional size. For the purpose of this study, the information is based on a fully structured recruitment process with a Formal

Panhellenic Recruitment happening in the fall semester of the academic calendar. Panhellenic sorority recruitment can offer a connection to other members, the local community, and a sense that the new member matters to a group from an early stage in their transition to college. First-year students who take part in Panhellenic sorority recruitment may find an instant sense of belonging. Strayhorn defined sense of belonging as “a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (p. 8).

A concern arises when this sense of belonging is interrupted. An example of this is when women are released from formal Panhellenic recruitment or choose to withdraw due to unforeseen circumstances. If sense of belonging is a basic human need, and sorority membership was something anticipated to create belonging; how do these women create this belonging now? Considerable research has been done about sororities, but often it is about negative aspects of the recruitment experience or membership (Golden 2014, Roof 2013). Little research has been done about the potential new member experience and little, if any, has been done on the sense of belonging of first year women who are unmatched through the formal recruitment experience. Since we know that sense of belonging is important to student retention and feeling a part of the campus culture, this study is aimed at learning about this belonging for students’ who sought membership in a Panhellenic sorority yet did not become members. This study is being done to learn about the PNMs who do not become members and their sense of belonging in their first year, but this is not to say that current members of Panhellenic organizations have sense of belonging. Panhellenic organizations are one way for first-year students to create a home on campus, but this study is not declaring it is the only way or a way that works for everyone. As

student affairs practitioners know, one thing does not work for all students and Panhellenic recruitment is no different.

Background

Formal Recruitment began as early as the 1900s when the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) stated that matriculation to college was a prerequisite for pledging a member sorority (Adventure in Friendship, 2012). Since the inception of NPC and the Formal Recruitment process, there have been changes to the structure of Formal Recruitment. One such change that has impacted the structure of Panhellenic Recruitment is an increase in the number of students who are participating in Formal Recruitment. While Formal Panhellenic Recruitment has made changes to structure and increased participants around the country, institutions have not kept up with the ever-changing nature of Panhellenic organizations in order to support women who are not accepted into a Panhellenic sorority (Guthrie, 2003). According to the National Panhellenic conference (2022), 10% of all college students are involved in a fraternity/sorority. Of total number, about 370,000 women are involved in one of the 26 Panhellenic organizations on 670 campuses. With a number this large, and on the rise, more literature, research, and education are needed for the women who do not get accepted into one of these 26 member organizations. If these steps are taken in the future, the transition and ultimately the sense of belonging of women who are not accepted into member organizations will be smoother and cause less stress to these women during their first semester on campus. Education for campus professionals and more dedicated research created for the women going through Formal Panhellenic Recruitment may assist in creating a sense of belonging to promote success, engagement, and well-being (Gopalan & Brady, 2019).

Problem Statement

A problem with Panhellenic Formal Recruitment that will be discussed in this research is the potential lack of sense of belonging first year students could have when they are not chosen for membership in a Panhellenic organization. There is a lack of knowledge surrounding the recruitment process for Potential New Members (PNMs) heading into Panhellenic Formal Recruitment which potentially causes women to be uneducated about the Formal Panhellenic Recruitment. This lack of knowledge leads to a lack of belonging or low self-esteem for women who do not find homes in Panhellenic organizations during Panhellenic Formal Recruitment (Chapman et al., 2008). Creating a community of knowledge and education for the campus community and a knowledge base around the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process for others not involved, may lead to creating a sense of belonging for women who do not become members to a Panhellenic sorority during Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. This knowledge would help in creating sense of belonging by creating accurate expectations for the PNMs, allowing more people to assist in their experiences because the campus community would have a better idea of the process and the ability to learn about the process ahead of time could allow some PNMs to not participate from the beginning because they realize the process is not for them before getting released from chapter during the process. Panhellenic organizations exist at institutions of varying size, Panhellenic membership sizes, and in many regional locations. The lack of sense of belonging due to the nonevent of membership into a Panhellenic Sorority has led students to transfer, confront anxiety and various mental health concerns, as well as create a community of non-trust around fraternity/sorority life (Golden, 2014). Contributing to the research on this topic, hearing the stories of women affected, and educating campus partners might create a

community of knowledge and increased sense of belonging for students who intend to participate in Panhellenic Formal Recruitment.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study will be to explore the experiences of first year collegiate women who intended to join a Panhellenic sorority but were not given the opportunity to join a sorority or did not receive a bid. In this study, I hoped to understand how this crisis in their early days on campus affects their sense of belonging on campus. In particular, I want to focus on these students' sense of belonging and their transition to college following the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process. While the number of women who partake in Panhellenic Formal Recruitment has risen at institutions, the number of women who are not matching or accepting bids to Panhellenic organization has also risen and created a concern amongst these institutions (Correia, 2013). This study is motivated by the experiences of these women who are not chosen to be a part of the Panhellenic community. In order to understand the role this nonevent has on their sense of belonging, this study will explain the importance of educating campus partners, fraternity/sorority life offices, and chapter members on creating more inclusive spaces for all first-year women on campus when PNMs do not become members. In this study, I hoped to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the college transition experiences of first year women who went through recruitment but did not become members?
2. How does not joining a Panhellenic sorority influence first year women's sense of belonging on campus during the first year of college?
3. How do these women find belonging on campus after not receiving or accepting a bid?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks I will use in this study are both transition theory and sense of belonging theories. I will focus on Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Strayhorn's Sense of Belonging Model (Schlossberg, 2011 & Strayhorn, 2019). Women in this study who are participating in Formal Recruitment are also transitioning to their first year at college. The act of not getting into a Panhellenic Sorority as these women had previously planned can be considered on all the transitions of Schlossberg's Transition Theory of anticipated, unanticipated, and nonevent transitions due to the nature of the event and the timing because it is happening in the first-year student's life (Schlossberg, 2011). This framework will ground the study in the understanding of why a change or transition creates such anguish in these women when they elect to endure the transition (Schlossberg, 2011). Transition theory describes turmoil associated with large, small, geographical, emotional, and elected transitions and how they change people's attitudes and emotions. These women are already attempting to navigate a large transition to a new location, new community, and new academic rigor, but the nonevent of not getting into a Panhellenic organization compounded with the transition of a new institution, creates more anxiety and turmoil during an already difficult transition (Golden, 2014).

This study will also be framed through a sense of belonging lens in order to co-construct knowledge about sense of belonging for women who are not chosen to be a part of a Panhellenic Sorority. In this study, I will use several pieces of literature on sense of belonging but will highlight Terrell Strayhorn's College Students' Sense of Belonging. Strayhorn's (2019) perception of affiliation and identification within the university frames the study well because when the PNM's are not accepted into a Panhellenic organization, their perception of connection is decreased while their lack of sense of belonging to a group they expected to be a part of is

increased (Strayhorn, 2019). This means as the PNMs yearned for the Panhellenic organization to accept them, their perception of what sense of belonging could be in a Panhellenic organization increased. When they were not accepted into a Panhellenic organization, that expectation of connection was actually decreased. Sense of belonging is a relational framework where everyone in the relationship benefits from being in the relationship (Strayhorn, 2019). When a woman is accepted into a member organization, not only does she benefit from social, academic, and emotional support from a new and instant community on campus, but she also gains from these formed relationships with new members. Using this lens will help strengthen the study because the Panhellenic organizations are relational and devoted to creating relationships. Humans in general need belonging and connection to others to thrive. This lens can be extended to the campus community and educating those in the campus community about women who are not chosen for membership into one of the 26-member organizations in order to create opportunities for belonging in other ways.

Significance of Study

This study will add to the research and impact areas of student affairs by providing a more dedicated understanding of a group of students who has yet to be studied in this context. Research on fraternities and sororities often details the amount of alcohol violations (Nelson et al., 2009), information on hazing (Nuwer, 2001), and community and academic standing (Grubb, 2006). However, the research around how fraternity/sorority life affects other campus and community populations – in this case first year women who wanted to be a part of this community and were not able to – is limited (Biddix et. al., 2014). The desired outcomes from this study will be to educate campus and community partners around Panhellenic Formal Recruitment which includes the PNMs, recruitment counselors, and campus partners including

residence life staff, fraternity/sorority life office staff, and first year experience staff. As Astin (1993) highlighted, fraternity and sorority involvement have a positive connection to educational outcomes such as persistence to graduation and engagement while attending college.

Understanding this connection is significant to offices of fraternity/sorority life and research surrounding Panhellenic sororities because the women who have not been accepted into these groups could lack the same institutional attachments and peer support groups that those who were accepted gained (Nathan, 2005). Educating others on campus from the point of view of the women who have not been accepted into Panhellenic organizations will be able to provide better advocacy for those in that position in the future.

Operational Definitions

Bid for membership: a formal invitation to membership issued by a fraternity/sorority or Greek-letter organizations. Also referred to as bids.

Chapter: the local organization of a national fraternity or sorority.

Formal Sorority Recruitment: a period of formalized membership recruitment that is organized and implemented by the local Panhellenic leadership during which a series of events are held by each National Panhellenic Conference Sorority on a given campus.

Fraternity: an organized society of men bound together by brotherhood and dedicated to the intellectual, physical, and social development of its members.

Many sororities refer to themselves as a fraternity as well because the word sorority stems from the Latin term meaning family (Baird, 1879)

Potential New Member (PNM): a student who is seeking membership within a fraternity/sorority, but who has not yet pledged membership to a chapter.

Membership Recruitment Acceptance Binding Agreement (MRABA): a binding agreement signed by Potential New Members on preference day and kept on file by the local fraternity/sorority life office. By signing this document, the Potential New Member is committing to a number of binding agreements regarding their participation in recruitment at the university where it is signed. Also referred to as a preference card.

Mutual Selection Process: the process by which potential new members and sororities choose one another through a rank order process during the formal recruitment process.

National Panhellenic Conference (NPC): the national governing council aimed at supporting the 26 National Panhellenic women's organizations (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020).

New Member: a member of a sorority after receiving a bid, but before initiation.

Nonevent: expected events that fail to occur such as expecting to receive a bid to a Panhellenic Sorority and then not receiving a bid to such organization (Schlossberg, 2011).

Quota: the number of women each sorority may pledge during a primary recruitment process. It is used with fully structured recruitment and may be used with partially structured recruitment (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020).

Recruitment Counselors: the women that are already initiated members of Panhellenic organizations who assist potential new members during the Formal Recruitment Process. (Pi Chi's) at the institution being studied.

Release Figures Methodology (RFM): methodology by which formal sorority recruitment numbers are calculated (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020).

Sense of Belonging: a student's perception of affiliation and identification with the university community (Strayhorn, 2019).

Sorority: an organized society of women bound together by sisterhood and dedicated to the intellectual, physical, and social development of its members (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020).

Transition: alterations to a student's life either in role, relationship, routine, or assumption (Schlossberg, 2011).

Unmatched in the bid round: A woman who successfully persists through the Formal Recruitment process, demonstrates a desire to be a member of a Panhellenic sorority but does not receive an invitation to membership.

Withdraw: The act of voluntarily discontinuing the formal recruitment process.

Summary

The lack of information, research and education on this topic leads to a strong area of need for this research in the field. This study should assist future researchers and the field by highlighting the experiences of collegiate women who did not join a National Panhellenic Conference Sorority. Findings from this study may build a knowledge base for campus and community partners to create education around fraternity and sorority life for future PNMs. Centering this study around students' transition and sense of belonging is important because the nonevent of not getting accepted into a Panhellenic organization likely affects both areas of a first-year student's experience. My hope is that the information gathered from former PNMs on their experiences will assist future first year students during their recruitment process. I also hope this research will educate community and campus constituents on this unique transition process, so they are better equipped to assist future students.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fraternalities and sororities have existed for hundreds of years, but research done regarding members and nonmembers' experiences with fraternity/sorority life is limited (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020). My study is focused on students who went through the Formal Panhellenic Recruitment process but were not afforded the opportunity to be part of the fraternity/sorority life community. This could be by self-selection out of the process because of several reasons or because the member organizations dropped them during the process. In this chapter, I explore the history of fraternity/sorority life, the National Panhellenic Conference, the formal recruitment process, and Release Figures Methodology (RFM) to set the stage for this research. I also explore the literature on college transitions and sense of belonging in hopes of further informing the present study. The nonevent of being unmatched with a sorority, as a first-year student, can cause distress. This distress may influence a student's sense of belonging and transition experience. A critical understanding of how an experience, such as joining a Panhellenic sorority, came to be so desired for first-year women is needed to understand the important aspects of this study and the nonmembers' experience with the fraternity/sorority community.

History of Fraternity and Sorority Life

Research states that students have searched for membership with a group of people similar to themselves throughout history (Chapman, et al., 2008). Fraternity/Sorority societies or college secret societies were founded in 1776 when Phi Beta Kappa was established at William and Mary (Baird, 1879). As these groups, literary and educational in nature, continued to spread across the country, their foundation consisted primarily of "friendship and the promotion of

common objects” (Baird, 1879, p.15). These themes are still seen today in fraternities/sororities and those who wish to be a part of them. In 1825, at Union College, Kappa Alpha Society “K.A.” became the first fraternity not focused on literary arts. This brought “K.A.” much opposition, yet in the following two years, two more fraternities/sororities would come to fruition (Baird, 1879).

The need for women’s organizational counterparts was evident. The first women's fraternity was Alpha Delta Pi founded in 1851 (Guthrie, 2003). In 1870, the first Ladies’ Societies were formed: Kappa Kappa Gamma and Kappa Alpha Theta (Baird, 1879). It was not until 1882 that Gamma Phi Beta coined the term sorority and women’s groups began founding under this term instead of fraternity (Guthrie, 2003). Throughout the years, more groups were founded on more campuses across the country and more students joined these secret and known societies.

The fraternity/sorority societies began differentiating based on geographical location around 1872; East, West, South and New England areas (Baird, 1879). These geographical regions began competing against one another based on their endowment, number of chapters on campus, academics, and facilities (Baird, 1879). During this time of competition, universities learned - through the loss of chapters and the flourishing of other chapters across the country- that establishment of chapters takes time, money, and the necessary facilities. The Eastern chapters had been around for much longer, so their facilities were better equipped because they had more members to pay dues. While the East was feeling well established, the South was recovering from a war and the West from a time where resources were scarce for their population. During this time, chapters began thinking about new members and the recruitment tactics being used. As Baird (1879) explained, “Chapters also will often draw members from some particular town or school; friends from either place will be a great inducement to a

freshman” (p. 22). Creating such recruitment protocol from an early stage in fraternity/sorority history, this tradition has caused issues for current potential members who might not be from a familiar town. This was the beginning, but not the end of recruitment practices becoming exclusionary for new members during the Formal Recruitment Process.

