

GREAT EXPECTATIONS AND POST-FEMINIST ACCOUNTABILITY:  
NEGOTIATING FEMININITY IN A MODERN DAY SORORITY

by

KATHLEEN R. GILLAN

NATALIE ADAMS, COMMITTEE CHAIR

BECKY ATKINSON

REBECCA BALLARD

NIRMALA EREVELLES

AARON KUNTZ

A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
Department of Educational Leadership,  
Policy and Technology Studies  
in the Graduate School of  
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2016

Copyright Kathleen R. Gillan 2016  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of study was to understand how femininity is produced within historically white sororities. In order to achieve this understanding, participants' experiences were analyzed through a qualitative lens informed by post-feminism and girls' studies. Drawing theoretically from Anita Harris' discourse of girl power (or the can-do girl) and Angela McRobbie's (2009) post-feminist concepts of double entanglement, post-feminist masquerade, and 'the perfect'; the construction of femininity, was explored within the context of sorority membership. Specific attention was given to the effort required, of sorority members with formal leadership experience, to interpret, negotiate, reproduce, and resist femininity. The goal of this study was to provide a more complex understanding of sororities and their members. Since this is an initial study, limitations were discussed as well as recommendations for future study.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Dr. Robert E. Gillan, and my mother, the late Susan Magee Gillan. From an early age, you instilled in me the importance of education and encouraged my love of learning. You always believed in me, even when I didn't believe in myself, and for that I am ever grateful. Thank you for always pushing me to be my best and encouraging me to follow my dreams.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation was completed with a lot of encouragement and assistance from family, friends, colleagues, and students. While this journey has been long and at times particularly challenging, I am eternally grateful for the experience and am indebted to all those who helped me throughout this process.

To my dissertation committee, Dr. Becky Atkinson, Dr. Rebecca Ballard, Dr. Nirmala Erevelles, and Dr. Aaron Kuntz, I thank you for your time, dedication, and feedback. To my primary advisor and chair of my committee, Dr. Natalie Adams, thank you for staying on top of me and pushing me to meet my deadlines. Your patience, advice, and support will not be forgotten.

To my family, thank you for your unwavering encouragement and understanding over the past six years. To my parents, Bob and Pat Gillan, thank you for your endless love and support of me and my educational pursuits. I cannot begin to thank you for the many sacrifices and am forever indebted. Many thanks also to my sisters, Courtney and Lindsey, my brother-in-law, Mark, and my nephew and nieces, Aidan, Lainey, and Addie. I know my academic pursuits have made it difficult for us to see one another as often as we would like. Know that I love you and am grateful for every opportunity we are able to spend together.

To my staff, past and present, thank you for always cheering me on and uplifting me through this process: Kathleen Duffy, Nicole Jackson, Jill Phillippo, Amanda Parker and Ryan Powell. I owe many thanks to Dr. Tim Hebson and Dr. Steven Hood. I am ever grateful to you both for supporting me in my Ph.D. pursuits and encouraging me to finish my dissertation

To Dr. Tim Salazar, I am ever grateful to you for challenging and supporting me in ways I cannot begin to list. I would not have completed my dissertation without you. Thank you for sharing your knowledge and expertise as a qualitative researcher.

A special thanks goes to Reatha Cox, a trusted confidante and mentor by advice and example. If not for you, I would not have discovered my passion for serving students. Thank you for not only believing in me, but also challenging me to be my best.

I would also like to thank Dr. Kathleen Cramer. Your guidance and encouragement over the years has been invaluable and appreciated beyond measure. Thank you for sharing your wisdom and for being an inspiration to me.

My graduate school experience would have been very different, if not for the support and friendship of three women traveling a similar path. Rosalind Moore, we started this journey together and after what has seems like a lifetime, we get to end it together. Through the many ups and downs, I could always count on Mary Lee Caldwell and Lane McLelland. Your moral support and encouragement has propelled me through many highs and lows. To Ros, Mary Lee, and Lane, thank you for your friendship during such a defining period in my life.

Finally, to the participants who took part in my study, I would like to express my sincere gratitude. Thank you for your honesty, willingness to share your personal experiences, and for being so very generous with your time. This dissertation would not have been possible without you.

## CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
DEDICATION .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iv
LIST OF TABLES .....	xii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xiii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Purpose of the Research.....	4
Research Questions.....	5
Significance of the Study .....	5
Theoretical Framework.....	7
Post-Feminism .....	7
Girls’ Studies .....	8
Research Design.....	8
Data Collection Methods .....	9
Explanation of Terms Used to Describe Participants .....	10
Organization of Research.....	11
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	12
History of Greek-letter Organizations .....	12

The Nature of Sororities.....	16
The Sorority Movement.....	18
National Panhellenic Conference.....	25
Sorority Terminology.....	26
Academic Research on Sororities .....	26
Femininity .....	31
Southern Femininity.....	32
Girls and Girlhood .....	32
Post-Feminism .....	33
Double Entanglement.....	34
New Sexual Contract .....	35
Post-feminist masquerade .....	36
‘The Perfect’ .....	37
Girls’ Studies .....	39
Historical Context.....	40
Emergence as an Academic Field.....	42
At-Risk Girls.....	42
Can-Do Girls.....	44
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY .....	47
Research Method .....	47
Researcher Positionality.....	48
Taming One’s Subjectivity .....	49
Study Setting.....	50

Participants.....	50
Data Collection Methods .....	52
Interviews.....	52
Research Journal.....	54
Documents .....	55
Methods of Analysis .....	56
Data Transcription .....	57
Data Analysis .....	57
Descriptive coding .....	58
Pattern coding .....	58
Theoretical analysis .....	60
Validity and Trustworthiness.....	65
Triangulation.....	65
Peer Review .....	65
Research Journal.....	66
Member Checks .....	67
Thick Description.....	67
Limitations .....	67
CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS .....	69
Becoming a Sorority Girl/Woman.....	70
Pre-Recruitment .....	70
Recruitment registration.....	70
Letters of recommendation .....	71

What to wear .....	71
Formal Recruitment .....	72
Move-in.....	72
Convocation .....	72
Open house round .....	73
Philanthropy round.....	75
Sisterhood round .....	76
Preference round .....	78
Bid day .....	81
First year .....	82
<i>Pledging</i> .....	83
<i>New member education</i> .....	83
<i>Initiation</i> .....	83
<i>Study hours</i> .....	84
<i>Eating at the house</i> .....	85
<i>Social events</i> .....	85
<i>Fitting in</i> .....	89
<i>Subsequent years</i> .....	90
<i>Living in the house</i> .....	92
<i>Leadership positions</i> .....	93
Looking for the Right Girl .....	94
Teaching Femininity .....	100
New Member Education Process .....	100

Dress and Appearance.....	102
Fashion shows.....	103
Trunk shows.....	104
Sorority uniform.....	105
<i>Being a butterfly</i> .....	108
Public Presentation.....	112
Communal Living.....	114
Candlelights .....	117
Academic Success.....	120
Becoming a Leader .....	122
Participant Biographies.....	123
Leadership Roles.....	132
Expectations of female leaders .....	132
<i>Southern femininity</i> .....	133
<i>Professional appearance</i> .....	136
<i>Prove oneself</i> .....	140
Limited opportunities.....	141
Competition.....	142
Competition amongst sorority members.....	142
Competition with fraternity members.....	146
Career, Marriage, and Kids.....	149
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	155
Findings Related to the Literature.....	155

Double Entanglement.....	156
Post-Feminist Masquerade.....	158
Self-Regulation .....	160
Can-Do Girl .....	161
Implications.....	163
Implications for Higher Education Administrators.....	163
Implications for Girls’ Studies and Post-Feminism.....	163
Recommendations.....	164
Conclusion .....	167
REFERENCES .....	169
APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL .....	177
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT.....	178
APPENDIX C: INITIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	182
APPENDIX D: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL .....	185
APPENDIX E: RECOMMENDATION EMAIL .....	187
APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANT INVITATION EMAIL .....	188
APPENDIX G: FOLLOW-UP PARTICIPANT INVITATION EMAIL.....	189
APPENDIX H: INSTITUTIONAL DATA .....	190

## LIST OF TABLES

1. First-Round Concept List.....	59
2. Double Entanglement Themes.....	61
3. Post-Feminist Masquerade Themes .....	62
4. 'The Perfect' Themes.....	63
5. Can-Do Girl Themes.....	64

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Double entanglement concept map.....	61
2. Post-feminist masquerade concept map.....	62
3. 'The Perfect' concept map.....	63
4. Can-do girl concept map.....	64

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2015, a sorority recruitment video, aimed at attracting prospective members, instantly became national news, drawing backlash, after a newspaper op-ed criticized the video for being “worse for women than Donald Trump” (Bailey, 2015). In her article, A. L. Bailey (2015), a freelance writer and editor, openly condemned the chapter for its lack of substance and absence of diversity. Bailey (2015) contended that rather than portray its members as intelligent and talented, the sorority chose to focus on “beauty and bounce” (para. 4). Bailey (2015) also highlighted that at no point during the video was there mention of the sorority’s core values of service or philanthropy efforts.

Described as “a parade of white girls and blonde hair dye, coordinated clothing, bikinis and daisy dukes, glitter and kisses, bouncing bodies, euphoric hand-holding and hugging, gratuitous booty shots, and matching aviator sunglasses,” the controversial video drew more than 500,000 views in the first week on YouTube (Bailey, 2015, para. 2). According to Bailey (2015), it was apparent “to the PNMs,<sup>1</sup> this video has a clear sales pitch: beauty, sexuality, and a specific look above all. They're selling themselves on looks alone, as a commodity” (para. 7). This assumption leads Bailey (2015) to question, exactly whom the sorority is actually recruiting. Is the purpose of the video to recruit young, female collegians in pursuit of higher education, or is the actual intent, to attract “hormonal college-aged guys” and “older, male YouTube creepers”

---

<sup>1</sup> Potential New Members (PNMs).

(Bailey, 2015, para. 3). Bailey (2015) further argued that the recruitment video is “so racially and aesthetically homogenous and forced, so hyper-feminine, so reductive and objectifying, so Stepford Wives: College Edition. It’s all so...unempowering...” (para. 2).

Despite her criticism, Bailey has maintained that she did not write the article to ‘shame’ or ‘blame’ the members (Sheets, 2015, para. 5). Rather, she wrote it, to “ensure that young college students are aware of the way they are presenting themselves to the world” (Sheets, 2015, para. 5). A mother of two young girls, Bailey has “strong feelings on feminism and the way women are portrayed in the media” (Sheets, 2015, para. 16). Her article being a platform with which to express her disappointment in how the sorority members chose to portray themselves in their recruitment video (Sheets, 2015).

Fuller (2015) agreed with Bailey and stated that, “the video is problematic, not merely because of the glitter and ‘gratuitous booty shots,’ but because it appears to actively undermine feminist ideals — ideals like respect, which women have to routinely fight to protect” (para. 7). While Bailey (2015) readily acknowledged that sororities are not known “for being bastions of feminist ideologies,” she feels that they should not play an active role in their own sabotage (2015, para. 4). By consciously and willingly participating in their own objectification, “these young women, with all their flouncing and hair flipping, are making it so terribly difficult for anyone to take them seriously, now or in the future...” (Bailey, 2015, para. 6).

In response to Bailey’s article, Gore, (2015) a self-proclaimed feminist, offered an apology to the chapter on behalf of women from her generation, most of who grew up in the 1970s and 1980s. Gore (2015) confided that growing up, she did not have a clear understanding of the Equal Rights Amendment or understand the need for Constitutional protection for girls and women. According to Gore (2015), for women of her generation, “female empowerment was

‘a thing.’ Whether we realized it or not, we saw first-hand, and ended up reaping the benefits without fighting the fight” (para. 6). Gore (2015) further explained how women of her generation “took the equality” fought for by their mothers and grandmothers, and “decided that women could do anything, even if it meant allowing ourselves to be objectified” (para. 9). In assuming blame for the disconnection, Gore (2015) admitted that “in the rush to empower young women, we didn’t direct you all about what your true potential is or, in the case of the UA sorority, the meaning of sisterhood in a larger sense” (para. 13).

In January of 2016, a similar recruitment video released by Delta Gamma at The University of Miami sparked criticism for also being hyper-feminine and featuring “girls lacking in ethnic and body diversity” (Levine, 2016, para. 2). According to Levine (2016), the video likewise fails “to demonstrate scholarly aspects, but successfully portrayed a sexist representation of women and appeared to perpetuate the stereotype of a sorority girl – rich, beautiful, and homogenous” (para. 2). Levine (2016) maintained that “the video is a poor representation of what a sorority and sisterhood are supposed to embody, and yet it’s a sad fact that much of this representation is exactly what being in a sorority entails” (para. 2). Levine (2016) further pointed to a pattern in many of the recent sorority recruitment videos, in which diversity is all but non-existent, with the emphasis being on the social aspects of membership versus community service and scholarship. Consequently, Levine (2016) inferred that “these videos disregard the main purpose of a sorority – to empower other women, make lifelong connections and benefit the surrounding community and campus” (para. 8).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Critique of these sorority recruitment videos is just one of many examples demonstrating the contradictions that contemporary sorority girls are navigating relative to definitions of

traditional femininity. An examination of existing literature shows that sorority girls are essentialized through stereotypes portrayed by the mass media and academic research. Often typecast as superficial, unintelligent, and hyper-feminine, the mass media produces a narrow-minded view of sororities and their members, which neglects to see them for who they are, complex individuals navigating the ideals, pressures, and expectations associated with being a sorority girl (Berbary, 2008). Similar to the mass media's narrow portrayal of sorority members, academic research, likewise, homogenizes sororities and sorority girls; "simplifying their existence to a quantitative understanding of specific behaviors such as those associated with binge drinking, eating disorders, and heterosexuality" (Berbary, 2012, p. 607).

When research ignores the complexity of negotiating femininity, the experiences of sorority girls are reduced to "behaviors outside of historical and cultural discourse, leaving...their performances of femininity vulnerable to a non-contextualized, ill-formed critique" (Berbary, 2012, p. 64). This essentialising of sorority girls masks their navigation of a complex environment and does little to provide any insight about how sorority girls make sense of the multiple and often competing discourses of femininity.

### **Purpose of the Research**

The primary purpose of this study was to understand how femininity is produced within historically white sororities and to expose the various ways in which sorority girls in formal leadership positions interpret, negotiate, reproduce, and resist the different societal messages concerning what it means to be a girl and appropriately feminine. Through exploring participants' unique experiences as sorority leaders, I identified specific themes, which have the potential to illuminate the competing, and often contradictory expectations and ideals of femininity experienced by sorority girls (Berbary, 2012).

Results of the study may serve to expand current research on sororities by offering a more complete and well-rounded understanding of how femininity is socially constructed within the institution of historically white sororities. This study also allowed the researcher to gather baseline data on an elite, privileged population that remains understudied, yet has significant influence on society (Kahn, 2012) and the ability to engage in issues of social justice at a structural level (Scheyvens, Scheyvens, & Murray, 2003).

### **Research Questions**

Consequently, the following research questions guided this study:

- (1) How is femininity produced within historically white sororities; and
- (2) How do sorority girls in formal leadership positions interpret, negotiate, reproduce, and resist femininity.

### **Significance of the Study**

According to Arthur (1998), the American college sorority is actively involved in the construction of feminine identities. Within this institution, sorority members are by no means passive products of socialization; rather, they are active agents, creating their own femininity (Arthur, 1998). Given the influence that sororities have in the construction of femininity, it is noteworthy that researchers have little interest to engage in research with this subpopulation.

Based on the need to expand literature on sorority girls and explore their negotiations of femininity, this dissertation details the process and findings of a qualitative study involving a Southern sorority community. Operating from a lens of post-feminism and girls' studies, this research serves to expand existing literature on sorority girls and address the absence of scholarship detailing the experiences of sorority girls, serving in formal leadership positions. More importantly, by resituating sorority girls as complex individuals navigating a complicated

terrain that minimally includes Southern culture, University culture, and sorority culture, this study challenges the simplistic representation associated with sorority membership.

Hevel and Bureau (2014) have argued “few environments within American higher education evoke more polarizing perspectives than those related to fraternities and sororities” (p. 23). Despite the conflicting opinions concerning the educational value of Greek-letter organizations, scholarly research on fraternities and sororities remains under-represented when compared to their predominance on American college campuses (Hevel & Bureau, 2014). Of equal concern, is that the limited research available on Greek-letter organizations privileges fraternities over that of sororities (Hevel & Bureau, 2014). With fraternities constituted as the norm, sororities are typically only discussed as an afterthought or in relation to their male counterparts (Berbary, 2012).

While a lot has been written about Greek organizations in the last decade, it is mainly within the typology of popular press, which tends to be poorly researched and devoid of empirical data (Molasso, 2005). Molasso (2005) has speculated one reason for the absence of scholarly research on fraternities and sororities could be the Greek community’s privileged place within higher education. Social clubs, of which fraternities and sororities are analogous, serve to both establish an elite status and preclude certain individuals from access to social power (Beisel 1998). According to Kahn (2012), elites can be described as “occupying a position that provides them with access and control or as possessing resources that advantage them” (p. 362).

A population known to be privileged and powerful, researching elites, like fraternities and sororities, presents distinctive challenges in research. Most notably is the difficulty that outside researchers face gaining access into what is perceived as an exclusionary closed-community (Molasso, 2005). Another possible contributing factor could be the desire of

researchers to study marginalized populations over that of privileged ones (Scheyvens, Scheyvens, and Murray, 2003). While at-risk groups, with goals of empowerment, are the focus and priority of most social science research, “this overlooks the importance of understanding the culture and practices of those that occupy powerful positions” (Scheyvens et al., 2003, p. 167). According to Scheyvens et al. (2003), “‘Studying up’ is this now considered a highly credible form of research as it allows us to gain a greater understanding of how differentiation and power are reproduced and used as tools to exacerbate marginalization of the weak” (p. 167)

### **Theoretical Framework**

Drawing theoretically from post-feminism and girls’ studies, I used Anita Harris’ discourse of girl power (or the can-do girl) and Angela McRobbie’s (2009) concepts of double entanglement, postfeminist masquerade, and ‘the perfect’ to explore the construction and negotiation of femininity within the context of historically white sororities.

#### **Post-Feminism**

Similar to that of feminism, there is not a single agreed upon definition for post-feminism (Gill, 2011; Kearney, 2009; Robinson, 2008). A complex and controversial term, the multiple meanings attributed to post-feminism have resulted in a myriad of misunderstandings and disagreements within current literature (Robinson, 2008). Often lacking specificity and used to represent a wide range of meanings, post-feminism is broadly understood in four distinct ways: an epistemological perspective (Alice, 1995; Yeatman, 1994), a historical shift (Hollows, 2000; Tasker & Negra, 2007), a backlash (Faludi, 1992), and an object of critical analysis (Gill, 2011; McRobbie, 2009). For the purpose of this study, post-feminism will be used in the conceptual sense, as a framework with which to shape my data analysis.