War times were harsh for fraternity/sorority societies. During the Civil War, colleges closed their doors and organizations lost members, but when the war was over, fraternities grew in numbers due to the number of men attending college (Baird, 1879). During the period of the Great Depression and WWII, membership in fraternity/sorority organizations fell and chapters stopped opening across the country. According to Guthrie, after the Great Depression, chapters returned to campus and brought with them a new drive for diversity in their groups (2003). During the time period post-WWII, fraternity/sorority organizations, “began to admit members more reflective of the college-attending population” (Guthrie, 2003, p. 2251). Lastly, the Vietnam War brought a downturn for fraternity/sorority groups because loyalty, tradition, and friendship were not in congruence with the social movements of the period (Guthrie, 2003). Fraternity/sorority life has seen growth and loss many times over throughout history, but the friendship and membership values have always stayed true.

Through the years, fraternity/sorority Societies grew into four councils of fraternity/sorority life. The women’s organizations wanted to ensure their organizations would continue to grow and created their own organization to protect and govern their groups: The National Panhellenic Conference. The Interfraternity Council, the Multicultural Fraternity/Sorority Council and the National Pan-Hellenic Council all create what has come to be the fraternity/sorority community (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020). Although this research focuses on the National Panhellenic Conference, all four councils create the

fraternity/sorority culture on college campuses, and each has their own recruitment processes and policies.

National Panhellenic Conference

The National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) was founded on May 24, 1902, originally as the Inter-Sorority Conference (ISC). This meeting consisted of delegates from Alpha Phi, Pi Beta Phi, Kappa Alpha Theta, Kappa Kappa Gamma, Delta Gamma, Gamma Phi Beta, and Delta Delta Delta. Delegates from Alpha Chi Omega and Chi Omega were invited but could not attend the 1902 meeting according to the National Panhellenic Conference Manual. In 1945, the name of the Inter-Sorority Conference was formally changed to National Panhellenic Conference moving forward in congruence with its mission and goals. The change of the name signaled a time in National Panhellenic Conference history of more member organizations joining together to push forward a similar mission and create campus Panhellenic cultures across the country (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020). According to the National Panhellenic Conference, the first meeting of this organization actually dates back to “1891 when Kappa Kappa Gamma invited all Greek Letter women’s collegiate fraternities - there were seven at the time - to a meeting in Boston” (2020, p. 8). National Panhellenic Conference adheres to values-based recruitment and has since 1989. This policy has been updated several times over the past 31 years, but most recently in 2019 to ensure the safety and enjoyment of potential new members (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020). The values that all 26-member organizations must abide by are as follows:

1. Focus on conversations between chapter members and potential new members about organizational values and member organizations.
2. Establish guidelines for membership recruitment budgets and set a cap on membership recruitment expenses, including the value of all donated goods and services

3. Keep decorations to a minimum and confined to the interior space used for recruitment rounds.
4. Determine recruitment event attire for chapter members that reduces individual financial burden and eliminates costuming.
5. Eliminate gifts, favors, letters and notes for potential new members.
6. Eliminate all forms of bid promising, oral or written, to join a certain sorority before bids are distributed by Panhellenic.
7. Eliminate recruitment skits (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020).

All member organizations must adhere to these rules, as well as, all regulations placed by their respective campuses, the National Panhellenic Conference manual, their local Panhellenic organizations and any regulations in place by their respective national organization. Examples of rules set by Panhellenic organizations would be a date of no contact set for member organizations to PNMs or the date that active members can no longer communicate with PNMs before formal recruitment, how long each round of formal recruitment will last, and the types of decor allowed to be present during each round.

During the National Panhellenic Conferences, the, “most basic and urgent questions have always centered around recruitment” (Adventure in Friendship, 2012, p. 4). With the number of questions, concerns, and women participating in Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process, the lack of research on the outcome of the process on the women is astonishing. There has been research regarding personality types best suited for recruitment (Roof, 2013). There has also been research on the best body type for recruitment (Rolnik et al., 2010). However, there is still a lack of research on the outcome Panhellenic Formal Recruitment plays on first-year student experience and transition, particularly for those students who are not able to join organizations after being interested in these member organizations. When the main topics of discussion within the

NPC community have historically been about “rushing and pledging agreements [*sic*],” the lack of research on the topic is concerning (Adventure in Friendship, 2012; Golden, 2014; National Panhellenic Conference, 2020).

Sorority Recruitment

The new member intake process for any of the 26 National Panhellenic Conference organizations is through a formal and/or informal recruitment process. This is due to the need to replace the membership the organization lost in the previous graduating class and grow the organization. The National Panhellenic Conference recommends the process take place in the first few weeks of the academic fall semester (2020). Some institutions have mandated the recruitment process take place after the first full term of classes. This is called a deferred recruitment style, but this format is not recommended by the National Panhellenic Conference because for retention of members for the organizations, missed mentoring opportunities for new members, and scheduling conflicts with the university the deferred recruitment process contributes to. Ultimately the decision is up to the institution though (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020). Recruitment is open to any student at the institution who is enrolled full time during that semester and there cannot be a GPA restriction on the students taking part in the process (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020). Women who tend to participate in Panhellenic sorority recruitment are often from wealthier backgrounds and have more family support (Atlas & Morier, 1994). Often these family members have been fraternity/sorority members themselves and understand the recruitment process as well. For the purpose of this study, this connection to fraternity/sorority life likely contributes to PNM's who do not have familial connections to feel as though they have less information than those who do have the connection from family groups and could cause concern for the transition of the potential new members who do not have the wealth of information about Panhellenic Formal Recruitment.

Historically, chapter members could be initiated into more than one chapter (Baird, 1879). This idea was termed “lifting.” Lifting members from one chapter to another was preventing chapter growth and was not allowing members to create meaningful relationships with members of one community. At the 1902 ISC meeting, agenda notes stated, “lifting a woman who already belonged to another fraternity is dishonorable and that the initiation of preparatory students was incompatible with the highest development of chapter life” (Adventure in Friendship, 2012, p. 3). So, to keep in honor with the National Panhellenic Conference, students began to be “rushed” instead of “lifted” through recruitment processes where women who were not yet a part of other chapters could express interest in National Panhellenic Conference chapters.

The research currently available on the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process is considerably narrow and reflects negative attitudes towards the fraternity/sorority system or how the system is perceived. Rolnik et al., (2010) studied the effects of body weight and BMI on sorority recruitment. The results found that women with higher BMI were less likely to be accepted into a Panhellenic sorority even if the BMI was still considered healthy. In another study, Roof (2013) explored the effects Myers Briggs personality test results would have on the outcome of a potential member’s Formal Panhellenic Recruitment. She found that it did not matter what personality the student had; personality was not a significant predictor of whether a student received a bid or remained unmatched. Germane to the present study, Atlas and Morier (1994) and more recently Golden (2014) studied the effects of unmatched students. Golden researched the effects on women’s anxiety after recruitment finding there to be subthemes of anxiety including damaged self-esteem and depression from the women who participated in their study (Golden, 2014). Atlas and Morier attempted to measure differences between women who did participate in recruitment and those who did not. They found there to be differences in need

for affiliation, willingness to attend parties where women did not belong already (Atlas & Morier, 1994). Abela and Seligman (2000) attempted to examine self-esteem after students participated in fraternity or sorority recruitment. They found that getting released from all fraternities or sororities would have lasting effects of depression, anxiety or feelings of rejection (Biddix et al., 2014). In the years that Panhellenic organizations have been in existence, only a handful of research studies are available on the recruitment process and very little on the long-lasting effects on students who are not a part of this community, but who expressed interest in joining the community. Further study on the recruitment process could aid campus-based professionals, sorority chapters, and national organizations better understand the potential impacts of this process.

The Formal Recruitment Process

The National Panhellenic Conference abides by a values-based recruitment system. This system has been updated over 5 times since 1989 but was most recently updated in 2019 to eliminate gifts, food, skits, and decoration while focusing on conversation during the recruitment rounds (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020). This system was implemented to focus on the values, beliefs, and experiences of each Panhellenic organization rather than a surface level costly view of the organization. The Panhellenic Conference supports three types of recruitment: Continuous Recruitment (CR), Partially Structured Recruitment (PSR), and Fully Structured Recruitment (FSR). Partially Structured Recruitment and Continuous Recruitment are used when a collegiate campus has less than 9% of the campus involved in fraternity/sorority life. Continuous Recruitment has quotas between two and nine new members in a new member class and most of the recruitment strategy is through continuous open bidding (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020). Partially structured recruitment has a quota between 10-30 women and is used on campuses of three or more chapters. A partially structured recruitment process is useful

for campuses who have a larger number of women who withdraw from the initial pool of interested women or for a campus who has a large number of women who join the recruitment process after it has officially begun. If 10% or more of the women on a campus are interested in Fraternity/Sorority life then Fully Structured Recruitment is recommended. Fully Structured Recruitment is recommended for campuses who have between four and 26 chapters and the quota is set to 20 or more new members per new member class (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020). This is the type of recruitment that the size of institution used for this study would typically use. There are several structures to this form of recruitment based on the number of chapters on the campus, but for a campus with 16 chapters (the medium size of this structure) a schedule would likely go as follows:

- Day 1: Event 1- Eight houses 30-minute parties
- Day 2: Event 1- Eight houses 30-minute parties
- Day 3: Event 2- Up to Six invitational parties 30-minute parties
- Day 4: Event 2- Up to Six invitational parties 30-minute parties
- Day 5: Event 3- Up to Seven invitational parties 45-minute parties
- Day 6: Preference Round- Up to Two invitational parties 1-hour parties

After each event women can preference the houses they would like to be invited back to the next event. For instance, after Event 1, each woman would rank six houses she would like to be invited back to during Event 2. For every Panhellenic system that uses a Fully Structured Recruitment (FSR) with 16 chapters, this is the schedule for which they would follow. Each Panhellenic organization gets to also invite potential women back to their events and based on the release figures methodology and mutual match system described below, women are matched with invitations for each event.

Release Figures Methodology (RFM)

The National Panhellenic Conference created a new methodology for matching potential members with chapters in 2003 (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020). Commonly referred to as Release Figures Methodology (RFM), this method allows for chapters to grow during recruitment based on their recruiting ability, while also considering their current chapter total. By thinking about not only their chapter total, chapter retention and growth, the RFM changed the way campuses recruited and retained members. The RFM serves as both a tool for groundbreaking analytics for the 26-member chapters in NPC, but also serves as a way to maximize matching opportunities for potential members during formal recruitment. The RFM has three main purposes: (1) to enable each sorority to invite a sufficient number of potential new members to each event to attain quota at the conclusion of recruitment, (2) to allow each potential new member to methodically investigate realistic options and ultimately match with a sorority for which she has a preference, and (3) to maximize the number of potential new members who ultimately affiliate with a sorority through recruitment (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020). Since the inception of the RFM system in 2003, 85-95% of potential new members who attend preference round become matched with their first choice (Golden, 2014). This means between 5-15% of the first years who begin Panhellenic Formal Recruitment do not end up members of Panhellenic organizations. If a campus has 1,000 women begin Panhellenic Recruitment, there are 50-150 women who do not become members. The system was created to optimize the potential members' possibility in matching, but there are still potential members who do not match through the RFM system due partially to NPC chapters who “under invite” after each round. There are also potential members who are unmatched before attending preference round. If potential members do not match, but still wish to join a Panhellenic sorority, there are other ways in which this matching can occur informally.

Nonmembers who wish to continue the recruitment process after Panhellenic Formal Recruitment can partake in Snap Bidding or Continuous Open Bidding. Snap Bidding is a process for chapters who do not meet their recruitment quota and wish to add members to their pledge class before Bid Day. To be eligible for Snap Bidding, women must have attended at least one Panhellenic Formal Recruitment party. Continuous Open Bidding (COB) happens from the moment Bid Day is over until the chapter has reached their chapter total and any woman who has not signed a Membership Recruitment Acceptance Binding Agreement (MRABA) is eligible for COB (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020). The Release Figures Methodology has changed the way campuses recruit and retain new members because it allows for more accurate member class numbers so the chapters can plan for their new member classes ahead of time more accurately. This also changed the number of women who match to NPC chapters, but there are still women who are unmatched and have trouble finding a sense of belonging during a time of harsh transition.

Transitions In College

The college years are full of transitions, from moving to college, changing majors, joining clubs, or moving housing arrangements multiple times (Schreiner et al., 2012). Transitions can either be positive for students or force students backwards potentially leading to disengagement from their environment (Schreiner et al., 2012). As students begin to work through their Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process, they are also beginning a large transition in parallel to finding their community in a new place. Student development theories such as Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Strayhorn's Theory of Sense of Belonging explain that these two processes are not easy even for a student whose recruitment process ends the way they anticipate (Schlossberg, 2011; Strayhorn, 2019). When the process does not end how the student

is anticipating, it creates another transition and gap in the creation of the sense of belonging that is drastically needed for first year students.

There are three types of transitions that are outlined in Schlossberg's Transition Theory. The three types are anticipated transitions, unanticipated transitions, and nonevent transitions (Schlossberg, 2011). Anticipated transitions are defined as "major life events that we usually expect such as graduation" (Schlossberg, 2011, p.159). Unanticipated transitions are events that occur unexpectedly and cause disturbance such as a surgery; lastly, nonevent transitions are expected events that fail to occur such as a canceled wedding (Schlossberg, 2011). The first-year students who are unmatched in recruitment are simultaneously going through all three of these transitions. These students are transitioning to a new campus (anticipated), they are transitioning through not being in a sorority after bid day as they expected to be (unanticipated) and they are transitioning through not getting asked to join a sorority as they had intended to (nonevent). Any one of these three transitions at one time can cause discord for a student, but all three can and have caused students anxiety (Golden, 2014). Regardless of whether a transition is positive or negative, transitions in general are associated with change. According to Schreiner et al. (2012), change causes students stress even when the change is considered to be minor. Schlossberg (2011) noted that students do not experience change and transition the same way so when first year women are not accepted into a Panhellenic organization, they could experience stress, anxiety, or a negative transition. Without proper understanding of the recruitment process, these unmatched first year students will be going through transitions they were not anticipating while still learning where to find a campus community.

Sense of Belonging

Similar to these students going through multiple transitions at one time, first-year students are still learning where to find community and how their new campus will be their

home. Sense of belonging generally refers to a feeling of connectedness that one is important or matters to others (Strayhorn, 2019). In the case of the present study, first-year women entered higher education expecting a sense of community to be found and achieved via a new sorority family. According to Baumeister and Leary, “positive affect should follow from forming and solidifying social bonds, and negative affect should ensue when relationships are broken, threatened or refused” (Baumeister and Leary, 1995, p.500). Positive relationships are not created when women are not welcomed into a Panhellenic sorority through Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. When students do not form a sense of belonging this can be called “sense of alienation” (Strayhorn, 2019, p.2). This absence of sense of belonging can trigger anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, and loneliness and can have long term effects such as dissatisfaction (Strayhorn, 2019). Students who attempt to join a Panhellenic organization are seeking sense of belonging through these organizations. When they are not accepted, a sense of alienation on the college campus could happen instead.