## **Girls' Studies**

An interdisciplinary field that grew out of cultural studies, youth studies, and women's studies, girls' studies demonstrates a "commitment to researching girlhood and girls' culture as unique social formations" (Kearney, 2009, p. 1). Prior to the interventions by feminists in the 1970s and 1980s, the voices and experiences of girls had been fundamentally overlooked with regard to research and policy (Harris, 2004a). When girls were mentioned in academic studies, they were either situated as an appendage to boys or discussed in relation to their physical beauty or sexuality (McRobbie & Garber, 1976). For their role in highlighting the absence and misrepresentation of girls in research and policies related to youth culture, Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber are credited with the laying the foundation of what would become girls' studies (Driscoll, 2002; Harris, 2004b; Kearney, 2006).

Growing in popularity, as an academic field, there is now a sound availability of girl-centered research within the disciplines of history, education, sociology, literary studies, psychology, media studies, and communication studies (Kearney, 2009). According to Driscoll (2008), despite the increased scholarship involving "female children, adolescents and young women, these only become 'girl studies' where they take on the social and cultural dimensions of girlhood" (p. 13). Similar to post-feminism, girls' studies will be used analytically to interpret and inform my data analysis.

## **Research Design**

A basic, interpretative qualitative study was employed to investigate how femininity is socially constructed within historically white sororities and how sorority girls in formal leadership positions at USouthern interpret, negotiate, reproduce, and resist femininity. As the most frequent form of qualitative research within education, "the basic qualitative study seeks to

understand how individuals make meaning of their lives and experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 23).

Derived from constructivism, phenomenology, and symbolic interaction, the basic qualitative study focuses on meaning, understanding, and process (Merriam, 2009). While “all qualitative research is interested in how meaning is constructed” as well as “how people make sense of their lives and their worlds,” it is the aim of the basic qualitative study to expose and explain said meanings (Merriam, 2009, p. 24).

Central to the qualitative study is the notion “that individuals construct reality in interaction with their social world” (Merriam, 2009, p. 22). In this sense, the “researcher is interested in understanding the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved” (Merriam, 2009, p. 22). Merriam (2009) has further asserted that researchers conducting a basic qualitative study are primarily “interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 23). In the basic qualitative study, data are traditionally collected through the use of interviews, observations, or document analysis (Merriam, 2009). The process of data analysis is conductive as well as interpretative and involves identifying recurring patterns, which are presented as themes or categories. A noteworthy characteristic of a qualitative study is that the findings are rich and descriptive (Merriam, 2009).

### **Data Collection Methods**

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather rich and thick description about the participants’ various experiences, with the objective of gaining a better understanding of how femininity is interpreted, negotiated, reproduced, and resisted within historically white sororities. A research journal was used throughout the research process to critically examine personal and

professional thoughts and understandings. Methods of data collection for the study include: participant interviews, document analysis, and a research journal.

To ensure data was properly interpreted, data analysis and data collection were simultaneously performed. Data gathered throughout the study was organized using QSR NVivo 10 and Leximancer. Utilizing a two-cycle coding process, featuring descriptive coding in the first cycle and pattern coding in the second cycle, the data corpus was coded, sorted, synthesized and theorized (Saldana, 2013).

### **Explanation of Terms Used to Describe Participants**

In today's society, sororities and their members are understood and characterized in various ways depending upon the context, sorority members may be described as girls, young women, women, sisters or members (Berbary, 2008). Within mass media, there is a tendency to use the term "sorority girls" and typecast members as ditzy, materialistic, and hypersexual (Berbary, 2008). Conversely, within academic research there is a propensity to refer to sorority members as "women," although the terms girls, young women, and women are often used interchangeably, without explanation. The inter/national organizations for the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) sororities, collectively known as women's fraternities or women's sororities, prefer the term women to that of girls, although the term sisters and members are also frequently used. This preference is noted within the literature review.

When casually referring to themselves and their friends, study participants often used the term girl or girls. When referencing a connection to sorority membership, however, participants overwhelmingly preferred the term sorority woman or sorority women. For many of the participants, the term sorority girl has a negative and degrading connotation, whereas the term sorority woman is seen as powerful and respectful.

In designing this study, I assumed that most of the participants would identify with the term girl, however, their use of girl or woman as a self-descriptor varies. While many of the participants did identify as girls, throughout the interviews, I discovered instances of contradictions, where participants struggled with describing themselves as well as other sorority members. In many instances participants used the term girl and woman interchangeably. The obvious contradictions indicate that it is not the term itself that is important but the context in which these terms are used.

For the purpose of this study, I collectively referred to individuals holding membership within a sorority as girls, sisters, or members. However, in an attempt to respect each participant's own naming practices, when referencing individual experiences or using an interview quote, I stayed true to the participant's voice and use her terminology of choice.

### **Organization of Research**

The next chapter will provide a comprehensive review of literature that addresses scholarship as it relates to this research study. Chapter III will discuss the research methods used for data collection and the methods for data analysis. Chapter IV will examine the research findings of the study. Chapter V, the final chapter, will include discussion, implications, and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study aims to contribute scholarship on the social construction of femininity within historically white sororities. First, I will introduce the history of Greek-letter organizations, emphasizing the nature of sororities and the development of the sorority movement. Following this section, I examine academic research on femininity, as it relates to sororities and sorority membership. Finally, I explore post-feminism and girls' studies, highlighting the discourses of girlpower (or the can-do girl), double entanglement, the post-feminist masquerade, and 'the perfect,' all of which are utilized for understanding how sorority girls interpret, negotiate, reproduce, and resist femininity.

### **History of Greek-letter Organizations**

For the better part of 200 years, Greek-letter organizations have been prevalent on American college campuses (Malaney, 1990). According to Hunt and Rentz (1994) "Greek letter organizations were student initiated and created to augment the academic experience and to provide an alternative to the rigors of the classroom" (p. 289). Established in 1776 at William and Mary College, the first documented Greek-letter organization, Phi Beta Kappa, was founded on the principles of "friendship, morality, and learning," (Turk, 2004, p. 2). By the early 1800s, Phi Beta Kappa had established additional branches at Yale, Harvard, and Dartmouth, marking the first time a private society successfully established chapters on multiple college campuses (Turk, 2004). This expansion, while coinciding with the transition of Phi Beta Kappa from a

secret social society to that of an honor society, also represents the development of Greek-letter organizations within the American college system (Turk, 2004).

While Phi Beta Kappa appears by all accounts to be the first documented Greek-letter organization, most chronicles of fraternal history begin with the founding of Kappa Alpha Society at Union College in 1825 (Syrett, 2009). Founded fifty years later, Kappa Alpha Society is considered by most fraternal experts, to be the first social Greek-letter organization based on the fact that it was founded on social purposes and continues to function with that intention (Syrett, 2009). For the purposes of this study, the nineteenth century will mark the birth of fraternal Greek-letter organizations.

As students of the Greek classics, founding members modeled the early Greek-letter societies after that of the ancient Greeks (Syrett, 2009). Perceived to be a more superior society than the Romans, there was a certain prestige in being associated with Greek traditions (Syrett, 2009). According to Syrett (2009), to be Greek “was to hearken back to the ancients, to the ideals of the founding of the Western Civilization; it was to subscribe to notions of self-improvement through literature and oratory” (p. 25). While early members joined Greek-letter societies primarily for the purpose of intellectual pursuit and brotherhood, they kept their involvement a secret for fear of reprisal from faculty members, who were distrustful of the intentions and actions of students (Syrett 2009; Turk, 2004).

After the founding of the Kappa Alpha Society, more commonly known as Northern K.A., the concept of “fraternity” became wildly popular with the students and within two years, Sigma Phi and Delta Phi were also established at Union College (Syrett, 2009). Collectively, these three fraternities, Kappa Alpha Society, Sigma Phi, and Delta Phi, are known as the ‘Union Triad,’ and serve as the framework for what is known today, as the American fraternity system

(Syrett, 2009). Three additional fraternities also have founding ties to Union College: Psi Upsilon in 1833, Chi Psi in 1841, and Theta Delta Chi in 1847 (Syrett, 2009). Union College, because of its integral role in the creation of the fraternal concept, is fondly referred to as the “Mother of Fraternities” (Syrett, 2009, p. 30). Due to increased popularity among students, by the 1850s, fraternal Greek-letter organizations had gained access to almost every college campus within the New England and Mid-Atlantic region, along with a few in the South and Midwest regions (Syrett, 2009).

Throughout most of the nineteenth century, White, Protestant males constituted the majority of students enrolled at institutions of higher education and consequently the make-up of fraternal membership (Syrett, 2009). A change in enrollment practices toward the end of the nineteenth century, however, forced fraternities to decide whether to include or exclude their new minority classmates (Syrett, 2009). It was during this time, due to the financial strains of the Civil War that colleges began to admit females, Jews, Catholics, and in some rare cases, African Americans and Asian Americans (Syrett, 2009). The arrival of ethnic and racial minorities on college and university campuses prompted many fraternities to close ranks, becoming more aware and self-conscious of their “whiteness” and Christianity (Syrett, 2009).