As I mentioned previously, a high percentage of the students attending Panhellenic Formal Recruitment have had family involved in fraternity/sorority life. The sense of belonging found in their actual family’s experience is what they too are expecting from fraternity/sorority life (Golden, 2014). According to Strayhorn (2019), belonging with peers, in the classroom or on campus is a critical dimension of success at college. When the ability to form a sense of belonging is disrupted, the possibility of academic failure leading to departure is greater (Strayhorn, 2019). A strong sense of belonging also leads to higher student commitment. Student commitment is defined as the student’s overall satisfaction, impression of overall educational quality, and willingness to attend the institution again. When women are not accepted into a Panhellenic sorority, the student commitment could suffer leading to a lack of willingness to return to the institution. The RFM report has increased the number of matched women to 85-

95%, but there is still the 5-15% of first year possible new members who will end up unmatched and need coping skills and support through the transition of the nonevent as their anticipated avenue for belonging is no longer an option.

Saville and Johnson (2007) examined the sense of belonging in women who joined Panhellenic sororities. They found that women who had been in Panhellenic sororities for longer than one year had a higher sense of belonging than women who had not. The study also found that seniors in Panhellenic organizations had higher sense of belonging than the first-year members (Saville & Johnson, 2007). Sense of belonging grew from events where members were able to connect with one another through the organization. The exception to these events was recruitment; the researchers found that formal recruitment did not grow sense of belonging for members. This could be due to, as Strayhorn (2019) suggested, that these are places where people feel unsupported or unwelcomed and, in these instances, belonging is less likely to be achieved. Researchers have also found that PNMs do not feel supported during recruitment, so it is less likely for them to find belonging there (Paxton and Moody, 2003).

Need for More Understanding

The lack of research around the topic of Panhellenic Formal Recruitment is concerning for the number of young women this topic affects every year. The lack of research leads to a lack of education for campus officials and for the women who end up in this position. With more research, understanding, and education around the mismatch and withdrawal rates from the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process, the more prepared campus officials can be to work with women who are affected by the mismatch. As previously stated, there are a few studies on the effects of personalities on formal recruitment matching and the effects of possible new members' body weight on their recruitment outcome, but only one study on the transition of students who attempt recruitment, yet are not selected to be a part of fraternity/sorority life

(Golden, 2014; Rolnik et al., 2010; Roof, 2013). There is also research completed on the women who lead potential new members through recruitment or Recruitment Counselors, as well as the effects of fraternity/sorority life on GPA; however, most of these are inconclusive (Nelson et al., 2006; Witkowsky, 2010). Examples of common research on fraternity/sorority life are drawn to hazing, alcohol use, or negative aspects of the fraternity/sorority community (Guthrie, 2003; Maisel, 1990). The need for more understanding on Panhellenic Formal Recruitment and its effects on women who are not chosen for membership is needed to assist in these women's transition and sense of belonging during their first year on campus.

Summary

By using history to understand the past of fraternity/sorority life, the National Panhellenic Conference, and the Formal Recruitment Process including the Release Figures Methodology, I can better understand the need for the study of the sense of belonging of students not accepted into these organizations. Using Schlossberg's Transition Model and Strayhorn's Sense of Belonging Model as theoretical frameworks for understanding the need for students to achieve a sense of belonging and the intense transitions they are experiencing, I hope to be able to better educate campus partners who serve these women. My goal is that by adding to this area of research, I can help shed light on an issue that affects the college-going transition and experience of many undergraduate women.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter is an overview of the research design and methods for this study on the sense of belonging of first year students after not being accepted into a Panhellenic organization through the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process. In this chapter, I review my positionality statement as a researcher, the qualitative design of the study, the research paradigm, the setting where the study took place, how participants were recruited, details of participants, the procedures of data collection, and how the data was analyzed after collection.

During this study, I explored the research questions I presented in chapter one on how students' sense of belonging was affected by not being able to join a Panhellenic organization through Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. This study also kept a focus on students' transition to campus noting that first year women who are taking part in Panhellenic Formal Recruitment are undergoing a large transition already by attending South Eastern College for the first time. My research questions were:

R1: What are the transition experiences of women who went through recruitment but did not become members?

R2: How does not joining a Panhellenic sorority influence women's sense of belonging on campus during the first year of college?

R3: How do these women find belonging on campus after not receiving or accepting a bid?

This study was focused on first year women after their experience with Panhellenic Formal Recruitment in order to learn how the process affected or changed their overall

experience during that year. The study was conducted at a southern, liberal arts institution where a large portion of students are involved in fraternity and sorority life. This campus was chosen because of the nature of this type of institution's recruitment style. For the purpose of this study, the institution will be called South Eastern College. This study was chosen to be qualitative in nature because I wanted to learn from the participants' stories, lived experiences, and narratives. Being able to build relationships and learn from each participant in a story-like manner was integral to exploring my research questions. Therefore, this study used a qualitative, narrative inquiry design.

Positionality Statement

The topic studied in this project was first year women who sought to be accepted into a Panhellenic sorority and were not accepted through the mutual match system during Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. Being the primary researcher on this dissertation project, I understood that as I am researching women who are involved in the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process, I need to recognize my positionality as a woman who is a member of a Panhellenic sorority. I have been involved with a Panhellenic sorority for seven years and in the most recent four years I have been an alumni advisor directly working with the formal and informal recruitment processes. This gives me great knowledge of Panhellenic formal and informal recruitment processes as well as an understanding of the mutual match system and the continuous open bidding process. As a first-year in college, I went through Panhellenic Formal Recruitment at a large, southern institution, and did not accept a bid through the process. Although this was my choice, I was in a similar situation to the women in this study because of the feeling of having no choice in the process and being released from the chapters that I felt like I would connect most with. This gives me a personal, historical connection to the topic as well. This positionality allows me to connect with the members of my study because they yearn to be a part of this

community, and I have a personal connection to their possible pain. However, this also could create distance between me and my participants because of the anxiety the Panhellenic community caused them and I am now a part of this community. I had to create trust and community with the participants in the study in order for the interviews to yield the best outcome.

The second portion of my positionality connected to the study, which was important to understand as I continued with this study, was understanding the bias my positionality can bring to the project and how to mitigate this bias from interfering with my study. In order to create the best space for my current students and the participants in this study, I planned to not conduct this study at the institution where I actively work with a local chapter. I was aware of the bias and conflict this would have caused and prevented that by choosing another institution with a similar recruitment style. I understood that being a part of the Panhellenic community could prevent my participants from trusting me fully when their potential pain and confusion was caused by the group of people that I identify as being a part of. I understood this concern and planned to keep this knowledge at the forefront while I interviewed and interpreted the participants' stories. As stated by Jones et al. (2014), "It is important to clarify whose story is being told and to illuminate for the reader how the participants' words are being interpreted." (p.41) I kept the interviewees as anonymous as possible in order to keep the identities of the women protected while also illuminating their stories in the study. Being a part of the community allows me to understand the process of Panhellenic recruitment well. This is a strategy not to navigate around my positionality as connected to the study, but to be as educated as possible to best hear the students' voices directly during the interpretation. Utilizing my personal knowledge of the process allowed me to understand the mutual matching system and continuous open bidding process as well. This allowed me to know the women who did not match into a Panhellenic sorority were not by

accident from the computer system. The education portion of the process is where the change needs to be made.

Understanding my positionality in the study helped assist me in understanding where my bias could lie within the research. Being a woman involved in the Formal Recruitment Process of a Panhellenic organization also gave me an understanding as to why this study is needed. I duly note that this positionality gave me inherent bias within the study as well. Creating strategies ahead of time and understanding these biases allowed me to be conscious of these throughout the dissertation process and prevented the bias from interacting negatively with the study.

Qualitative Design

This dissertation will use narrative inquiry as the primary research design while investigating the effects on sense of belonging on first year women after not being accepted into a Panhellenic sorority through Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. Narrative inquiry uses stories as the primary understanding of individual life (Wang & Geale, 2015). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), narrative inquiry extends the personal interview and personal story to life history narratives, historical memoirs, and creative nonfiction. There are three approaches to use narrative inquiry: biological, psychological and linguistic. The biological approach considers the participants life, gender, race, and family history (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In the psychological approach the narrative is analyzed using personal insights and motivations. The linguistic approach focuses on the pitch, tone, spoken word, and verbal cues of the participant during the interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This dissertation took into account each approach of narrative inquiry, but focused on the biological and psychological approaches. As the researcher, I used students' identities to embrace their stories and validate their lived experiences throughout their first year using the biological approach of narrative inquiry while I engaged their personal insights and motivations the participants had to participate in Panhellenic

Formal Recruitment. I also used the psychological approach of narrative inquiry to elaborate on these areas of their individual experiences.

The researcher and the participant need to develop a deep relationship. The researcher also needed to continue to collect stories and hear narrative experiences from the participant in order to create the best interpretation of the data as possible. According to Wang and Geale (2015) “active collaboration with the participant is necessary throughout the narrative inquiry process. Researchers need to continually discuss the participant's stories with the participant, and reflect on his/her personal, social, and political background.” (p.197) Creating this deep relationship with the women who were not accepted into a Panhellenic organization allowed for their stories to be told and heard more clearly as they yearned for a trusting relationship after facing rejection during Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. An important aspect of narrative inquiry is for the participant and researcher to become bonded in a way that allows the participant to become the researcher during the interview process. This allows the participant to ask questions and provide follow ups to researcher-posed questions during the interview process creating a fluid and flexible qualitative design (Mason, 2002). The semi-structured interview process allowed for this connection and process to happen seamlessly.

This type of research is valuable for this study because humans live social and independent storied lives. These stories combined into a narrative and were recounted through narrative inquiry (Kim, 2016). Narrative inquiry “relies on life experiences as narrative by those who live them.” (Jones et al., 2014, p.82) As the researcher, relying on the life experiences of the non-Panhellenic women allowed for a first-hand account of the experience during the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process as well as the stress in the aftermath. This allowed the researcher to experience the narrative story or lived experience through the women in order to assist in creating better practices in the future for women in the same positions.

Research Paradigm

My qualitative research was focused on the sense of belonging of first year women who are not accepted into a Panhellenic sorority yet sought to be. This study was about the meaning these women were making of their surroundings, their pain from this nonevent of getting into a sorority, and their belonging on campus after this incident. Due to the meaning-making nature of this study, the research was situated in the constructivism paradigm. This paradigm framed the study in a structure that brings who I am as a researcher into the study yet situated the study amongst the participants to ensure their narrative is heard and meaning is derived from their stories. The constructivist paradigm constructs meaning making as a way to make sense of something so in this study the participants had the ability to make sense of their experience from Panhellenic Formal Recruitment (Lincoln & Guba, 2013).

The constructivism paradigm has several dimensions including the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological dimensions. The study was supported by each dimension in different ways, and all are needed for the framework to be fully bound around the research subject. Ontology is the nature of reality (Jones et al., 2014). In this study, the ontological approach was explored through the stories of the women's lived experiences which created a reality where these women were not accepted or wanted. This lived experience or interaction between the possible new member and the Panhellenic organization created a reality for the possible new member where the Panhellenic organizations were not welcoming or places of belonging.

The epistemological dimension of the framework drives the reality co-created by the participant and the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 2013) In this study, the possible new member developed a trusting relationship to understand and co-create their lived experience through a narrative interview. Although the participants' experience was already lived, we worked

together to construct meaning from it in order to understand their sense of belonging on campus after this nonevent. In the epistemological dimension, the knowledge is not discovered, but created due to the transaction between the known and to-be-known, meaning the information will be co-created due to the relationship of trust established between the participant and me as the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). This dimension frames the knowledge I gained from the interview with the participant. The relationship allowed the participant to trust me with their narrative which is now known as their knowledge (Kim, 2016).

The axiological dimension through the constructivism paradigm is the role that values and ethics play in the research study. When this research study was developed, valuing the narrative, personal experiences, and stories from the participants was the primary focus of the researcher. The identity of the participants in the study was also a primary focus that I held so that the women in the study feel trusted. Valuing these stories, the women's choice to share is important to this study because the stories and lived experiences are only accounted for by them. These stories are also important because the axiological dimension values the importance of co-creating the data for those that the research will benefit (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Change cannot be made without these women's stories and it is this dimension that values that creation of data and change.

Research Methodology

The methodology is the process that guides the study and creates a design implementation (Jones et al., 2014). In this research study, I used a qualitative design structure called narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry or narrative research can be in the form of autobiography, life stories, historical content, interview, journal, or letters and they all assist in the meaning-making process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The narrative inquiry method is powerful not because the method is about the participants' life, but because the narrative stories

interact with each participants' life as they tell their own narrative stories. The narrative inquiry allowed for the participants to share their personal stories in a way where they connected with the interviewer allowing for meaning to be made more easily from their story. This also allows for trust to be made between the participant and the interviewer allowing for the participants' stories to be valued and heard for possibly the first time. In narrative inquiry, Kim (2016), suggests that the researcher must imagine the space where the story took place in order for the research to live as it unfolds. In doing this, I was able to learn from the recruitment experiences of the first-year women to hopefully use this experience to unfold deeper connections for future students. I believed this qualitative method is most useful for my study because of the use of interviews, documents, lived experiences, and stories combined. In this form of research, I know I needed the participants to be open to sharing their stories and personal histories with me for these participants to understand they are the storyteller and expert - not me (Kim, 2016). Narrative design places the participant as the expert and the researcher as the learner using the design "living, telling, reliving, and retelling" (Kim, 2016, p.97).

Setting

This dissertation used a southern, liberal arts, public institution for the study. For the purpose of this study we called the institution South Eastern College. As the researcher, I chose this site because this institution used a fully structured recruitment process similar to other institutions of this size and scope. As noted in the literature, institutions of this size and Panhellenic communities of this size are required to use fully structured recruitment processes (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020). The fully structured recruitment process uses multiple rounds of parties and has a quota of above 20 members (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020). Using a site with a fully structured recruitment process also means over 10% of the campus is involved in a Panhellenic organization, meaning that their number of women participating in

formal recruitment is higher than a campus that uses partially structured recruitment or informal recruitment. This leads to a higher chance of women being eligible for the study. South Eastern College yields a campus total of around 1,400 students being involved in 8 Panhellenic organizations and over 2,100 students involved in fraternity and sorority life on campus. During the 2019 Panhellenic Recruitment cycle there were around 1,380 women involved in 8 Panhellenic organizations. This data is from the 2018 and 2019 South Eastern College RFM reports. Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, I do not have data for the 2020 recruitment cycle to report. During these two recruitment cycles, an average of 550 PNM's began Panhellenic Formal Recruitment leading to an 86% match rate with a Panhellenic chapter in 2018 and an 84% matching with a Panhellenic chapter in 2019 meaning between 77-88 students who began Panhellenic Formal Recruitment did not end up becoming members.

As the researcher, I hoped to also find information regarding areas of growth surrounding a sense of belonging for institutions using similar recruitment models. As stated by Baumeister and Leary (1995), people have an innate need to connect and relate to other people or groups of people. When this need is not met, many areas of life can be disrupted. For a first-year student on campus, finding connections to others can be difficult and could be made more difficult by not receiving a bid into a Panhellenic sorority. At the minimum, the need to form interpersonal relationships is innately yearned for and universal among human beings (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Knowing this, first-year students who did not receive a bid and were denied this form of interpersonal relationship could be looking for other ways to form belonging and they may feel a sense of anxiety, unease, or distress during this process leading to a sense of depression or lack of sense of belonging. These are the reasons I used this institution for this study on first-year

students' sense of belonging after not receiving a bid through the Formal Panhellenic Recruitment process.

Student Recruitment Selection

I used the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life at South Eastern College to recruit participants from the group of women who began the Formal Panhellenic Recruitment process as a Potential New Member (PNM) during the Fall 2021 semester but did not complete the process as a new member of a Panhellenic organization. These first-year women were contacted by the Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life at South Eastern College when they self-selected out of the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process or were mismatched out of the process. These students were contacted via email when they ended Panhellenic Formal Recruitment by the Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life at South Eastern College. All first-year students who began the Formal Recruitment process in Fall of 2021, did not attend South Eastern College before fall 2021 and were 18 qualified for the study as long as they did not end up members of a Panhellenic organization through Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. All participants received two \$10 amazon gift cards as an incentive to participate in the interviews. The original goal of participants was ideally between 5-10 students, but I ended up with four students to interview. I concentrated recruitment efforts via email and direct contacting of students provided by the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life. The time between their initial email and their interview was supposed to be about 3 weeks so that each student had time to experience campus life after recruitment. I was hopeful that this allowed for the nonevent of not joining a Panhellenic Sorority to have set in while also allowing students to explore other avenues of sense of belonging. Unfortunately, this time ended up being much longer due to unforeseen time lapses and a lack of initial participant interest in the study. This became a limitation of the study and recruitment took longer than expected. The Director of Fraternity and Sorority life continued to

reach out to students well into the fall semester to seek participants for the study. I was able to identify and connect with four participants, but it ended up taking some snowball recruitment as well as continued contact past our initial timeline. Every student who contacted me was contacted for an interview. These interviews were to take place via zoom video call or phone, depending on the level of comfortability the student had with the technology and being interviewed.

Participants

Students eligible to participate in this study were first year women who began the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process but did not become members a Panhellenic organization on Bid Day. These participants were classified as PNMs to the Fraternity and Sorority Life office at the beginning of the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process, but either self-selected out of the process or were mismatched with all Panhellenic organizations before being eligible for membership on Bid Day. For the purpose of this study, I chose to send a call for participation via email to all PNMs who chose to withdraw or self-select out during any round of the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process. This study allowed for first-year women who selected out of the Formal Recruitment Process and those who mismatched to participate because both groups end up without membership in a Panhellenic organization. While students who self-select out had the choice to do so, they still had a reason to want to self-select out that was probably due to mismatch in PNMs expectations of recruitment and the outcome. Interviewing both groups allowed me to learn from all aspects in Panhellenic Recruitment who did not become members after Panhellenic Formal Recruitment.

Procedures and Data Collection

This study was about the participants' sense of belonging after not becoming a member to a Panhellenic sorority through Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. Data collection involved two

interviews with each participant. One 60-minute semi-structured interview in order to hear the participants' feelings about Panhellenic Formal Recruitment through their answers allowing for follow-up questions and answers as well as details on the significance in the participants' life (Jones et al., 2014). A second 60-minute interview was conducted to follow up on the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment experience, and to elaborate on the participants' sense of belonging after Panhellenic Formal Recruitment throughout their first semester on campus. The participants helped guide the order of the questions based on their answers to the previous questions which allowed the researcher to gather the interviewees' stories from their answers better than a structured order and preset list of questions for an interview. Semi-structured interviews are when researchers "devise loose structured interview protocol and several open-ended questions utilizing clarifying questions, such as asking about feelings, what happened next or the topics' significance" (Jones et al., 2014, p.135). A second 60-minute interview was scheduled to follow up on the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment experience, and to elaborate on the participants' sense of belonging. The participants helped guide the order of the questions based on their answers to the previous questions which allowed the researcher to gather the interviewees' stories from their answers better than a structured order and preset list of questions for an interview. This structure is supported by the fact that this study is grounded in the epistemological paradigm which will allow for the participant and researcher to create the narration together through the semi-structured interview process (Clandin, 2007). For the study, I gained information on the participants' feelings around the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process, their opinion around their current state of sense of belonging on campus, and their background with Panhellenic organizations. I used probing, feeling, background, and opinion questions in order to gain insight into the students' narratives based on the research procedures outlined by Jones et. al. (2014). As a researcher, I understood that procedures such as using

adequate pauses, correctly structured questions, and using methodological-based protocol led to an interview which yields the best data.

Interview Protocols

Even though I planned to use a semi-structured interview process to allow for the participants to share their stories and elaborate in ways that might differ from other participants' stories, I had a script for each interview from beginning to end. This script reminded me as a researcher to share my purpose, research, and informed consent with each participant as well as introductory information about myself to begin to build rapport (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). I began the interview with introductory and background questions for the participants in order to better get to know each participant. The interview was structured with broad, lower risk questions first leading into more difficult pointed questions later while still knowing that the order could change based on the participants' answers and conversation following the semi-structured protocol. Broad natured questions began the interview. Examples of these broad questions were... "describe the reasons you were interested in South Eastern College when looking at attending college?", and lead to more pointed questions such as, "where have you found community on campus during your first year on campus?" Using this structure allowed me to make on-point changes and create each interview to be directed towards that participant while also having a plan before each interview began. Each participant's experience, narrative, and story were different and I wanted to allow each participant the space to share their individual story by not feeling cornered into certain questions. Jacob and Furgerson (2012) suggested using prompts which allowed for these quick directional changes, while still using the questions that were originally created. I recorded the interview sessions and have them transcribed after being recorded in order for analysis and interpretation to be as accurate as possible.

Data Analysis

For this study, I planned to collect data by completing interviews with participants. Data analysis and the interpretation of such data allowed me to make sense of the data and convey understanding of the phenomenon depicted by the participants (Jones et al., 2014). Analysis allowed the data to be broken down into parts that could be easily interpreted by me to understand what was being observed among the participants. The methodological approach was taken heavily into account at this stage of the study. Clandinin (2007) asserted that too many researchers fail to connect their analysis to the methodology in order to interpret the research. Since this study was using a narrative inquiry approach, I had to use information beyond what the participants said and voiced in their interview to fully understand their lived experiences more deeply and connect their stories of Panhellenic Formal Recruitment and sense of belonging together (Jones et al., 2014). I planned to do this by interpreting their tone, pauses, and inflection as stated in the previous sections to ensure that I had the information needed to inform beyond what was spoken by the participant. I had to make sure my notes were a blend of description, interpretation, meaning, and understanding as well as the event taking place in detail. In order to do this, I used an analysis technique often associated with narrative inquiry called narrative analysis. I used the version of this technique that allows the researcher to frame the event being discussed or the narration in a way that centers the narration around the participant and not the researcher's voice.

In analyzing the data, I examined the raw data, reduced the data through coding, and searched for patterns among the coding and then deliberately created themes based on these patterns (Kim, 2016). I took notes based on each participant's interview, but also planned to use the recording to adjust my notes as needed after each interview. These notes were placed into Microsoft Excel to create tabs with each participant so that I was able to see across the

participants and find the commonalities among their words and phrasing to identify patterns. Using these techniques allowed me to interpret and analyze the participants' lived experiences of Panhellenic Formal Recruitment and their sense of belonging on campus after not receiving acceptance into a Panhellenic organization.

As the researcher, there were several ways to analyze the narrative including using the relationship between the people's life stories and their perceived life experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The narrative could have been analyzed by dissecting the relationship between people's environments and their lived experiences or considering the lived experience itself as the focus of the narrative inquiry (Jones et al., 2014). Using the interviews and listening to and interacting with each participants' narrative is only the first step. I also used the steps to analyze the data to find similarities and patterns and create future implications and themes to guide change for future women going through Panhellenic Formal Recruitment.

Coding

Narrative Analysis was selected as my methodology to hear the participants' voice and story through their lived experiences as already stated. In order to keep this as the focus of the study during the coding stages of the analysis and align with the narrative methodology, the form of coding that has been chosen is Vivo. This technique is aligned with the type of study I am hoping to achieve by "prioritizing and honoring the participants' voices" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 107). Vivo allowed me to find patterns in the participants' stories and group those patterns to create themes. I used this structure as stated above by organizing the stories shared by the participants in a spreadsheet and then finding the overlap or shared experiences across the participants' stories. These similarities or shared experiences were then copied to a separate sheet to show the patterns in the narrative. This process allowed me to visualize each individual narrative as its own lived experience, and then see the themes emerge between patterns in the narratives.

Trustworthiness

I understood that as a qualitative researcher there were going to be times where the research felt similar to my story. As stated in the subjectivity and reflexivity section, I hoped to understand myself and my identities well enough before the narration interpretation to ensure my own story did not interfere with the stories of the participants. With that being said, I also wanted to recognize that I was going to take precautions to ensure trustworthiness in my study. Three steps I took to do this were creating an audit trail, using peer examination, and employing member checks. Creating an audit trail entailed keeping all interview questions, interpretations, demographic questionnaires, and analysis until the study had been concluded so that there is a paper trail of evidence as to how the analysis was done. Peer examination allowed me to use credible informants to support the analysis and conclusions that I had drawn based on the stories and lived experiences of the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I did this by using staff from the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life at South Eastern College to verify that I interpreted the policies, procedures, and handlings of the Formal Recruitment process correctly based on the participants' explanations. This provided credibility and trustworthiness to the study. Lastly, I planned to use member checks in this study to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of this study. Member checks were used when I compiled the interpreted data and checked with participants to ensure the interpretation was correct based on their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Practicing member checks allowed me to validate the participants' experiences with them after interpreting their words and nonverbal cues. I did this by sending each participant gathered themes from the interpretation so that they could confirm the interpreted themes were what the participants intended to describe in their interviews. Ensuring the study is trustworthy allows for the research to be credible in the field and the participants to feel more comfortable knowing the data they are providing is being used in a credible way.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the methodology, the participants for the study, the procedures, how data were collected and interpreted, as well as the research paradigm and design. Using the qualitative methodology of narrative inquiry allowed me to showcase the stories of first year women's experiences with Panhellenic Formal Recruitment after not being accepted as a member in a Panhellenic organization. I studied the participants' sense of belonging on campus after this nonevent occurred in their first year. After the interpretation and analysis of this data, as well as ensuring the validity of the interpretation, the data was used to make recommendations to the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life in order for first year students in the future to have a better experience with the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter centers around the stories and experiences of the participants with Panhellenic Formal Recruitment and their sense of belonging when they did not become members of Panhellenic Organizations after going through Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. These narrative stories and the details explained the individual feelings. Intertwining their stories depicts themes and understanding throughout. Chapter three explained the details of narrative methodology, participant selection, including the analysis and transcription of each interview into data. This chapter details the themes and understanding of the transcription from each participants' narrative. Each participant shared insight into their reasons for attending South Eastern College, why they chose to participate in Panhellenic Formal Recruitment, what their expectations were for joining a Panhellenic organization, and how they decided to leave the recruitment process. These narratives are shared individually below as a way to highlight each individual's stories before merging the narratives together to identify themes and commonalities between the individuals' narratives.

Throughout the recruitment period, finding participants who were willing to share their stories was not easy as shared above in the recruitment section. Students in this group were reluctant to admit they were not accepted by the Panhellenic organizations and therefore were not open to sharing their stories easily. In the end, I found four willing participants who wanted to share their stories with others. They were vulnerable, willing, dedicated to creating change, and excited about sharing in this study. Although difficult to recruit participants, the four women

whose stories are shared below using pseudonyms created a study with shared themes, implications, and future research to be done.

Participant Narratives

Ava

Ava was the first person to connect with me through my call for participants. She was skeptical of her choice to attend South Eastern College because she only chose to attend when she did not get into another sought after university. Her support system became her roommate very quickly in the first weeks on campus. She shared,

Yeah, so it was really hard at first and because I rushed, I moved in at least a week earlier than everybody else and luckily for me my roommate rushed too, so we were here together and able to do that together, but I lived in the same house my whole life in the same area and obviously I always went to the same school never moved anywhere. So, moving two hours away to college was a big change for me.

Ava also had several high school friends attend the same institution which allowed her early connections with others on campus. As she began sharing about her Panhellenic experience, she mentioned she signed up for Panhellenic Formal Recruitment for the same reason the literature says many women do: family reasons (Golden, 2014). Ava mentioned to me:

Okay, yeah, so I first of all, my mom was in a sorority when she was in college, she was a And then my aunt on her side was also in a sorority, then my cousin was in a sorority, like my mom's whole family was in the south and my dad was in the north. That is not really part of like what they do, but for the family down here that I'm around a lot. They join sororities, and they loved it. And I saw that my cousin had a lot of her bridesmaids from her sorority sisters and I knew a lot of people from high school who had joined sororities and absolutely loved it. So, I thought that it was going to be for me

and that I had a family of people that I could hang out with at a new place: a sisterhood sort of.