Valuing loyalty to brotherhood above all else, early members of Greek-letter organizations, primarily selected their members based on class status, however, at the end of the nineteenth century, more emphasis was placed on race and ethnicity (Syrett, 2009). Similar to the nineteenth century fraternity man, the twentieth century fraternity man cared deeply for his reputation and “believed he was judged by the company he kept” (Syrett, 2009, p. 218). With this belief ingrained into the organization’s culture, rather than determine membership eligibility based on personal characteristics; admittance was determined by reputation, religion, race, and

class status (Syrett, 2009). By 1920, several national fraternities chose to include provisions within their organization's constitution that only White, Christian men were eligible for membership. The exclusion of individuals based on difference, prompted many students to form their own Greek-letter organizations, modeled after those that had previously denied them access (Syrett, 2009).

In response to the exclusionary practices of historically white fraternities the first Black Greek-letter fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., was founded at Cornell University in 1906 (Newsome, 2009). According to Newsome (2009), Black Greek-letter organizations (BGLOs) sought to “emulate White Greek organizations while incorporating various aspects of racial identification, cultural heritage and social awareness” (p.18). The central premise of BGLOs, therefore, involves fighting racism, discrimination and other social injustices faced by people of color (Newsome, 2009). Currently, there are nine Black Greek-letter organizations in existence today: Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., Iota Phi Theta Fraternity Inc., Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc., Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc., Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Inc., Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Inc., and Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc. (Anson & Marchesani, 1991).

Founded at Yale University in 1895 by three “non-secretarian” Jewish students, who were previously denied membership based on their religion, the founding members of Pi Lambda Phi fraternity desired the benefits and privileges associated with fraternity membership (Syrett, 2009, p.168). Additional “minority” fraternities soon followed suit, with the founding of the first Catholic fraternity, Phi Kappa Sigma, in 1889 at Brown University, and later Rho Psi, the first fraternity for Chinese students, founded at Cornell in 1916 (Syrett, 2009). These organizations, though intending to honor the uniqueness of their memberships' race, culture, or religion, “were

not founded for the purpose of celebrating their difference; they were founded precisely because their differences had prevented their participation in the first place” (Syrett, 2009, p.169). More recently emergent Greek-letter organizations have been founded based on special populations, such as LGBTQ+ and military veteran status. All-female Greek-letter organizations will now be examined in greater detail.

### **The Nature of Sororities**

With more than four million sorority members enrolled at 665 college and university campuses, as a collective, sororities are presumably the oldest, largest, and most powerful of the female networks in Northern America (National Panhellenic Conference, n.d.). Situated as a support network and, in many ways, viewed as the quintessential sisterhood, sororities are an appealing engagement option for many female collegians (Handler, 1995). While there are many reasons that girls join sororities, most are seeking membership in an organization similar to their “culturally shaped skills, habits and styles” (Swidler, 1986, p. 275). Robson (1966) defines the role of the fraternity [sorority]:

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

As private organizations, with specific standards for membership, including recommendation policies and behavioral expectations, sororities are by nature elitist and regulatory (Scott, 1965).

While on one hand, members may tout the diverse, open, and accepting nature of their organization and membership, sororities often perpetuate conformity to appearance and behavior, particularly when it comes to traditional notions of ideal femininity (Handler, 1995). Of significance is that “notions of womanhood are very much shaped and bound by the sorority’s

needs and purpose and the sorority's relationship to Greek life and the campus culture" (Handler, 1995, p. 237). It is in the act of becoming a member of a sorority that "women engage, individually and collectively, in constructing themselves as women" (Handler, 1995, p. 237). Under the control of adult members, known as 'alumnae,' sorority members and sorority spaces are also highly regulated (Scott, 1965).

Existing research on sororities confirms that members are more involved in college than non-members (Astin, 1993) and have a tendency to be more engaged throughout their entire college experience (Hayek, Carini, O'Day, & Kuh, 2002; Pike, 2003). Moreover, sorority affiliation is positively linked with increased levels of involvement in extracurricular organizations, volunteerism, and civic responsibility (Hayek et al., 2002; Whipple and Sullivan, 1998), as well as the development of interpersonal skills (Hunt & Rentz, 1994; Pike 2000). Furthermore, research has identified an impact of sorority involvement on retention and persistence; in that sorority membership significantly and positively predicts retention to sophomore year as well as a higher 4-year and 5-year graduation rate (Biddix, 2014, p. 3).

For the purpose of this study, only members from those sororities that are a part of the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) will be included as participants. It is important to note that each of these sororities' functions as an inter/national organization with the authority to govern its local chapters located on campuses across the United States and Canada (National Panhellenic Conference, 2005). Further, each individual chapter operates under the auspices of its affiliated host institution and the inter/national organization (National Panhellenic Conference, 2005). While other sororities, such as local sororities, historically Black Greek-letter sororities, culturally based sororities, and special interest sororities have evolved over the years,

they are not included in this initial study and are only referenced as needed for historical purposes.

### **The Sorority Movement**

Founded in 1851 at Wesleyan College in Macon, Ga., the Adelphean Society has the distinct privilege of being the first female secret society on a college campus. (“History: Highlights in ADPi,” n.d.). Only sixteen years old and a first-year student at Wesleyan, Eugenia Tucker, was the visionary behind the creation of this secret society (“History: Highlights in ADPi,” n.d.). Tucker founded the Adelphean Society for “the mental, moral, social, and domestic improvement of its members” (“History: Highlights in ADPi,” n.d., para. 2). Established one year later, in 1852 at Wesleyan College, the Philomathean Society, by all accounts, is the second oldest female secret society in the United States (“Our History,” n.d.). Local in nature, these secret societies utilized classical names until they became national organizations in the early 1900s (Bauer, 2005). In 1904, the Philomathean Society would permanently change its name to Phi Mu Fraternity (“Our History,” n.d.). Likewise, in 1905, the Adelphean Society would become known as Alpha Delta Pi Fraternity (“History: Highlights in ADPi,” n.d.). The founding of these two societies is pivotal in that they represent what would eventually become a larger female fraternal movement (Bauer, 2005).

Prior to 1865, Monmouth College in Illinois was unfamiliar with the concept of Greek-letter societies; however, with the establishment of Beta Theta Pi and Delta Tau Delta and later Phi Gamma Delta fraternity in 1866, the concept quickly became a conversational topic among both male and female students (“The History of Pi Beta Phi,” n.d.). So much so, that on April 28, 1867, twelve girls would meet to form a secret college society, known as I.C. Sorosis. Derived

from the Latin word “soror,” which means "sister," (“The History of Pi Beta Phi,” n.d.). I.C. Sorosis was later renamed Pi Beta Phi (“The History of Pi Beta Phi,” n.d.).

According to *The History of Pi Beta Phi*, the founding of I.C. Sorosis “was not the outcome of a hasty, thoughtless school-girl's whim or sentimental flash, but the result of serious discussion and planning” (n.d., p. 20). The founders knew very well that they would have to contend with resistance as females encroached on what once was considered a male only privilege, pursuing an education and obtaining membership in a secret society (“The History of Pi Beta Phi,” n.d.). These early founders were pioneers with an insight into the wants and needs of female collegians, particularly with respect to unity and intellectual and spiritual development (“The History of Pi Beta Phi,” n.d.). The founding of I.C. Sorosis serves as another fundamental moment for the female fraternal movement, in that it marks the establishment of the first female society on a co-educational campus (“The History of Pi Beta Phi,” n.d.).

In the fall of 1867, Ashbury College<sup>2</sup> then a small prestigious liberal arts school, located in Indiana began conditionally phasing in female students (Turk, 2004). With decreased funding and partially filled classes, a result of the Civil War, the Board of Trustees was forced to look into alternative sources for enrollment (Turk, 2004). Faced with a similar experience to those at Monmouth College, the females at Asbury, likewise found themselves the object of ridicule and resentment by their male peers (Turk, 2004). Despite Asbury’s move to phase in coeducation, very few girls applied because of Ashbury’s restrictions on female enrollment policies that excluded girls from college preparatory courses required for admission (Turk, 2004). Local resident, Bettie Locke, was one of the first females to enroll at Asbury, and she along with three other girls, Laura Beswick, Alice Allen, and Mary Simmons, were the lone few that possessed

---

<sup>2</sup> In 1884 Ashbury College would change its name to DePauw University (Turk, 2004, p. 16)

the needed training that qualified them from admission (Turk, 2004). Locke, through her brother who was also a student at Asbury and a member of fraternity, developed a special relationship with Phi Gamma Delta, an all-male fraternity (Wilson, 1956). During Locke's sophomore year, Phi Gamma Delta would offer her a pin to be their Champion (Wilson, 1956). Strong-willed and believing that she deserved the right to be an initiated member, not just the fraternity's Champion, Locke declined the invitation (Wilson, 1956). At the urging of her father, a fraternity member and a professor at Asbury, Locke with the assistance of two other female students would create her own secret society (Turk, 2004; Wilson, 1956). Known today as Kappa Alpha Theta, Locke is credited with founding, in 1878, the first female Greek-letter fraternity (Turk, 2004; Wilson, 1956). Kappa Kappa Gamma would also be founded at Monmouth College in 1870.

In October of 1872 in the State of New York, Alpha Phi was founded at Syracuse University. A little over a year later in December of 1873 at the Lewis School for Girls, Delta Gamma was established (Turk, 2004). Alpha Phi and Delta Gamma would likewise be incorporated as "fraternities," because at the time of their founding, the word "sorority" did not yet exist (Turk, 2004).

Founded in 1874 at Syracuse, Gamma Phi Beta has the privilege of being the first sorority (Turk, 2004). Known prior to 1882 as a society, Gamma Phi Beta, adopted the term sorority at the prompting of a Latin professor, who believed the term fraternity an unwise classification for an organization of young ladies (Turk, 2004). The use "sorority" would soon become a popular way to distinguish male and female Greek-letter organizations (Turk, 2004).