For Ava, she was really looking for something her family members had and a way to make her institution feel like a family. She felt like she had a good idea of what was going to happen during Panhellenic Formal Recruitment from her family and her Pi Chi leaders. However, she still felt like her expectations were not met from the process because her expectation was to “end up in a sorority and that changed my outlook on the whole semester because I would have gotten a bid day buddy, a big, gone through all the fun days they do.” Ava began the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process wanting to be a member of an organization. As she continued with formal recruitment, the chapters she felt connected to and wanting them to accept her released her day after day. Because Ava did not connect with the chapter(s) left on her list on preference round, she withdrew from the process. This left Ava feeling as though she was missing out on the opportunities Panhellenic could have afforded her through membership, especially since her roommate accepted a bid so she was watching her take part in the activities she was expecting to take part in, “now, like my roommate, who rushed she did join a sorority. So, it’s easy for me to see all the things that she’s able to do and that I would be doing if I were in a sorority too.” When asked about the largest challenge of formal recruitment, Ava emphasized that, “getting dropped by sororities was probably the hardest part.” She mentioned seeing her list (of houses) after the first round of parties was “pretty depressing.” As Ava continued with our conversation, she mentioned that their Pi Chi’s had not told them this was normal during the formal recruitment process. Ava continued with the Panhellenic recruitment process until Preference round, the last round of recruitment, when she chose to withdraw from the process. Ava mentioned her reasoning for leaving recruitment was not receiving an invitation from the

house she really felt at home at for the preference round. Ava chose to leave campus the morning of Preference round because her family did not want her to be around during the bid day festivities the next day. Ava went on to describe that it was “very, very hard to come back” to campus after bid day since it was already stressful transitioning to campus originally.

Originally, Ava felt bitter about the outcome of Panhellenic formal recruitment. She mentioned she now feels better about it knowing how much time she has to dedicate to her major instead of a sorority. When asked about campus support, Ava mentioned, “I just kind of moved on a bit on my own. That worked out for me and I found other people who had been in the same situation as me which helped.” Students similar to Ava are interested in Panhellenic sororities because they have seen their family members thrive. These students desire a sense of connection to other students. When that does not happen, it causes stress and unbalance as it did for Ava when she was dropped from houses leading to her withdrawal.

Ava’s Sense of Belonging

Ava tried to get involved on campus quickly after Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. She formed relationships with people in her classes and joined the Student Ambassador organization. “We like to promote South Eastern College and I am starting to train to be a tour guide as well. I have met a lot of people through that.” Ava feels very connected to South Eastern College and Student Ambassadors was the first organization that assisted in this connection. This organization has allowed her to form friendships with people in her residence hall who also joined the organization. She mentioned how important joining this organization was to her during the first few weeks of school because of her empty time from not being in a Panhellenic sorority while some of her fellow first year women were dedicating time to that.

Ava was looking for specific things from a Panhellenic Organization when she attempted to join an organization through Formal Panhellenic Recruitment. She explained, “I was looking

for a distinct group of friends, like the whole big/little thing. People who like to throw events. There's a lot of things to do when you are in a sorority." When I reconnected in a follow-up interview about 3 weeks after the first interview with Ava, even though she had found a solid connection through the Student Ambassador organization, she did not feel like she found what she was looking for through Panhellenic Formal Recruitment in Student Ambassadors. She described seeing her roommate attend date nights and formals, yet she sees no opportunity on campus for her engagement in events similar to those which made her feel left out and anxious. Although these events are what she was yearning for from such an organization, she believed that could be found in another organization, but does not know where to start to find such a connection.

Ava described a sense of belonging as "feeling like you belong or knowing that you have people enjoying where you are at." Even though Ava was not accepted into a Panhellenic organization through formal recruitment, and she has still yet to find what she thought she was looking for in a Panhellenic organization through any other group, Ava does feel that she belongs at South Eastern College. She plans to stay at the institution in order to continue connecting with people and growing the relationships with her friends. Ava did not mention her interest in the COB process, but had not sought this out when we spoke for the second time.

Catherine

Catherine was a pre-nursing major and loved the size of South Eastern College. Catherine found a support system very quickly in her roommates. This was very important to her during her first semester because, "college in general has not been what I thought. My classes are much harder than I thought they were going to be." When I asked her about her transition to South Eastern College, Catherine discussed how much harder college had been than her high school experience. "I had to re-learn how to learn. I had to create study habits and find people in my

classes who could help support me.” Catherine created a support system in her classes through study groups in addition to her roommates. Catherine’s support system was a strong reason for her interest in Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. She explained, “the main reason I signed up was because my roommates were and it sounded like the best way to meet people.”

Catherine shared that the largest challenge in Panhellenic Formal Recruitment for her was the stress and emotion that came with leaving each house after the parties and not knowing if they liked you as much as you liked them. “I didn’t understand why I got a house back or I didn’t get one back.”

The lack of acceptance Catherine felt after only having one chapter on her list that she never felt connected to lead her to withdraw from the process. This ultimately led to her leaving the Panhellenic recruitment process as she mentioned she only got a house back that was on the bottom of her list everyday of recruitment. She mentioned, “I just woke up that morning and I had so many emotions. I just did not know what to do.” Catherine also discussed talking with her Pi Chi leader and her parents in order to come to the decision that a Panhellenic sorority “was not for her.”

Catherine never felt positive about the recruitment experience from the beginning, but after withdrawing from the process she felt like she was missing out on the “experiences, t-shirts, date nights and getting closer to everyone in sorority.” She felt lost and alone after withdrawing at first because she had no one to talk to about the process. However, she mentioned that now she knows you do not have to be in a sorority to have friends at South Eastern College. “The sorority does not define you,” as Catherine shared, noting that she is still good friends with her roommates who are in sororities.

Catherine “found herself” at South Eastern College through classmates, roommates, and her coursework, even though in the beginning it was a rough transition academically. She found

Panhellenic Formal Recruitment to be emotional and difficult and she still “really do not understand how the process works. Like how exactly you get through to houses or asked back to houses.” Even through this emotional time, Catherine still was able to make the decision to withdraw from recruitment and now knows this decision was correct for her.

Catherine’s Sense of Belonging

Catherine’s narrative of sense of belonging and connection had elements similar to Ava’s while also being very different. Catherine stated she had a harder transition in the beginning of the semester, but once she was comfortable and understood academic expectations, she was not as nervous. Feeling comfortable in a space held a lot of importance to Catherine. Catherine defined sense of belonging as “feeling comfortable and feeling like you are actually accepted into that place.”

Catherine, unlike Ava, chose not to get involved in any campus organizations. Although, she did form close relationships with classmates and her roommate. Catherine’s main reason for not getting involved in other organizations was time constraints. “I am still new to college. So, I am kind of just still trying to get in the groove of things and like figure out how things work.” Catherine was only looking for close relationships from her potential Panhellenic experience. She was interested in the “sorority sister” relationship but felt like she had gotten that with her roommate.

Catherine has not done much research to add other organizations to her schedule right now. She has found the one thing she wanted from Panhellenic organizations through other avenues and Catherine feels like South Eastern College is a place that she belongs. The environment has been the perfect size and space for her to feel comfortable and learn to connect with others in a way that facilitates relationship building and belonging for her.

Diana

Diana chose to attend South Eastern College because of the distance to her family's home, the size of the school, and her desired major. She was interested in being a nurse upon graduation. She went to a very small high school and she enjoyed the college town, chaos, and community being built at South Eastern College. Diana, not unlike Catherine and Ava, felt like she had strong support from her roommates at South Eastern College. One of her suitemates is a lifelong family friend of hers; therefore, she felt like they would be able to support one another through their first year on campus. Diana's largest adjustment coming to South Eastern College was the class size since her high school graduating class was only 44 people. She said, "Being one of so many thousand was an adjustment." Diana was the first participant to mention the learning adjustment after COVID. Diana stated, "...especially going off COVID and quarantine times. Having to re-learn because during then there was more of an online portion and now it's more in person."

Similar to Ava's reasoning, Diana chose to participate in Panhellenic Formal Recruitment due to her mother's involvement in a Panhellenic sorority. Diana mentioned that her mother still meets monthly with her member class sisters to celebrate birthdays. Diana was seeking something similar when signing up for Panhellenic Formal Recruitment, "I was looking to have those long-lasting, deep relationships that my mom found." Although Diana did not find that within a Panhellenic sorority, she was surprised by how much the process made her question herself and why people were not accepting her within their sisterhood. "I was worried like, what if they don't like me? Like, what if I did something wrong?" Diana continually mentioned her ability to read people and have conversations with others, but this process never made her feel comfortable and continually made her question herself and her abilities. This could have lead Diana to feeling less about herself and lowering her self-esteem in the process. She said it was

memorable, but she always left each house stressed because she was thinking, “What could I have done better for them to like me more?”

Diana had done the most research of all the participants before going into Panhellenic Formal Recruitment, but most of that research was from her mother’s perspective. She said her expectations were met based on her mother’s information.

I felt like there was going to be clapping and stuff when I opened the door. I felt like a jet engine was put in my face and it was 20-30 girls clapping and chanting in my face and that was real. My mom explained to me what the process was so I did not go in completely blindsided and I knew it was going to be a little bit like speed dating and it would be fast and loud.

Overall, Diana said her process was positive. Her leaders were good, and the chapter members communicated well with one another as well as with her as a PNM, which made her feel good while in the houses. However, as soon as she left each house, she began to question what more she could have done to return to that house. Ultimately, Diana ended up being dropped by all the houses except for one. The one house she did have left on her schedule she knew “was not the house for me.” Diana was interested in the continuous open bidding process and knew from her mother that she needed to withdraw from Formal Recruitment before signing a preference round card in order to be eligible for this process. Diana felt like she made the correct decision for herself to leave the recruitment process because she never felt comfortable, but she was glad she went through Panhellenic Formal Recruitment because now she can relate to so many other students.

I feel like overall [it] is going to be a more well-rounded experience of college. Like now I’m able to relate to all the girls that did indeed go through rush because I literally went

through the whole process except for bid day. So, in that regard, I'm able to relate to like some of the stresses of it all and maybe help some other girls that are coming in.

One of Diana's suitemates went through Panhellenic Formal Recruitment as well, so Diana was comforted during her withdrawal process by the fact that her support system understood her situation and her feelings. Diana was one of the more introverted students who participated in my study and she mentioned this fact made it harder for her to connect to others during recruitment, but that her roommates and suitemates provided support when she needed it.

Diana's Sense of Belonging

Diana began the recruitment process mainly because her mother was in a sorority and she was looking for the types of friendships her mother still has to this day. As she described, she was largely uncomfortable with new experiences because she was an introvert. It is because of this and the combination of battling COVID-19 during that semester, that she was not able to get involved in many campus organizations after withdrawing from Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. Diana however did find one group to join that "was exactly what I was looking for in a Panhellenic sorority just in the wrong place."

Diana chose to join a faith-based sorority on campus. During their recruitment process, she felt relaxed and that the process was authentic, as opposed to her experience in Panhellenic Formal Recruitment where she felt a lack of comfort and increased pressure. Diana said, "You get to choose to be in their sorority, not just the sorority choosing you." When asked how to define sense of belonging Diana said "the sense of togetherness and knowing where you come from. It is a little bit of playing into your own personal identity in the way of knowing where I am supposed to be." She went on to mention that this faith-based sorority was where she felt she was supposed to be. She knew she belonged based on acts of service her sisters performed for her when she was ill and the retreats she was able to participate in

Diana did not have the perfect first semester as she had pictured it when she registered for South Eastern College. She was not accepted into a Panhellenic organization, she was sick much of her first semester on campus, and due to her introverted nature, it was not easy at first for her to find a group to connect with. Yet, Diana found an organization where her hopes for friendship and deep relationships were met and exceeded. She knew the faculty really cared for students at South Eastern College, she felt connected to other students and that she's cared about at South Eastern College - all which led to her strong sense of belonging at South Eastern College.

Sally

Sally was the last student to participate in my study. Sally also chose to attend South Eastern College because of her interest to major in nursing and she felt very secure in her decision. Sally said, "I am where I am supposed to be. I have loved making new friends." Sally found support through her first-year seminar within the pre-nursing program. She has made several close friends through this seminar, but she also mentioned her Pi-Chi group from recruitment as a source of support and friendship that has continued throughout her first semester on campus. Sally was the first student who brought up her CA (Residence Hall Advisor) as a source of support during her transition last semester.

Similar to some of the other participants' responses, Sally chose to participate in Panhellenic Formal Recruitment because she saw other friends creating homes for themselves in Panhellenic communities. Although Sally signed up for recruitment to find what others had found inside the chapters, she ended up finding a community through her Pi Chi group and in other Pi Chi groups because they had to move in early. She mentioned that she really liked meeting all the girls even though her expectations from recruitment were not met.

Sally's conceptions of Panhellenic Formal Recruitment came mostly from social media. She said, "I have an older friend that goes to [Other State's Flagship University]. So, I was kind

of expecting like the [Other State's Flagship University] rush that was on Tik-Tok." Sally mentioned not understanding what she was getting into when she signed up for recruitment because she did not do much research about the houses, the required finances to participate, or Panhellenic in general. She was mainly concerned about finding friends. This lack of understanding around the formal recruitment process created a feeling of frustration about the lacking information and ultimately, a source of discouragement for Sally. She said, "Like the feeling of being discouraged when you are dropped by a house that you enjoy. You are kind of like well, what could I have said differently or what could I have done better for them to like me? It just creates a mentality like they do not like me." This mentality that others did not like Sally could create a feeling of anxiety leading to low self-esteem after the discouragement and non-acceptance from the Panhellenic organizations

Ultimately, this discouragement became too much, and Sally chose to withdraw from the process. This did not change her experience of the first few weeks on campus for Sally, but once the Panhellenic organizations began holding events, Sally noted that all changed. "I was like 'Oh, they have stuff to do. I do not have any obligations and am just stuck here.'" Even though she was missing Panhellenic organization sanctioned events, Sally now knows she made the right decision for herself and she has made some great friends through her residence hall and major. She mentioned to me that you do not have to be in a sorority to be someone at South Eastern College. She now feels that her feelings are validated about not needing to be in one of these organizations and that made her proud about the decision she made.

Sally's Sense of Belonging

I interviewed Sally most recently, so there was the longest gap between her Panhellenic Formal Recruitment experience and when we spoke for the interview. Meaning there was the longer time for her to find other organizations on campus to connect with prior to the interview,

compared with the other participants. Yet, Sally had not joined any other organizations since withdrawing from recruitment. This was mostly due to time constraints. She said, “schoolwork is a lot and I just do not want to overwhelm myself because I did get a job.” She felt like adding a student organization to her work-life and schoolwork would add stress to her first semester. She was still looking for a nice, easy-going group of people on campus to connect with as she was when she decided to participate in Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. She said South Eastern College does send out information on how to join campus organizations, but it became overwhelming with the number of options and the unknown amount of time and additional stress it would add to her schedule.

Sally felt the most connected to South Eastern College through her friends. Sally shared the moment when she felt like she started to belong at South Eastern College was through her connection to her friends. She mentioned, “I think definitely when I started making friends because I felt like I really felt like I found my people that I belong with.” These friendships continued throughout her first semester and made her feel as though she belonged at South Eastern College. Although Sally has still not found another organization to join or sought out other ways to become connected to South Eastern College, she felt as though she belonged, and it was because of the people she had become connected to. Even without the Panhellenic Community to connect with.