With a few exceptions, the female societies founded in the 1870s were done so to provide mutual support and assistance to female collegians, who were combating daily resentment and opposition on a male-dominated campus (Turk, 2004). Placing a great deal of emphasis on

scholarship and academics as well as companionship and support, the identity of early sorority members is very much associated with challenging societal expectations regarding a female's place in higher education (Turk, 2004). These pioneering members, who valued academics and advocated for educational rights, resisted the ideal notion of femininity, creating social support systems, and carving a place for themselves on American co-educational campuses (Turk, 2004).

Of concern to these early founders, was proving that they were capable of managing college-level work and competing academically at the same level as their male counterparts (Turk, 2004). According to Turk (2004), within all of the histories of early female fraternities, "concern with intellectual performance and a sense of responsibility to 'make good' as female collegians holds primary place" (p. 24). These first generation members "regarded themselves as representatives of womanhood, their ability to succeed on campus a reflection upon their sex as much upon themselves" (Turk, 2004, p.5). In an effort to ensure that both their fraternity and their gender were represented in the best possible manner, these young sisters placed immense pressure on one another (Turk, 2004). As one of the early members of Kappa Alpha Theta so powerfully states, "somehow we realized that we were not going to college just for ourselves—but for all the girls who would follow, if we could just win out" (Turk, 2004, p. 18). Through the promotion of leadership development, encouragement of academic excellence in the classroom, and establishment of a network of solidarity; the early female founders intended Greek-letter societies to primarily serve as a support system for their members. However, these founding principles of the first generation members were soon disregarded, as their second generation sisters realigned their purpose to reflect a more social nature, which included an added emphasis on appearance, rushing new members, and spending time with college men (Turk, 2004).

From the late 1800s to the mid 1900s, female enrollment in colleges and universities soared (Turk, 2004). This dramatic growth in female enrollment prompted the emergence of national sororities throughout the United States at institutions of higher learning (Callais, 2002). Additional organizations established throughout the United States, include Alpha Omicron Pi, chartered in 1897 at Barnard College at Columbia, which has the distinction of being the first separate college for girls to be associated with a prestigious all-male university (“About AOII,” n.d.). With the installation of its Pi Chapter in 1898 at Sophie Newcomb Memorial College at Tulane University, Alpha Omicron Pi also has the distinction of being the first female Greek-letter fraternity to reach national status (“About AOII,” n.d.). With the growth of the sorority movement still in full force, additional national organizations would be developed at additional co-educational institutions, to include: Delta Delta Delta at Boston University in 1888; Alpha Xi Delta at Lombard<sup>3</sup> in 1893; Chi Omega at the University of Arkansas in 1895; Delta Zeta at Miami University of Ohio in 1902; and Alpha Gamma Delta at Syracuse University in 1904 (Johnson, 1972). Alpha Chi Omega, previously founded, as a professional music sorority, at DePauw in 1885, would eventually drop its musical requirements in order to become a social sorority (Johnson, 1972).

In Farmville, Virginia, at the State Female Normal School<sup>4</sup>, an interesting situation occurred with the founding of four sororities known collectively as the Farmville Four (Johnson, 1972). Kappa Delta, which was founded in 1897, and Zeta Tau Alpha, in 1898, would become known as general social fraternities (Johnson, 1972). Sigma Sigma Sigma, founded 1898, and Alpha Sigma Alpha, in 1901, however, would choose to become education specific sororities;

---

<sup>3</sup> Lombard College would eventually change its name to Knox College (Johnson, 1972).

<sup>4</sup> The State Female Normal School would eventually change its name to Longwood College (Johnson, 1972).

exclusively chartering chapters at normal schools (Johnson, 1972). Alpha Sigma Tau, later founded in 1899 at Michigan State Normal School, would likewise establish itself an education sorority rather than a social sorority (Johnson, 1972).

Similar to the evolution of fraternities, female groups more closely associated with religious beliefs saw an emergence in the early 1900s, as many female collegians, specifically those of Catholic and Jewish faiths, were excluded from existing Greek organizations (Johnson, 1972). Established at the University of Michigan in 1912, Theta Phi Alpha was founded as the first female fraternity for Catholics (Johnson, 1972). Those groups founded for the purpose of a common bond in Judaism include Alpha Epsilon Phi, founded in 1909 at Barnard College; Delta Phi Epsilon, founded in 1917 at New York University; Phi Sigma Sigma, founded in 1913 at Hunter College; and Sigma Delta Tau, founded in 1917 at Cornell University (Johnson, 1972, p. 62).

With the female presence on campus more readily accepted and the number of female collegians attending co-educational colleges up from 4,600 in 1870 to 61,000 in 1900, the second generation of female fraternity members, no longer felt the struggles and burdens of their first generation sisters (Turk, 2004). Seemingly relieved of the responsibility of representing their sex, this new generation of members, with an emphasis on appearance in addition to social and extracurricular matters, blindly turned away from the intellectual and scholarly pursuits that their first generation founders held so near and dear to their hearts (Turk, 2004).

With less pressure to prove that females deserved access to the same advantages of higher education, one can point to the 1890s and 1900s as the significant point in time when sororities changed from the values-based societies, emphasizing women's advancement created by their first generation predecessors, to the more social organizations that we know today (Turk, 2004).

It was the second-generation sorority members that adopted a member-specific focused mentality, promoting “themselves and their chapters ahead of all the needs of other female collegians, securing for their chapters and themselves a socially exclusive and elite status” (Turk, 2004, p. 47). It is in this preoccupation with social affairs, and status, that considerable tension was created with the first-generation sisters, who questioned if their second-generation members ever truly understood the true meaning and purpose of female Greek-letter organizations (Turk, 2004). It is this pivotal change in focus and mentality that is said to be the root cause for female Greek-letter organizations straying from their founding principles and values (Turk, 2004).

Similarly excluded from joining existing female Greek-letter fraternities and sororities, African American female students founded their own Black Greek-letter organizations. Three of the four original BGLOs were founded at Howard University: Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. in 1908, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. in 1913, and Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., in 1920 respectively. Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc., founded at Butler University in 1922 is the fourth of the Black Greek-letter organizations. According to Giddings (1988), these sororities offer an "important source of leadership training for Black women, whose opportunities to exercise such skills in formal organizations are few" (p. 16). With a focus on hands-on community service, the National Pan-Hellenic (NPHC) sororities are unique with respect to other Greek-letter organizations (Giddings, 1988).

Additional multicultural sororities would be founded and are affiliated with the following umbrella organizations: National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO), National Multicultural Greek Council (NMGC), and National APIA Panhellenic Association (NAPA). Since the NPHC, NALFO, NMGC, and NAPA sororities are not part of the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC), they were not included in this study.

## National Panhellenic Conference

The National Panhellenic Conference (NPC), as it is known today, was originally organized in 1902, as the Inter-Sorority Conference (ISC) (National Panhellenic Conference, 2005). Despite the many name changes over the years, as an organization, it has retained its identity as a conference (National Panhellenic Conference, 2005).

The following are formal definitions as defined in the *NPC Manual of Information, 20<sup>th</sup> Edition* (2015):

**What is NPC?** The National Panhellenic Conference is an organization composed of 26 inter/national Greek-letter women's sororities. Each member organization is an autonomous social group consisting of women who are college and university undergraduates and alumnae. (p. 11)

**Purpose.** The National Panhellenic Conference was established to assist collegiate and alumnae chapters of the NPC member organizations to cooperate with colleges and universities and foster interfraternal relationships. (p. 11)

**Mission.** The National Panhellenic Conference is the premier advocacy and support organization for the advancement of the sorority experience. (p. 11)

**Functions of NPC.** In 1988, the 26 member organizations affirmed the concept that the National Panhellenic Conference continue to operate as a conference. Each NPC member organization is equally represented by a delegate and up to three alternate delegates. Each member organization is allowed one vote, and the delegate casts this vote. The delegate, who serves as a member of the NPC Board of Directors, acts as liaison between her sorority and the other NPC organizations. In order to conduct business, this delegate body meets annually. The delegates function year-round as members of NPC committees, the largest of which are the Alumnae Panhellenics Committee and the College Panhellenics Committee. The officers of NPC (chairman and vice chairman) are members of the delegate body. They serve in an established order of sorority rotation — first as vice chairman then as chairman. Each position is a two-year term. The Advocacy chairman, Panhellenics chairman and Finance chairman are appointed by the NPC chairman and approved by the board of directors. These five officers serve as members of the Executive Committee with voting privileges. (p. 11)

**Requirements for membership.** A women's sorority must have been established in its national character for a minimum of 13 years. All of its collegiate chapters must be established in senior colleges and universities authorized to confer bachelor degrees and recognized by the appropriate regional association of colleges and universities; and it

must have at least 14 chapters, of which the latest established is at least two years old. (p. 13)

### **Sorority Terminology**

Familiarity with Greek-letter specific terminology and likewise the context in which certain terms are utilized in this study is critical for comprehension. For example, there are early inter/national female Greek-letter organizations and societies that regard themselves as fraternities, while others utilize the term sororities (Turk, 2004). Prior to 1882, when Gamma Phi Beta coined the term sorority, female Greek-letter organizations referred to as fraternities (Turk, 2004). Since many of the organizations were previously incorporated as fraternities, for simplicity and historical reasons, fifteen of the twenty-six have retained their fraternity designation (National Panhellenic Conference, 2005).