Themes Across Participant Narratives

Each participant had individually different narratives about their experiences when they did not become members in Panhellenic organizations through Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. These narratives described their reasons for wanting to join a Panhellenic organization, decisions for going through Formal Recruitment, their expectations of the process, and their largest challenges and successes during the process. These stories were unique in so many ways, but the

four participants' narratives also had common themes. These overlapping concepts create space to see the most noted themes and focus areas of understanding. The overlapping themes detailed below connect several key findings in this study, which ultimately will lead to suggestions for future practice in the next chapter. In this section, I describe the themes across participants' stories.

“I Still Do Not Really Understand How It Works”: Understanding Formal Panhellenic Recruitment

The first theme I saw in the participants' narratives was the need for more communication around the Panhellenic Recruitment Process or the understanding of the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment Process. Sally and Catherine both mentioned at different times in our conversations that even before they withdrew from Panhellenic Formal Recruitment, they did not understand how the process worked and that they wished they had communication before the process began. Catherine mentioned,

We had to go at the end of the day and like rank all the houses that we wanted in the morning and then waking up the next morning and seeing that like I got a house back that I did not want was kind of a challenge to me because I really did not understand like why I would get back a house that I did not really want.

At the same time, Sally described her confusion,

I guess I still do not really understand how rush works in a way. Like you talk to a girl for what five minutes, right? And that's how they decide whether or not like they want you and I think that some girls go in with the mentality that like, oh, they do not want me. Yeah, I kind of do not know.

This confusion and lack of understanding can lead to a sense of anxiety around the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process. Sally mentioned the stress this unknown caused her

during the process because it made her question herself and how she was interacting with the women inside the houses during rounds. Sally and Catherine both found this stress to increase by the amount of fear the unknown brought during the process. Ava also mentioned her confusion and lack of understanding various aspects of the Formal Recruitment Process, and she was also confused on policies and regulations. “Everyone told me that I would at least make it to the second or third round with them for being a legacy and then actually they dropped legacies this year, it was weird.” When I asked Ava if anyone spoke to them ahead of recruitment about the legacy policy or if they had received information on individual Panhellenic chapters’ policies she said, “not that I remembered.”

This lack of information around the policies and structure, in addition to the confusion about the Formal Panhellenic Recruitment procedures, created anxiety for the participants of this study. When multiple participants discussed their anxiety around the unknown of recruitment and how they still feel like they would have been more confident if they had understood the process, I knew this theme was important to this study.

“I Lucked Out”: Finding Support Systems

Another theme that became apparent through the participants’ narratives was the support systems that roommates and suitemates provided for PNMs. All four participants mentioned their residence hall structure during the discussions as being important to their sense of belonging. Oftentimes, they mentioned their roommates as a support when they withdrew from recruitment. “I lucked out and I got fantastic roommates.” Diana mentioned this sentiment when discussing her support system when she withdrew from recruitment. Catherine agreed when asked how her transition to South Eastern College had been, “Well in the beginning, me and my roommates were all pretty close. All three of them are now in sororities, but they are all in different ones so I have been able to go like meet some of her friends and go with her if her boyfriend cannot go

which is cool.” Ava had the same experience with a close friend from high school who came to South Eastern College, “I was really, really close to my high school friends. One of them came here and went through the same situation as me so we bonded over that.”

Ava, however, did not know her roommates before moving in. Because she did not know she was going to attend South Eastern College until close to the fall semester, she did not get to choose her roommates. She did mention that it was nice getting to know people on her floor and their roommates through her Pi Chi group since there were several girls who did not know their roommates. “Personally, I chose to go here too late to choose any roommates, mine were random and I did not know my suitemates well. We just met the day that we moved in. We bonded over that.” Sally had a similar experience with her Pi Chi group because the PNM’s moved in a week earlier than the rest of the first-year students on campus. She mentioned this gave her extra time to get to know a smaller group of students first and create relationships and support systems that she does not think she would have been able to make if she had not gone through recruitment.

These participants’ stories are an important reminder of the integral role that peer support plays in helping college students find a sense of belonging on campus. The participants of this study all mentioned that their housing units created strong support systems for them during their transition to their first-year which helped them find belonging during and after their Formal Panhellenic Recruitment process. Some of the participants alluded to their roommates providing increased support when they chose to withdraw from the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process when others could not.

“It Was Largely Based in My Mother’s Suggestion”: Reason to Participate in Panhellenic Formal Recruitment

The third prevalent theme after reviewing the individual narratives was the decision-making in choosing to sign up for Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. All four participants wanted

something they had seen someone else receive from the Panhellenic community. Two of the participants had family members who are heavily involved in Panhellenic organizations, and the other two had seen older friends join Panhellenic organizations at other institutions and yearned for a similar type of connection or involvement.

Ava's and Diana's mothers are both still involved in their Panhellenic organizations and suggested that they register for Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. Ava's mom, aunt, and cousin were all in the same organization and she wanted the same sisterhood they all had. "I saw my cousin had a lot of her bridesmaids from her sorority and absolutely loved it." Diana added that her mother still meets with her sorority sisters every month and she was looking for the "long-lasting deep relationships that my mom found." Both women were quick to mention that they did little-to-no research outside of what their mothers had told them about the Panhellenic organizations or formal recruitment. However, they were excited for the experience of being in an organization.

While Sally and Catherine did not mention any direct family ties to the Panhellenic community, they both mentioned registering after seeing others' experiences with the Panhellenic community. Catherine's roommate was signing up and she did not know anyone else attending South Eastern College so she decided that it would be a good way to meet other people. Sally, on the other hand, knew she desired to be in a sorority, but she only knew this from watching her older friends join Panhellenic organizations at other institutions. Sally added, "A lot of my older friends are in sororities and I guess they never really had the opportunity to make their own friends on their own without being in a group so I thought without being in one [a sorority], I wouldn't make any friends. So, I wanted to rush." Sally went on to agree that her reason to participate in Panhellenic Formal Recruitment was fully at the persuasion of her other friends.

Every organization is going to be different for everyone who joins. These participants went into the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process with little-to-no research on the process. They each had been given little knowledge on what the process entailed, other than that of their friends and families' personal experiences. They signed up with an expectation for themselves from someone else's experience. This theme was common amongst their answers and I wonder if it's a key to the commonality of their outcome of non-membership.

“I Do Belong”: Belonging at South Eastern College

The final prevalent theme I found from the study was the idea that although each participant struggled to connect with any of the Panhellenic organizations, each participant did still feel as though they belonged at South Eastern College. The participants felt this belonging at some level due to the friendships they had formed while being at South Eastern College, either with other people, roommates, or within other student organizations at South Eastern College. Each participant described sense of belonging in a way that directly connected to how they felt belonging at South Eastern College, but the fact that they did not find belonging in a Panhellenic organization did not ultimately affect their ability to find belonging at South Eastern College.

Sally and Catherine had both formed close connections to friends and roommates. This made a direct impact on their ability to feel a sense of belonging at South Eastern College. Sally mentioned she felt like she started to belong when she made friends, “because I felt like I really felt like I found my people that I belong with.” Catherine found a group of classmates and roommates that made her feel connected to South Eastern College in a way that allowed her to feel that she belonged at the institution.

Diana and Ava both felt like they had started to belong at South Eastern College once they joined other organizations which allowed them to find what they were originally looking for in a Panhellenic Organization. Diana was looking for “a close group of friends” and she went on

to mention that she found “exactly what I was looking for in a Panhellenic sorority just in the wrong place.” Ava actively sought to get involved on campus quickly after Panhellenic Formal Recruitment and she was able to find the Student Ambassador group that had the same passions as herself. Ava loved South Eastern College, and she wanted to find a group where she was able to share her love for the institution while also being able to share her story and influence other students in their transition to South Eastern College. She mentioned how this organization and the ability to share her story increased her sense of belonging to South Eastern College and ultimately her wish to stay at South Eastern College throughout the fall semester.

Summary

This chapter explained the narratives of the four participants for this study and their commonalities which led to the themes of the study. Depicting their stories and experiences individually allowed me as the interviewer to see each individual experience and focus on those participants' experience alone. Interpreting the participants' experiences, created a way to examine the data together in order to find common themes of the participants' experiences. After reviewing the participants' stories and sense of belonging, I was able to draw common themes such as “I Still Do Not Really Understand How It Works”: Understanding Formal Panhellenic Recruitment, “I Lucked Out”: Finding Support Systems, “It Was Largely Based in My Mother’s Suggestion”: Reason to Participate in Panhellenic Formal Recruitment, and “I Do Belong” Belonging at South Eastern College. These themes bring together the experiences of the four participants in a way that shows the connections between their stories. In the following chapter, I will use these findings to discuss implications of this research and recommendations for future research and practice.

Chapter 5

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I discuss my findings along with future implications of this study regarding sense of belonging of first-year women after not becoming members in Panhellenic organizations through Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. I first discuss my findings in the context of prior literature. Then, I explore implications of the study and recommendations for student affairs practice. Finally, I present implications for further research on this topic.

I became interested in this topic after realizing the lack of breadth in the literature that surrounds fraternity and sorority life, and more specifically the influence not becoming a member has on those who seek membership. As I began the study, I realized that a key reason for this lack of research was the lack of interest of students to participate in such a study. As discussed below, I believe this lack of participation to be partly due to what is evidenced in the research that the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment causes an intense anxiety and the women do not want to re-experience that through sharing the memories. Although I was able to find participants, create implications and themes, and share recommendations based on these themes and implications, I know that in the future more research could be done to strengthen this area of fraternity and sorority life research. The following section will connect previous literature and research to the present study.

Discussion

The research questions of this study were developed in order to guide this study and were founded in empirical research around transition and sense of belonging. Transition affects roles, routines, relationships, and even assumptions about self (Schlossberg, 2011). Sense of belonging on the other hand affects people similarly, but also can affect anxiety levels, cause stress, and has

been found to incite depression if belonging is not found (Strayhorn, 2019). With this study, I set out to determine if sense of belonging was being achieved by women who did not find membership in an organization, they planned on joining during a large transition in their lives: going to college. The purpose of this study was not to decide if Panhellenic Sororities were positive or negative experiences or the importance of Fraternity and Sorority Life. Panhellenic sororities have been found to have positive impact on the satisfaction and retention of students, as well as lead to positive effect on persistence (Nelson et al., 2006). Panhellenic sororities have also lead to negative self-esteem, alcohol concerns and negative pressures (Roof, 2013). These arguments for positive or negative contributions to campus life will be continued to be made as students are accepted or not in Panhellenic sororities. There are also Panhellenic members who have negative experiences after being accepted for membership and chose to drop from their affiliated chapters. These experiences could lead to future research in other areas surrounding Panhellenic organizations but was not the focus of this study. This study was created to research the sense of belonging of students who are not accepted into membership while knowing that there are students who are accepted for membership and have positive experiences with the Panhellenic organizations.

R1: What are the transition experiences of women who went through recruitment but did not become members?

Based on the findings in the present study, women who went through recruitment but did not become members in Panhellenic organizations experienced multiple transitions. They had difficulty transitioning to campus so early in the year, and earlier than most students. As transition research states, it takes time for one to cope with a transition in order to learn how to best handle that transition (Schlossberg, 2011). This would be especially apparent during Panhellenic Formal Recruitment as first-year students are learning to cope with the anticipated

transition of attending their first year on campus while also learning to cope with the unanticipated transition of not finding membership in a Panhellenic organization.

The transition to campus early for Panhellenic Formal Recruitment was mentioned by at least one of the participants because they moved in early, they did not feel like there were any staff or faculty around to support them during that transition. This feeling of lack of support is consistent with prior literature that showed support systems were important to all students during their collegiate years. This is especially true for first-year students to form connections in order to know that they have a sense of belonging on campus (Strayhorn, 2019). Some participants also mentioned of the transition back to school after recruitment because family members suggested the women leave campus after they withdrew from recruitment. This second transition to campus caused stressed because the participants wanted to belong and connect with other students. While Formal Panhellenic Recruitment came to an end and the women were at home they were concerned how they would connect after coming back to campus and other women had found belonging within their new member classes. Then once they arrived back on campus, the stress of transition and the desire to maintain social bonds were acting at the same time while the women felt they did not belong in the group they had sought membership in originally (Schlossberg, 2021; Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

The last-mentioned group of transitions the participants mentioned were transition experiences related to academia. One of the participants mentioned re-learning how to learn or having to adjust their study habits to succeed in the classroom during an already difficult semester beginning. Stress, anxiety, lack of well-being and poor mental health can affect academic achievement, student retention, and graduation rates (Chapman, et al., 2008). The participants mentioned the stress and anxiety that Panhellenic Formal Recruitment caused and

the difficult careers they had elected to major in as first-year students. There is no doubt these students needed to adjust their study habits and learn how to manage their time after such an unanticipated event such as being dropped from Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. These were a few of the transitions mentioned during the study by women who went through recruitment but did not become members.

R2: How does not joining a Panhellenic sorority influence women's sense of belonging on campus during the first year of college?

This study found that ultimately Panhellenic Formal Recruitment did not negatively affect the sense of belonging for the first-year women who were seeking membership in Panhellenic organizations but were not accepted. The women who participated in this study stated that by the time we did the later portion of their interviews, they felt like they belonged at South Eastern College. As stated by Baumeister and Leary (1995), "the need to belong can be directed toward any other human being, and the loss of relationship with one person can to some extent be replaced by any other" (p.500). In this way, the participants each found what they were looking for in a Panhellenic organization through another organization.

What I did find through the analysis of the study was that the formal recruitment process and the lack of membership did affect was how long it took for the participants to find belonging and where they found belonging. The participants in this study all mentioned they did find belonging, but it was a longer process for them due to the fact that they were also trying to combat the anxiety and personal questioning these women were having to deal with after Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. Panhellenic Formal Recruitment has been known to cause low self-esteem which can impact college success and involvement (Chapman et al., 2008). Although, according to Baumeister and Leary being involved and having a sense of belonging on

campus creates a buffer from stress and improves mental health which these women could have been seeking out after withdrawing from Panhellenic Formal Recruitment (1995).

Although the women were very resilient in their first semester and did end up finding belonging, they entered into South Eastern College and were very upset initially with the outcome of their Panhellenic Formal Recruitment experiences, some were seriously hurt by the Formal Recruitment process causing affects such as low self-esteem, anxiety and stress. This study was consistent with Gopalan's (2019) findings that "students' sense of belonging has been identified as a potential lever to promote success, engagement, and well-being in college" (p.1) When their expectations were not met, they found their belonging in their roommates, classmates, the campus environment, and other organizations in order to persist through their first semester on campus and find success and wellbeing in other areas on campus.

R3: How do these women find belonging on campus after not receiving or accepting a bid?