Within the *NPC Manual of Information, 20th Edition* (2015) female Greek-letter organizations are referred to as sororities. For the purpose of this study, the term sorority will be used to refer to all NPC member organizations. Also noteworthy is that sororities have members of all ages, given that they are comprised of collegiate members and alumna members. As such, sororities are collectively referred to as women's sororities (National Panhellenic Conference, 2005).

### **Academic Research on Sororities**

While a number of recent studies have investigated how different female groups (i.e. athletes, gangs, cheerleaders, etc.) engage with femininity (Krane, Choi, Bard, Aimar, & Kauer, 2004; Laidler & Hunt, 2001; Rubin, Nemeroff, & Russo, 2004), very few have focused on sorority membership and the role of the sorority in producing femininity (Berbary, 2008). As a researcher, I find this particularly surprising, given the significance of female friendship groups and 'bedroom culture' in cultivating femininity (McRobbie, 1978) and the implied role of the

American college sorority in the active construction of feminine identities (Arthur, 1998).

Situated as social organizations, sororities not only provide opportunities for members to interact socially and form relationships; many also offer a group living experience within a private housing facility (Arthur, 1998). It is within the communal setting of the sorority house, where 'bedroom culture' comes into play (Arthur, 1998; McRobbie, 1978). Through the practice of 'body routines' or 'getting ready,' in which members apply makeup, style hair, share clothes and talk about fashion, femininity is socially constructed (Arthur, 1998; Esposito, 2002).

In *Dress and the Social Construction of Gender in Two Sororities*, Arthur (1998) engages in research with two sororities to determine if a relationship exists between the social construction of femininity and that of idealized images, or visual norms. Arthur (1998) contends that for those interested in researching ideal images, exclusive organizations, like sororities, provide a unique environment in that idealized images are often used as a means of enforcing social control (Arthur, 1998). In terms of exclusive organizations, two types exist: the total institution (Coser, 1974) and the greedy organization (Goffman, 1978). While total institutions (i.e. prison, military, and cults) maintain strict control over their members, within greedy organizations (i.e. social clubs and groups), the controlling ideology may not be as apparent (Arthur, 1992; Coser, 1974; Goffman, 1978).

With specific interest concerning the influence of role commitment, Arthur (1998) interviewed new sorority members at an institution in the Pacific Northwest. Initial study findings indicated that each of the two sororities desired the same idealized image of a sorority girl; one that is thin, suntanned, and well-dressed (Arthur, 1998). Similarly, both sororities taught their members that attractiveness is a requirement of the feminine role and that achieving beauty takes work (Arthur, 1998). Of particular significance, Arthur (1998) discovered that "adherence

to idealized images and specific notions of femininity were expected to lead to happiness and success” (p. 93). Of similar importance, data revealed that pressure to adhere to the sorority’s idealized image, lessened over time, as sorority members progressed through college and became less interested in the social aspects of the sorority (Arthur, 1998).

In *College Women and Sororities: The Social Construction and Reaffirmation of Gender Rolls*, Risman (1982) examines “the day-to-day operation of the sorority system as it affects each member’s ideas about herself and her perspective on the world around her” (p. 232). According to Risman (1982), sororities offer a unique setting for observing the correlation between traditional social norms and individual member development. Within the context of the sorority, it was observed that institutional norms are used to socialize members into appropriate feminine behaviors (Risman, 1982). Risman (1982) also discovered that sororities encourage traditional gender roles by reinforcing that success is not contingent upon members’ achievements in school and athletics, but rather upon their ability to develop relationships with boys.

In a more recent article, Stone and Gorga (2014) examine how “pariah femininities, or undesirable and contaminating femininities,” are contained during the process of sorority recruitment (p. 349). According to Stone and Gorga (2014), with an all-female membership, sororities offer an ideal setting in which to study hegemonic femininity. Expanding on Schippers (2007) theory regarding containment of non-hegemonic femininities, Stone and Gorga (2014) argue that sorority practices for containment are possibly more nuanced and might be motivated by fear. More specifically that pariah femininity may taint the hegemonic femininity of current sorority members (Stone and Gorga, 2014). While no specific practices of social exclusion were identified, lesbianism was found to be contained and managed through the practices of “discursive strategies about diversity and ‘good fit,’ ...the silent or closeted lesbians who were

managed within existing sorority rituals,” and “creation of a separate sorority to contain pariah femininities” (Stone & Gorga, 2014, p. 353).

To date, the most comprehensive research examining negotiations of femininity within sorority culture is a dissertation study by Lisbeth Berbary (2008) entitled *Subject to Sorority: Women’s Negotiations of Competing Discourses of Femininity*. Employing an ethnographic study of a historically white sorority at a large public Southern university, Berbary (2008) aims to “understand the ways in which sorority women negotiate the different societal messages concerning what it means to be a woman” (p. 241).

As an outsider, non-Southerner, and non-Greek, Berbary (2008) used informal interviews, participant observation, and document collection to gain knowledge about the sorority and its members. Four distinct rounds of data analysis were incorporated in Berbary’s (2008) study. In the first round, Berbary (2008) coded the data for the purpose of the research. In the second round, the data was coded in response to the research questions (Berbary, 2008). The third round of coding involved deconstructing the categories derived from the previous round of analysis (Berbary, 2008). In the fourth and final round, Berbary (2008) recoded all original data in an effort to identify any overlooked patterns or themes.

Using post-structural feminist theory, the study findings were presented as a pseudo screenplay, featuring four main characters, each from a different classification (E.g. freshman, sophomore, etc.) as well as other supporting characters (Berbary, 2008). Berbary’s (2008) screenplay was broken into three distinct groups of four scenes, with each set representing one of the three research questions. The first set of scenes introduced the dominant expectations of femininity within the sorority culture and the discursive expectations that existed within Zeta Chi sorority (Berbary, 2008). The second set of scenes represented the main themes discovered

through data analysis and focused on how expectations of femininity were disseminated and disciplined within Zeta Chi sorority (Berbary, 2008). In particular, the “overt discipline enforced by Zeta Chi ruling bodies (Standards and Nationals), dissemination of rules through new member meetings, and covert discipline and dissemination of expectations that occurred through ‘girl talk’ and issues of ‘girl safety’ were explored through the scenes” (Berbary, 2008, p. 138). The last set of scenes investigated the performance and negotiation of femininity. Specifically, depicted are the various ways in which Zeta Chi members “simultaneously reproduce, resist, and recreate expectations of femininity through their bending of rules, recognition of inconsistency, use of language, discussions of ‘difference,’ and use of vulgarity” (p. 169). In order to connect data to theoretical framework and the researchers’ understanding, Berbary (2008) added interpretations in the form of Director Comments to each of the scenes.

Within the sorority culture of Zeta Chi, Berbary (2008) discovered only one dominant discourse of femininity, ladylikeness, which was grounded in heterosexual, white, Christian upper-class values. Berbary’s (2008) study offers a unique perspective into Southern sorority culture, an oftentimes overlooked area in terms of understanding how members negotiate femininity. As a result of her dissertation study, Berbary has published multiple follow-up articles including: *The American sorority girl recast: an ethnographic screenplay of leisure in context*, “*Don’t Be a Whore, That’s Not Ladylike*”: *Discursive Discipline and Sorority Women’s Gendered Subjectivity*, *Sorority Spaces: Discipline of gendered reputation in public leisure*, *Reflections of Culture: A Diary of a Sorority Girl*, and “*Even the Good Girls Have Their Moments*”: *Sorority Women’s Mis-Repeats of Ladylike Discourse*.

A review of literature on femininity identified a narrow view in relation to sorority members’ experiences, while existing literature does provide evidence about the influence of

sorority membership on the construction of gender roles and feminine identities, it neglects and essentialises the experiences of sorority girls. Girls' studies and post-feminism is employed to examine how femininity is constructed within sororities and how sorority girls interpret, negotiate, reproduce, and resist femininity. Drawing from Harris' discourse of Girl Power (or the can-do girl) and McRobbie's (2009) notion of double entanglement, the post-feminist masquerade, and 'the perfect,' participants' experiences in interpreting, negotiating, reproducing, and resisting femininity are examined. Femininity will now be discussed.

### **Femininity**

DeSantis (2007) notes, while we may be born male, female, or intersex, "our ideas of gender (i.e., masculinity and femininity) are shaped and constructed by social forces and discourse—such as media, family, societal traditions, and peer groups—not innate to the human biological form" (p. 25). While sex is primarily understood as a category based on biological difference, gender is culturally formed by language (Butler, 1990). According to Butler (1990) gender is not something one is, but rather something one does. Expounding upon the notion of performativity, Butler (1990) argues "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed... There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is *performatively* constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (p. 25).

Girls therefore are not born knowing how to be feminine; rather, our bodies learn the proper performance of femininity "through organization and regulation of time and space, and movements of our daily lives" (Bordo, 1989, p. 165). Consequently, it is the enactment and normalization of diet and exercise along with body presentations (e.g., applying make-up, styling hair, etc.) that our bodies memorize the feelings of failure and never being good enough (Bordo,

1989). The cultural meanings of femininity, beauty and success become inscribed onto our bodies representing the ideal, against which we will continually measure, judge and discipline (Bordo, 1989). How Southern femininity is interpreted, negotiated, reproduced, and resisted will now be discussed.

### **Southern Femininity**

While the idea of the lady is very much a part of American culture, within the South, this image is deep rooted, with “far-reaching social consequences” (Middleton-Keirn, 1986, p. 84). At the very core of Southern beliefs and culture is the ideal of the Southern lady, who embodies the following feminine qualities: soft, kind, protective, delicate, quiet, ladylike, and sweet (Middleton-Keirn, 1986). Within society, the appropriate role of the Southern lady is that of marriage and having children (Good, 1989). The Southern lady is likewise expected to adhere “to a strict code of behavior, her dignity, morality, and chastity” (Good, 1989, p. 73).