This question seemed to be the hardest for the participants to answer and for me as the researcher to formulate an answer to as well. The women in the study had varying answers to how they got involved their first year, if they got involved, and why. Some did not get involved in campus activities due to time, and some found organizations quickly after not joining a Panhellenic organization yearning for that same connection they were looking for during Formal Recruitment. They all created deep relationships with classmates and roommates and feel as though they belong at South Eastern College. Each participant found a way to connect and find belonging on campus although not all chose student organizations or activities to replace the original organization they were hoping to find belonging in.

I believe some of this has to do with research and literature cited in the section above. The women were yearning to create relationships during Panhellenic Formal Recruitment and the ones that joined other organizations were finding a relationship to replace the ones they had previously hoped Panhellenic sisters would have in their lives (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The women who chose not to get involved due to time constraints, could be still be dealing with stress, anxiety and wellbeing concerns left from the pain of Panhellenic Formal Recruitment as stated by Chapman et al. so they do not want to increase their workload at this time (2008). Some women found belonging in deep friendships through their classmates and roommates in order to increase their studies and success in the classroom. As stated by Gopalan and Brady (2019), “in college, feeling a sense of belonging may lead students to engage more deeply with their studies, leading to persistence and success” (p. 1).

Other areas of this question that were also of importance to discuss were where and how each participant searched for their sense of belonging. The drive each woman had for connection and sense of belonging was differing, which ultimately led to how they were able to find their belonging. Two of the women in the study immediately made it their goal to join another organization where she could share her experiences as a first-year student with other students while another woman had no interest in finding an organization this year to join. The dedication to relationships with others and finding connections enabled them to ensure sense of belonging at the institution. While all four of the participants felt as though they belonged at South Eastern College, the other two participants noted that they were not intentionally seeking out other opportunities for belonging or connection. The reason for this was not discussed by the participants, but reasons could be varied and due to well-being, stress, anxiety, transition, or concern on belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Chapman et al., 2008; Schlossberg, 2011;

Strayhorn, 2019). They also could have not discussed this because they are doing okay in their current situations and did not feel the need to discuss that.

These research questions were all answered through the study and in each participant's answers to varying degrees. The trends and interpretations of the data presented themes that led to conclusions as to what transition experience these women went through, how their sense of belonging was affected, and how they were able to find a sense of belonging on campus after not being accepted for membership.

Implications for Practice and Research

In this section, I discuss implications from this research study related to the first-year students' non-membership in Panhellenic sororities after participating in Formal Panhellenic Recruitment. The data from this study might suggest that students who participate in Formal Recruitment do not have adequate information or in the case information was available to them, the participants were unaware of the information they needed before attending the first round of Formal Panhellenic Recruitment. This was demonstrated through multiple of the participants' reactions after round 1 of Formal Panhellenic Recruitment. Students who participate in Formal Panhellenic Recruitment also implied that the timing of the process made it difficult for their transition either because they did not know that campus staff were available to support during non-academic times or because the early move-in was stressful for them.

The study led to many implications surrounding the participants' sense of belonging on campus, but directly related to the Formal Panhellenic Recruitment process. Based on the study findings, it appears that the overwhelming Formal Panhellenic Recruitment schedule and pressure did not assist these participants in finding belonging. In addition, not becoming a part of a Panhellenic group did not prevent them from developing a sense of belonging. The findings from the study suggest that first year women who did participate in Formal Panhellenic

Recruitment do need to have a solid support system in place either through campus staff or through personal connections to friends and family. This is a prerequisite in order to assist in their positive experience with the process and also in their transition to campus after. This was evident by the participants' level of support systems and their assistance to their positive or negative transitions to South Eastern College after not being accepted for membership into a Panhellenic Sorority.

This study could imply reason for or against a Fully Structured Formal Recruitment and therefore could make the argument for deferred recruitment style. This was not the intended implication from the study. As stated by the National Panhellenic Conference deferred formal recruitment is a second academic term recruitment (2022). The National Panhellenic Conference still believes that there is no better way for the enrichment of women in the chapters than to join early in their academic career. (National Panhellenic Conference, 2022). This study is not to negate the research and continued support from the National Panhellenic Conference. Their could be a future study implied from this research about the importance of primary recruitment in the fall or deferred recruitment, but the goal of this study was not to create need for more deferred recruitment styles.

The implications of this study were developed from the research study and supported by the literature review. The implications all lead to future recommendations for practice or future study which will be discussed in the next sections.

Recommendations for Practice

This study yielded several implications based on the participants' experiences with Formal Panhellenic Recruitment, their transition to South Eastern College, and their search for a sense of belonging on campus. The implications and research lead to several recommendations

for future practice as it connects with Formal Panhellenic Recruitment and how this process can assist with first year women's sense of belonging or transition to campus.

As the participants mentioned, moving in early to participate in Formal Panhellenic Recruitment sometimes added stress to their experience because they felt as though campus was not "open" yet. When I asked if they had support from campus professionals throughout the Formal Panhellenic Recruitment process, their reaction connected back to the fact that professionals were not on campus yet (or the students were unaware that they were) due to classes not being in session. I recommend that more campus professionals be involved in the Formal Panhellenic Recruitment process such as CAPS staff, Student Engagement staff, Dean of Students' staff, or other campus-based professionals depending on the institutional size and structure. These staff members could provide the PNMs with support when they are not actively involved in a Panhellenic Formal Recruitment rounds and show the students that they are supported by staff on campus by being present and sharing other experiences available to students on campus. They can also show support by educating the first-year women on other organizations they can easily get involved in if they do not find a home in the Panhellenic community. The process consists of multiple days, many hours, logistics, and planning (National Panhellenic Conference, 2012). Volunteers to aid in the process in the form of campus professionals would bring attention to these folks being present on campus already and allow for Panhellenic staff to focus on the areas of greatest need.

The support by campus-based professionals can be done in a number of ways and I recommend this be based on institutional size, structure and staffing availability. For a Panhellenic Formal Recruitment that uses the fully structured recruitment process and lasts multiple days, I recommend having campus professionals volunteer in campus unions or other waiting areas between rounds with the PNMs so that they can talk with PNMs about campus

organizations, comfort women about the stress of the process, talk about the transition to college, and give the Greek Life Staff the ability to work in other areas of the process. Due to current staffing concerns and the pressure surrounding the beginning of a new academic year, each campus would have to consider how best to utilize staff in this way and if the campus' staffing structure allows for this. These waiting rooms can often be stressful for PNMs as they could be there for hours between parties and having campus staff there to talk about the institution or the first weeks on campus could give the women a sense of support from the campus rather than just additional time to think about Panhellenic Formal Recruitment.

During each round that recruitment counselors meet with PNMs to release chapters and when PNMs receive new lists, CAPS or another counseling organization should be present in these campus waiting areas for women to speak about managing stressful situations, transition after recruitment, and understanding their sense of belonging at the institution. As stated by multiple participants, they questioned themselves when they found out they were dropped or wondered what they could have done better. Some participants also felt discouraged or depressed by the information. These moments would be helpful to have counselors present to talk through these feelings in order to know there is support on campus.

Another recommendation based on these findings, is for the Panhellenic Executive Board to create a platform for the PNMs to better understand the Formal Panhellenic Recruitment process before orientation or their first meeting with their recruitment counselor. This could be in the form of an online portal where each chapter would submit information about their national philanthropy, financial information, event schedules, and their Formal Recruitment processes. The Panhellenic Executive Board would then create blogs and features for the different chapters as well as for Panhellenic Recruitment to ensure that the PNMs have adequate information. While similar information is usually available on the Office of Fraternity and Sorority life's

website, creating a way that ensures accountability from the PNM to review it is important. The issue that arose from the interviews was that the PNMs did little research on the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process and those who did, did not have the awareness of the Office of Fraternity and Sorority life's website would be a good resource during this process. Creating a way for PNMs to have access to the same information as one another and a portal system where the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life can monitor who has done the research allows the Panhellenic Executive Board to know the PNMs are well educated on the process and Panhellenic community before they enter their first round of Panhellenic Formal Recruitment.

From all the conversations with these participants, there was a lack of understanding about the process even if there was a family connection to Fraternity and Sorority Life or information out there for the PNMs to read themselves. This lack of understanding led to an overwhelming sense of stress and exclusion instead of creating a space where the PNMs could learn about the Panhellenic organizations. This lack of knowledge eventually impacted the PNMs feeling of acceptance for membership into a Panhellenic organization. Each participant expected membership as the anticipated event from Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. As stated by Schlosberg (2011), "anticipated transitions are major life events we usually expect" (p. 159). As this was an anticipated event, it interrupted students' transition to South Eastern College when their expectation was not met; therefore, creating a way to inform PNMs better about the process ahead of time would perhaps help manage their expectations. As stated by Chapman et al. (2008) a theme of recruitment is often long days and stress for PNMs because of the fear of not being accepted by the Panhellenic member organizations. This fear turned into a reality for all these participants as I found out in the interviews and therefore supports the need for more information to be shared with the PNM's in order for them to feel more secure going into Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. The lack of information did not lead to their withdrawal from

the process, but it did lead to them feeling overwhelmed quickly and a sense of exclusion. The presence of more information would not lead to more PNMs matching for membership, but it would create a sense of understanding around the process that alleviates stress associated with the Formal Recruitment process. The use of an online portal before the Panhellenic Recruitment process begins would increase the knowledge for the participants because the PNMs would learn about the process and the Panhellenic organizations before attending PNM orientation. This portal could not only house chapter information and Panhellenic Recruitment Policies but could also include information on how PNMs create lists after round, relationships with the Fraternity and Sorority Life Office, information on campus organizations or ways to find connection if PNMs are not chosen for membership. This would give the PNMs a more well-rounded view of the Formal Recruitment process as well as gives the PNMs a more realistic view of Formal Recruitment. When I asked each participant, none of them had done any research on the Panhellenic Recruitment process. This portal would allow the PNMs to learn about the process, the Panhellenic organizations, and the institution's policies before attending recruitment and be held accountable to do so in order to take part in the Formal Recruitment Process. This would increase the knowledge and decrease the surprises that could come with Panhellenic Formal Recruitment.

Based on the experiences the participants had during Formal Panhellenic Recruitment, another recommendation for future practice is to ensure the recruitment counselors have detailed training on sense of belonging, transition, and Formal Panhellenic Recruitment so that as leaders they can ensure the best experience for each PNM. This training could explore campus involvement levels, first year experience, and the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process in detail so that when leading PNMs through a stressful time, they will have the ability to guide them with empathy and detailed information at every step. The participants had varying

connections and relationships with their recruitment counselors which changed their experience with Formal Panhellenic Recruitment dramatically. Some participants said they were well prepared for each round and some said they had no idea what would happen next. Ensuring the recruitment counselors have gone through extensive training and are giving their PNMs a similar experience, would ensure a more positive experience for all first-year women regardless of membership status after the process. This is not to negate the training recruitment counselors have already been attending, but I believe there should be an added component about the first-year experience in order to ensure these women have an understanding of their PNMs.

Panhellenic Recruitment is based on the number of undergraduate students who are Panhellenic members and how often the number of Panhellenic organizations have increased; however, the ability to ensure that every PNM has a positive experience can always change even though the structure is set in place. The purpose of Formal Panhellenic Recruitment is “all membership recruitment programs are planned to provide opportunities for the greatest possible number of women to become sorority members while protecting the rights and privileges of both the individuals and the chapters.” (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020, p. 96) Knowing this is the purpose of Panhellenic Recruitment, validates the previously stated recommendations. Using the experiences of the first-year women who are not currently being accepted into membership and sharing their experiences to make recommendations for change creates opportunity for the greatest number of women to be involved in the Panhellenic community. Educating Pi Chis, creating better information for the PNMs, and including more campus-based professionals in the Formal Recruitment Process creates a sense of community surrounding the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment Process that furthers the National Panhellenic Conference’s mission to ensure as many women match with Panhellenic organizations as possible.

Recommendations for Further Research

In this section, I discuss several recommendations for future research informed by the findings from the present study. As I interviewed each participant, the largest set back was the timing of the interviews. Future researchers should consider the timing of interviewing students on this topic. A study designed to interview participants as soon as the women withdraw from Formal Panhellenic Recruitment would likely allow for clearer recounts of students' experiences on the details of the process. In this study, the goal was to have the second interview 6 weeks after the first and to have the first within a week of leaving the Formal Recruitment Process. This could not be achieved because the first interviews were typically 6 weeks after leaving Formal Recruitment so another 6 weeks would be close to finals if not after the participants' first semester on campus. Having the first interview sooner would allow for more accurate interpretation of the Formal Recruitment Process and second round of interviews to be further apart from the first round.

Further, a longitudinal study based on the number of PNMs who withdraw from Formal Panhellenic Recruitment and the transfer rate at an institution may also yield insight into these unique experiences. These participants seemed to find a home in another organization or through classmates and roommates, but at a larger institution I wonder if this would have been harder to find leading to an increased transfer rate. The rate of transfer could be correlated to the participants' sense of belonging and therefore this type of study would be beneficial to the community and those being interviewed.

In this study, I found that the participants were overwhelmed by the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process but were still able to find a sense of belonging through other organizations or friends on campus. Future work in this area should enlarge the study to multiple institutions in order to see if the information gained by this study can be projected across institution types,

regional locations, and panhellenic sizes. This study could also be edited to include other Fraternity and Sorority counsels as well to see their impact on sense of belonging after not being accepted for membership. Being able to compare across institutional types would give future researchers, and even those in the Panhellenic community, a way to qualitatively and quantitatively see the direct connection of Panhellenic Formal Recruitment and sense of belonging. This connection could lead to a larger change in the process or more education for those in supporting roles on campus.

Lastly, I will mention that anyone who furthers this research or attempts research with the same population of students should understand the anxiety or hurt the process has caused these students before interviews occur. I felt like the first part of interview one was very important to these students in order to create a relationship with them that was trusting and empathic in order for the women to feel comfortable with discussing such a sensitive topic. I was also careful to mention throughout the interview process that they are free to stop the interview at any point if the questions became too difficult to answer. Establishing rapport with these participants is very important for anyone doing future research in this area.

This study was beneficial in finding information related to the sense of belonging and transition of first year women who are not accepted into membership in Panhellenic organizations through Formal Panhellenic Recruitment. However, this was only the tip of the iceberg and there is still so much to learn. This community is vast and is only continuing to grow (Correia, 2013). Learning how to support first year students who yearn for this membership but are not accepted by these organizations is one way that campus professionals can assist in their transition and sense of belonging.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I reflected on how my findings answered my research questions, explored the implications of my study, and identified recommendations for practice and future research based on this study. In this study, the participants bravely explored their experiences and narratives with me in order to create a research study that answered how to find sense of belonging after not finding membership in a panhellenic organization, how their transition was affected by Formal Panhellenic Recruitment, and even shared with me where they did find sense of belonging at South Eastern College after not being accepted for membership into a Panhellenic organization. These questions lead to implications for practice and research that will hopefully alter the experiences for future first year women who are not accepted for membership in the future by educating campus professionals and those who work directly with the PNM's.