According to Good (1989), “in the mind of the South the *idea* of the lady has always been held sacred, a myth whose centrality must be protected at all time” (p. 73). Placed on a pedestal, it is the lady, who as the moral guardian, is understood to represent all that is good in the antebellum South (Good, 1989). To deviate from the Southern feminine code is to risk disapproval and exclusion (Good, 1989).

### **Girls and Girlhood**

In *Young Femininity: Girlhood, Power, and Social Change*, Aapola et al. (2005) suggest that the notion of girl and girlhood are not fixed, but rather fluid. Within today’s society, the term girl “can denote identification with girl culture or female accouterments and it can also be used as an informal address” (Aapola et al., 2005, p. 6). Citing stylistic reasons as well as political implications, Aapola et al. (2005) use the term girl and young woman interchangeably, preferring

not to define girl or girlhood using chronological age-limits. Driscoll (2002), likewise argues that the contemporary girl encompasses “no specific age group but rather an idea of mobility preceding the fixity of womanhood and implying an unfinished process of personal development” (p. 47). Criticized and rejected by second wave feminists, the term ‘girl’ is being reclaimed by young feminists in hopes of changing its meaning (Aapola et al., 2005).

### **Post-Feminism**

A complex and oftentimes controversial term, post-feminism is most often understood using three conceptualizations: a theoretical perspective (Alice, 1995; Yeatman, 1994), a historical shift (Hollows, 2000; Tasker & Negra, 2007), and a backlash (Faludi, 1992). These conceptualizations, however, are inherently problematic in that they do not denote with any specificity what features constitute post-feminism (Gill, 2007). Fundamentally, they do not speak to what makes something post-feminist (Gill, 2007). According to Gill (2007), “in order to use the term postfeminism for analytic purposes, we need at minimum to be able to specify the criteria used to identify something as postfeminist” (p. 149).

Building upon Fauldi’s (1992) interpretation that post-feminism is representative of the undoing of feminism; Angela McRobbie (2009) offers a fourth conceptualism of post-feminism; a “complexification” of the “backlash of feminism” that can be taken to mean that feminism has been both ‘taken into account’ and rejected. Expounding on the work of Judith Butler, McRobbie (2009) contends that both the doing and undoing of feminism is facilitated by what she has terms, a double entanglement. In the words of McRobbie (2009),

Elements of feminism have been taken into account, and have been absolutely incorporated into political and institutional life. Drawing on vocabulary that includes words like ‘empowerment’ and ‘choice’, these elements are then converted into a much more individualist discourse, and they are deployed under this new guise, particularly in media and popular culture, but also by agencies of the state, as a substitute of feminism. These new and seemingly ‘modern’ ideas about women and especially young women are

then disseminated more aggressively, so as to ensure the woman's movement will not re-emerge. (p. 1)

According to McRobbie (2009), this faux-feminism offers not only a false sense of freedom but also suggests that equality has been achieved so feminism is no longer needed. For their part in this charade, girls and young women are positioned as beneficiaries of social and cultural rewards, in the form of symbolic educational and occupational gains, as long as they renounce feminism (McRobbie, 2009). For the purpose of this study, post-feminism was used in the conceptual sense, as an object of critical analysis.

### **Double Entanglement**

McRobbie (2009) further suggests exploring post-feminism through what she has termed a double entanglement, "the co-existence of neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life...with processes of liberalisation in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations" (p. 12). Using the movie *Bridget Jones's Diary*, McRobbie (2009) shows how despite benefitting from feminist gains (i.e. career, financial independence, autonomy, and sexual freedom), Bridget still desires and actively pursues traditionally feminine values and norms (i.e. heteronormative love, marriage, and kids). Caught in an entanglement of sorts, for Bridget, the ability to choose her marital status is in itself problematic and anxiety generating (McRobbie, 2009).

In another example, McRobbie (2009) describes a late 1990s TV advertisement for Citroën cars, starring supermodel Claudia Schiffer. In the advertisement Schiffer is seen removing her clothes, while descending a staircase. Eventually walking out of the mansion to an awaiting Citroën car (McRobbie, 2009). While at first glance, the ad might appear as sexist, in this situation, feminism is induced and for all intents and purposes taken into account, only to be seen as no longer needed (McRobbie, 2009). According to McRobbie (2009, in this instance,

there is no exploitation; Schiffer appears to be not only performing the strip tease of her own volition but possibility enjoying it. McRobbie (2009) argues that this imagery only works because Schiffer is a well-known and successful supermodel. McRobbie (2009) further contends that “once again the shadow of disapproval is evoked (the striptease as site of female exploitation) only instantly to be dismissed as belonging to the past, to a time when feminists used to object to such imagery” (p. 17). In today’s society to make an objection to the above-mentioned imagery, would risk ridicule (McRobbie, 2009). Simultaneously progressive (i.e. exhibiting sexual freedom, choice and empowerment) and conservative (i.e. sexual object of the male gaze), Schiffer exemplifies the complexity associated with the entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas (McRobbie, 2009).

### **New Sexual Contract**

As part of the “new sexual contract,” for their abandonment of feminism girls in Western society are rewarded with increased work opportunities, educational gains, control of fertility and participation in consumer culture (McRobbie, 2009). Requirements for this gender settlement of sorts, include: “occupying positions of visibility and agency through participation, employment, and consumer culture; abandoning a critique of patriarchy and relinquishing political identities; and engaging in a range of practices” that are both conservative and progressive (Butler, 2009, p. 952). This new sexual contract, which offers capacity, success, attainment, participation, social mobility, and enjoyment; operates via a system of incitements and enticements (McRobbie, 2009). As subjects of capacity, under the spotlight, girls are made visible in various ways (McRobbie, 2009). Using the Deleuzian concept of luminosity (or visibility), McRobbie (2009) explains this visibility.

The power they seem to be collectively in possession of, is ‘created by the light itself’. These luminosities are suggestive of post-feminist equality while also defining and

circumscribing the conditions of such a status. They are clouds of light which give young women a shimmering presence, and in so doing they also mark out the terrain of the consummately and re-assuring feminine. Within this cloud of light, young women are taken to be he actively engaged in the production of self. They must become harsh judges of self. (p. 60)

McRobbie (2009), using what she describes as “four ‘luminous’ spaces of attention” (p. 58), examines this new standing of girls. The first of these luminous spaces is the fashion-beauty complex, from which the immaculately groomed post-feminist masquerade emerges “as a distinctive modality of prescriptive feminine agency” (McRobbie, 2009, p. 59). The second space is that of education and employment in which the well-educated hard working girl is the prominent figure (McRobbie, 2009). Third, is the luminous space of “sexuality, fertility, and reproduction,” within which the phallic girl is found. The fourth and final space of luminosity is that of globalization, from which emerges the global girl (McRobbie, 2009). Of particular importance to this study is the post-feminist masquerade.

**Post-feminist masquerade.** According to McRobbie (2009), from within the “fashion-and-beauty complex,” emerges a feminine agency distinctly shaped by consumer culture (p. 9). As a feminine totality, the post-feminist masquerade is constructed through intentional participation in traditional feminine rituals and practices of grooming and self-maintenance (McRobbie, 2009). Through the adoption of a highly stylized hyper-femininity, girls make a statement that the masquerade is a matter of personal choice not one of obligation (McRobbie, 2009).

For girls gaining access to the masculine spheres of work and leisure, the masquerade serves as a rescue mechanism; helping them navigate a patriarchal landscape without sacrifice to their sexual identity (McRobbie, 2009). Further, the masquerade serves to veil aggressive and competitive behaviors as well as disguise any fears associated with the potential loss of feminine

appeal (McRobbie, 2009). McRobbie (2009) further asserts that if a girl aspires to get married or have a family, then she cannot risk being seen as too powerful, for fear of jeopardizing her chances (McRobbie, 2009).

### **‘The Perfect’**

In *Notes on the Perfect: Competitive Femininity in Neoliberal Times*, McRobbie (2015), introduces the idea of ‘the perfect,’ an intensified practice of self-policing based on the desire to achieve the fantasy of the ‘good life.’ In *Cruel Optimism*, Lauren Berlant (2011) discusses how people remain attached to fantasies of ‘the good life,’ despite the fact that this ideal is no longer sustainable in present day society. According to Berlant (2011), all attachments are inherently optimistic, what makes them cruel, however, goes beyond the mere sense of disappointment. Rather, “cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing” (Berlant, 2011, p. 1). Meaning, the object that you thought would bring you the promise of happiness, actually becomes the very thing that is preventing you from achieving happiness (Berlant, 2011). The object’s presence, however, represents the possibility of happiness, so losing the object is thought to be much worse than actually being destroyed by it (Berlant, 2011).

For McRobbie (2015), “the idea of the perfect is both part of female ‘common sense’, something now expected of what Harris (2004) refers to as the ‘can-do’ girl, and also something potentially dangerous, a mechanism unleashing new waves of self-harm” (p. 4). In striving to achieve perfection, girls are judging themselves against an impossible standard (McRobbie, 2015). Emerging “as a horizon of expectation, through which young women are persuaded to seek self-definition,” (McRobbie, 2015, p. 3) ‘the perfect’ takes the shape of feminine regulation of self. ‘The perfect,’ in essence, manifests as an “inner drive, a determination to meet a set of

self-directed goals” (McRobbie, 2015, p. 12). McRobbie (2015), further maintains that ‘the perfect’ creates what is described as an

[...] inner-directed self-competition. The competitive ethic is internalized for the reason that where gender hierarchies must more or less remain intact there cannot be open competition in work (and indeed in school) with their male counterparts. At most it will be said that a competitive woman wants to make it to the top ‘in a man’s world’. By these means too is male privilege actively safe-guarded. (p. 15)

Not able to openly compete with their male peers, females turn their competition inward, which results in self-beratement (McRobbie, 2015). As an everyday form of self-measurement against highly ambiguous benchmarks, girls and young women dangerously self-regulate, in order to fit in with what society deems to be correctly feminine (McRobbie, 2015). This self-regulation resulting in the maintenance of gendered boundaries (McRobbie, 2015).