This dissertation declared some clear implications and future changes in practice that could be made by campus-based professionals surrounding Panhellenic Formal Recruitment in order to ensure a better experience for all PNM's. Students participating in Panhellenic Formal Recruitment need more information before participating in Formal Recruitment to feel successful in each round which can be done by creating more education for them before the Formal Recruitment process begins. Through collaborative agreements, staff could be a part of creating more sense of belonging during the formal recruitment process as the participants felt as though campus was not open before school began and therefore felt as though staff and faculty were not available for consultation. More active volunteers would depict to the PNM's the amount of support available to them on campus. The study brought to light several future research areas due to the lack of research and participation for the study as well. The Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process is structured in nature, but with the recommendations and implications for practice based on this study more women could find homes through the Panhellenic Formal

Recruitment Process even if they weren't able to find a home in a Panhellenic Organization. The recommendations could lead first-year students to understand the process, campus organizations and the ability to find another home easier than before.

The history of the Panhellenic Conference, Panhellenic Formal Recruitment and the lack of literature lead to a study detailed here about the sense of belonging for first-year women after not being accepted for membership into a Panhellenic organization. This study found that although these women did not find membership in a Panhellenic organization, they did find belonging at South Eastern College. This might not be the case for all students who seek membership in these organizations and therefore the need for future study in this area is apparent. Although these four women had the support from friendships, classmates, RAs and family members, other first-year women who seek membership might not have this support to create belonging at another institution or even at South Eastern College. I am proud of the participants in this study who felt comfortable sharing their experiences with me in order to hopefully lead other first-year women to share their experiences in the future. Finding sense of belonging, connection and support will always be an important part of the transition experience and supporting these students through that should continue to be of importance for campus-based professionals working with these students in the future. In the end, these first-year women climbed the mountain and came back down... and they are okay.

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Appendix A

Semi- Structured Interview Protocol and Interview Questions

- The interview participant will be sent an email reminder 24 hours prior to the scheduled interview date with the date, time and zoom information.
- I will engage in welcoming discussion with the participants before the interview to decrease anxiety and build rapport.
- When the participant arrives, the researcher will greet them and ensure they have an opportunity to read and sign a virtual copy of the IRB consent form. I will ask if the participant had any questions about the IRB, interview process or protocol. Due to zoom limitations I plan to send the signed IRB through the chat feature.
- I will explain to the participant again that participation in the interview is voluntary and if at any time they became uncomfortable they can stop the interview.
- I will let the participant know that they will have the opportunity to select a pseudonym that will be used when writing up the findings. If they were not interested in selecting their own pseudonym then I identified one for them. The IRB consent form and the web survey are the only data with their actual name attached, all other data including the social diagram and transcription of the audio will be saved under their pseudonym.

Sample Interview Questions: In Priority Order

I am going to ask the participants a few questions over two interviews in order to hear more about their sense of belonging on campus during their first year after not joining a Panhellenic Sorority through Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. The questions are meant to be open response and broad so that participants can answer openly and

freely. There is no correct answer and I want them to understand that I am here to learn about their experiences during their first year.

Interview one:

1. What made you choose to attend South Eastern College?
 - a. In what ways, if at all, have you enjoyed that decision?
 - b. What part of this choice could have been better so far?
2. Describe your experience on South Eastern College campus so far.
 - a. Can you tell me about the support systems you have here?
 - b. How did you find these support systems?
3. Can you tell me about your transition to college thus far? What has that been like?
4. Can you describe your decision making process to participate in Panhellenic Formal Recruitment? What led you to participate in Recruitment?
5. Describe your Panhellenic Formal Recruitment experience?
 - a. How did this experience make you feel? Can you give me an example of when you felt that way? (e.g., what was happening?)
6. Can you tell me what expectations you had of Panhellenic Formal Recruitment?
 - a. In what ways, if at all, were those expectation met?
7. What type of information or research did you do on the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process before signing up?
 - a. How adequate/ reflective was this information of the actual Formal Recruitment process?

8. Can you tell me about some challenges you faced during Panhellenic Formal Recruitment? Can you give me an example? Describe the successes you found. Can you give an example of a success?
 - a. How did you celebrate these success? Be specific. Overcome these challenges?
9. What led you to leave the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process?
 - a. How did this outcome change your first weeks on campus? Can you think of a specific instance to share with me?
 - b. How were you feeling about the decision to leave the Formal Recruitment Process? Be specific.
 - i. What support from campus staff did you receive during the first weeks of the academic year after the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment process?
10. How do you feel about the how the recruitment process ended for you?
 - a. What support from campus staff did you receive during the first weeks of the academic year after the formal recruitment process?
 - b. In what ways, if at all, did not joining a sorority during the recruitment process impact how you felt about being a student at South Eastern College? Can you give an example?
11. How, if at all, do you think this (not joining a sorority) influenced your transition to college? Can you provide an example or think of a specific time?

Interview two:

During this interview we will be talking about what college has been like for the participant so far. I plan to follow up on some of the questions asked during interview one while also diving into their sense of belonging on campus since our first interview.

1. Thinking back over the semester thus far, what has college been like for you?
2. In our first interview you spoke about XYZ, can you tell me more about that? [this question will allow me to follow up with what participants shared with me during our first interview]
3. I'd like to switch gears a bit and ask you some specific questions about sense of belonging. When you hear the term belonging or sense of belonging, how might you define Sense of Belonging?
4. Since the Panhellenic Formal Recruitment Process, have you found other campus organizations that you have joined?
 - a. What drew you to these organizations?
 - b. In what ways have you found connections and belonging in these organizations?
 - c. If you haven't found other campus organizations, what has kept you from joining other organizations?
5. What were you originally looking for from a Panhellenic organization?
 - a. To what extent have you been able to find that in other organizations or activities on campus? Which ones? If not, how does that make you feel? What support could campus offer you in order to assist you in finding that?

6. Describe a time when you felt most connected to South Eastern College and why that made you feel connected.
7. At this point in time, do you feel like you belong at South Eastern College? Can you give me an example of when you've felt that you do belong or don't belong?

Probing Questions

- Can you give me an example of a time that demonstrates that
- Describe how you felt when
- Tell me how that made you feel
- How did that impact your transition to South Eastern College?
- How that that impact your connection or sense of belonging to/at South Eastern College?

Interview Wrap Up

- At the end of each interview, I plan on turning off the audio recording and checking in with each participant in order to see how they are feeling about the interview and the process.
- I plan to remind each participant they can let me know at any time if they do not wish for their data to be included in the study. If they do want to continue, I will follow up with them with notes and initial findings and to be included in the member checks.

Appendix B

Consent Form UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CONSENT FORM

Students' Experiences in College following Panhellenic Recruitment

Researcher's Statement

I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you if you are selected to participate in an in person interview with the researcher.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Georgianna Martin, Associate Professor

Mary Frances Early College of Education, Department of Counseling and
Human Services, University of Georgia

glmartin@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study

I am conducting qualitative research study from a single university to explore the sense of belonging of first year women after participating in Panhellenic Formal Recruitment and not joining a sorority. Conducting this research will illuminate the experiences of first year women during a transitional time in their life. I also seek to explore influence, the benefits, and the challenges of developing friends, connections, and relationships within the institution and with campus resources and staff after such events have taken place.

You are being asked to participate in the study because you are a first-year women who participated in Panhellenic Formal Recruitment as a PNM and did not join a Panhellenic organization on Bid Day from this process. Any findings of this study will be shared with the Office of Fraternity & Sorority Life at Georgia College & State University.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked ...

- To provide data to the researcher in the form of two zoom interviews.
- During the interview with the researcher, you will be asked a several open-ended questions which allow you to share your experiences about your sense of belonging during your first year after not joining a Panhellenic Sorority. Participants will be advised not to share information unless they are comfortable talking about it with the researcher.

- The total on zoom interviews with the researcher should last no more than 45-60 minutes per interview for a total of no more than 2 hours.
- The researcher, will offer you an opportunity to provide feedback on the analysis and notes.
- The time commitment expected of participants will range based on the individual's degree of engagement. The maximum duration to participate in this research study is expected to be no more than 2 hours.
- All of the interview materials will have a pseudonym as an identity in order to protect the participant's confidentiality.

Risks and Discomforts

- It is possible that participants may feel mild emotional discomfort (e.g., feelings of stress/discomfort, sadness guilt or anxiety, loss of self-esteem, etc.) when sharing experiences about their Panhellenic Formal Recruitment on campus since this event. The researcher will minimize emotional discomfort by ensuring each participant understands they have full authority to decide what to share and what not to share. In addition, the researcher will provide information to each participant about Student Counseling Services at the end of the interview portion of the study.
- The researcher takes responsibility to prevent any social risks for participants by ensuring privacy for participants. The researcher's protocol will minimize the risk of loss of privacy for participants.

Benefits

- Participating in the study is not expected to provide direct benefits to the participant, although participants may find some personal benefit from talking about their experiences making friends and being engaged outside of the classroom.
- The researcher will analyze the data provided by participants and publish the findings in an effort to inform anyone who supports first year students or who works with Panhellenic Organizations. These experiences will enhance the awareness and understanding college administrators and faculty have about first year women's experiences, especially those who lack the experience of a Panhellenic Organization and offer important insight which can be useful for anyone supporting these women during their transition to campus.

Incentives for participation

Participants selected to conduct the interviews with the researcher are eligible for two \$10 gift cards if they participate in both interview rounds. After the first interview participants will receive one \$10 gift card and after the participants participate in the second interview they will be eligible to receive the second \$10 gift card. The researcher will record receipt of the incentive using the participant's pseudonym on the UGA payment log. The payment log will be retained for audit and not shared unless required by law.

Audio Recording

Audio recording devices will be used during the interview to allow the researcher to transcribe the interview for later analysis. The audio recording will not include any personally identifiable information. Participants will be notified that the recording is being started before doing so.

Privacy/Confidentiality

This research involves the transmission of a limited amount of data over the Internet. Every reasonable effort will be taken to ensure the effective use of available technology; however, confidentiality during online communication cannot be guaranteed. Only data collected in the initial survey will include participant's name or other personally identifiable information. Research participants selected to complete an in-person interview will be asked to provide-or if preferred assigned-a pseudonym upon agreeing to participate in an interview. The researcher will use the pseudonym throughout the interview including on printed materials used in the interview, throughout data analysis, and in the findings in an effort to maintain confidentiality of the participants.

The interview audio file, and transcription data will be saved as an electronic file folder which is password protected. Each audio file and transcription will be labeled with the pseudonym to maintain participant's confidentiality. The interview files will be kept in a separate password protected folder in an electronic document which includes a list of the participant names and their pseudonym. All electronic files will be retained for one year after the analysis is written and reported. The project's research records, except the actual names of participants and the assigned pseudonym, may be reviewed by the Office for Human Research Protections and by departments at the University of Georgia responsible for regulatory and research oversight only when required by law.

Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone without your written consent unless required by law. The information will not be used or distributed for future research, even after identifiers are removed.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information. Your decision about participation will not impact your grade or your relationship with the Office of Fraternity & Sorority Life.

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is Callie Cole a graduate student at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Dr. Georgianna Martin at glmartin@uga.edu or at 706-542-1812. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

_____ Name of Researcher _____ Signature _____ Date

_____ Name of Participant _____ Signature _____ Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Appendix C

Participant Recruitment Emails

Dear student,

Thank you for participating in Georgia College Panhellenic Formal Recruitment. As the Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life, I want to offer you an opportunity to discuss your recent recruitment experience. This opportunity is voluntary, but should you choose to participate, you could receive up to \$20 in amazon gift cards for your time. If you are interested in sharing your experience please see the email below for more information...

Dear student,

My name is Callie Cole and I am a graduate student enrolled in a doctoral program in Student Affairs Leadership at the University of Georgia. As a graduate student, I am conducting a research study to explore sense of belonging for first year women after not receiving a bid into a Panhellenic Sorority through Panhellenic Formal Recruitment at South Eastern College. This study will explore the experiences of first year women who went through Panhellenic Formal Recruitment, but did not join a Panhellenic organization. As a student, I share this experience with you and know it can be difficult. I am interested in the stories and experiences of women in this situation and would love for you to share your experiences with me during my study. I am hoping this research will help college educators who work with first-year students understand this experience in hopes of supporting and improving the first-year experience for future students.

First-Year women who did not join a Panhellenic Sorority through Panhellenic Formal Recruitment at South Eastern College are sought to participate in this study. In order to be eligible, you should meet the following criteria:

1. You are 18 or above.
2. You began the Formal Recruitment process for a Panhellenic Sorority in Fall 2021 at South Eastern College.
3. You did not enroll at South Eastern College before Fall 2021.
4. You are pursuing a bachelor's degree at South Eastern College.

Participation is voluntary. Strict confidentiality of participants will be maintained throughout the study.

Participants will be asked to complete 2 one to one interviews with the researcher via the Zoom platform. Each interview will last between 45-60 minutes. Participants selected to participate in an in person interview with the researcher will receive a \$20 Amazon voucher for their participation after the second interview session.

If you are a first year woman and want to participate in the study, please contact me at cacole@uga.edu for further communication about the study. If you have any questions about this

study, please call me, Callie Cole, at 501-831-3554 or email me at cacole@uga.edu. Thank you in advance.

Best,
Callie Cole
University of Georgia
Student Affairs Leadership Doctoral Student

Participant thank you email to be sent following the 2nd interview

Dear %Name%,

Once again, thank you for taking the time to participate in the research study I am conducting to complete my doctoral dissertation. Your time is valuable as are the experiences and stories you shared with me. In the coming months I will analyze data in order to write up an analysis which will illuminate the experiences you and other participants have had in their first year on campus. You will receive an email to invite you to review the interpreted themes of the data via email. Please feel free to provide feedback to me to ensure what you intended to describe in your interview is portrayed in the data.

The analysis and narratives will support administrators, faculty and others who work with Panhellenic Organizations and first year women on campus. I intend to make recommendations to those who serve first year women on campus as well as the folks who serve Panhellenic Organizations and students involved in these organizations. As promised, there is a \$20 Amazon voucher can be redeemed by following this link. Should you have any problems with the link or have any questions, please call me, Callie Cole, at 501-831-3554 or email me at Cacole@uga.edu.

Best,
Callie Cole
University of Georgia
Student Affairs Leadership Doctoral Student