McRobbie (2015), argues that the notion of ‘the perfect’ has come into existence because, after an extended period of repudiation, feminism once again has a presence in society. With feminism back in the picture, recognized as a force with which to fight gender inequality, ‘the perfect’ transpires as a vector for hetero-normative competition between girls and young women (McRobbie, 2015). According to McRobbie (2015), this competition is contingent upon the

...restoring [of] traditional femininity, which means that female competition is inscribed within specific horizons of value relating to husbands, work partners and boyfriends, family and home, motherhood and maternity. Reduced to journalistic clichés, this comes to be known as ‘having it all’. The perfect thus comes to stand for the relationship between successful domesticity and successful sexuality. (p. 7)

‘The perfect’ therefore, serves as a mechanism for competition among girls and young women (McRobbie, 2015). In combination, ‘the perfect’ manifests as “an inner-directed self-competitiveness which is in effect self-beratement about not being good enough or perfect enough, and [an] outer-directed competition or antagonism towards other women” (McRobbie, 2015, p. 15). According to McRobbie (2015), of significance is that the ‘the perfect’ and the

post-feminist masquerade, similarly exhibit exceedingly normative femininity combined with inner-directed aggression. Having discussed post-feminism, the next section will discuss girls' studies.

### **Girls' Studies**

According to Aapola, Gonick, and Harris (2005), contemporary girls' studies, "attempts to make central the constitution of 'girls' as a category through an examination of the diverse experiences of young women in their social world" (pp. 9-10). Girls' studies treat with seriousness, any inquiry into the various "circumstances, opportunities and challenges" associated with the lives of girls (Aapola et al., 2005, p. 10) While girlhood research was originally conducted with the aim of helping scholars to understand the experiences of future women, it has since evolved to recognize the experiences of girls' and young women apart from future womanhood (Aapola et al., 2005). Of particular interest is the examination of how girlhood is conceptualized, performed, and portrayed by the media (Harris, 2004a). Current areas of concern to those in the field of girls' studies include the construction of girlhood, girlhood and sexuality, feminism for girls, popular culture, and education, as well as research by girls and young women (Harris, 2004a).

Prior to the 1970s, within youth studies, there was little research related to girls and their experiences. The few academic studies, in which girls were mentioned, situated them as an appendage to boys or discussed them in relation to their physical beauty and sexuality (McRobbie & Garber, 1976). Highlighting the noticeable absence and misrepresentation of girls in youth culture research and policies, McRobbie and Garber (1976) are credited with laying the foundation for what would eventually become the field of girls' studies (Driscoll, 2002; Harris, 2004b; Kearney, 2006).

In the groundbreaking text, *The 1970s: Bedroom Culture*, McRobbie and Garber (1976), address what they perceive to be the marginalization of girls in youth subcultures. For McRobbie and Garber (1976), girls are not so much missing from youth subcultures, as they are seen to relate in a different manner. With less freedom than their brothers, girls occupy different personal and leisure spaces than that of boys (McRobbie and Garber, 1976). Specifically, McRobbie and Garber (1976) discovered a distinctive girls' culture, with a commercial connection vastly different from that of male subcultures. Operating within the domestic sphere of the bedroom, girls as active consumers, can try on clothes and experiment with makeup and hairstyles in a safe environment (McRobbie and Garber, 1976). McRobbie and Garber's (1976) visionary insight into girl culture would serve to validate the need to study the various ways in which girls create a unique culture as a result of interaction with each other. The next section will place Girls' Studies in historical context.

### **Historical Context**

According to Gonick (2006), "Girl Power names a complex cultural phenomenon and social positioning for young women that is neither coherent or fixed" (p. 6). Considered by Harris (2004b), to be "one of the most important words in the new lexicon of female success...girlpower or *grrrlpower* was the catchword for an underground young radical feminist movement that advocated for the improvement of girls' lives" (p. 16-17). Traced back to the 1990s, the term Girl Power was first associated with the Riot Grrrls, a mostly white, middle-class girls' movement that organized in Washington, DC and Olympia, Washington (Gonick, 2006). According to Hesford (1999), the Riot Grrrls used the term Girl Power as a means to reclaim the word 'girl,' distancing themselves from what they considered to be an adult patriarchal world ruled by hierarchy and status. Touting the motto, 'Grrrls need guitars,' Girl Power became a way

for all female punk rock bands to celebrate “the fierce and aggressive potential of girls as well as reconstitution of girl culture as a positive force embracing self-expression through fashion, attitude, and a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) approach to cultural production” (Gonick, 2006, p. 7).

Previously excluded from serious involvement in what was at the time, was considered a masculine punk rock scene, bands like Bikini Kill and Heavens to Betsy used their lyrics and bodies for political action and activism (Gonick, 2006). In direct opposition to sexism, elitism and exclusionary practices that limited both the expression and involvement of girls in punk rock, the Girl Power movement “of the Riot Grrrls encouraged young women to see themselves not as the passive consumers of culture, including that of the punk rock scene, but as producers and creators of knowledge, and as verbal and expressive dissenters” (Gonick, 2006, p. 7).

While the original Girl Power movement associated with the Riot Grrrls was anti-consumerism in nature, once it gained mainstream attention, there was urgency to not only categorize the movement, but also to clarify the Girl Power message (Gonick, 2006). Despite opposition from the Riot Grrrls, the Girl Power phenomenon entered mainstream culture, ultimately falling victim to commercialization and commoditization through services and products targeted at young girls (Gonick, 2006). This commercial co-optation resulted in the reinvention of girlpower to the now known campy catchphrase (Harris, 2004b).

Reaching their pinnacle in 1997, the Spice Girls, an all-girl rock group, is most closely associated with the popularization of the girlpower motto (Aapola et al., 2005). Calling for equal rights and advocating for sisterhood, the hyper-sexualized and overly marketing message of the Spice Girls was widely celebrated by the media (Aapola et al., 2005). It is in this new meaning that girlpower now represents a girl’s attitude and a style of display (Harris, 2004b). Scholarly

research situated within this historical context of the girlpower movement is discussed in the next section.

### **Emergence as an Academic Field**

The visible absence of girls in popular media, television, literature, and academic research, changed considerably with the turn of the late twentieth and twenty-first century (Gonick, 2006). This increase in public presence as well as interest in girls, their lives, and their concerns, is due in part to what Gonick (2006) argues is “an expression of the uncertainties, tensions, fears, and anxieties elicited by the rapid social economic, and political changes taking place due to neoliberal politics” (p. 5). Further, the subsequent proliferation of girls’ images and voices in the media, on television, and in debates on educational policy, is representative of the many ways in which girls have, for the first time, come to represent the future (Gonick, 2006).

While this proliferation at first glance may be exciting, it raises several questions about the impact on the construction of girlhood and girls’ subjectivity. According to Gonick (2006) discussions about girls and girlhood have primarily been framed within the competing discourses of ‘Girl Power’ and ‘Reviving Ophelia.’ Emerging simultaneously in the 1990s from different contexts, the discourses of ‘Girl Power’ and ‘Reviving Ophelia’ sit in contrast to each other (Gonick, 2006). From these discourse emerge two themes emerge that characterize girls as ‘successful’ and ‘can-do’ or ‘vulnerable’ and ‘at risk,’ with both discourses producing identities situated in conflict with restrictive social and cultural standards that dictate socially appropriate behavior for girls (Harris, 2004b; Gonick, 2006).

### **At-Risk Girls**

Unlike the assertive, dynamic, and celebrated discourse of Girl Power, the Reviving Ophelia discourse is homogeneous, producing girls as vulnerable, frail, and in need of saving

(Gonick, 2006). Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* serves as the naming inspiration for this discourse (Gonick, 2006). Pipher (1994), a practicing therapist, frustrated with the insurmountable problems affecting adolescent girls, uses her book as a platform to discuss the many challenges facing today's girls and offer strategies for saving them.

Aptly named for the tragic character from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Ophelia is symbolically representative of what is perceived as a crisis of girlhood (Gonick, 2006). At one point happy and carefree, Ophelia falls madly in love with Hamlet, who is in competition with her father for her attention (Pipher, 1994). Torn apart by obedience and unable to meet the conflicting demands of both her father and Hamlet, Ophelia goes mad with grief, ultimately taking her own life (Pipher, 1994).

Drawing inspiration from actual client experiences, Pipher (1994) maintains that in early adolescence, something substantial happens, which causes once confident and well-adjusted girls to lose their resiliency and optimism. With their wholeness shattered, as a result of the unbearable turmoil of adolescence, "girls become fragmented, their selves split into mysterious contractions" (Pipher, 1994, p. 20). In *The Second Sex*, philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (2009) theorized that it is during this pivotal time in adolescence that a girl "realizes that it is not women but men who are the master of the world. It is this revelation—far more than the discovery of the penis—that imperiously modifies her consciousness of self" (p. 301). Fighting an unnamed problem and overwhelmed by societal pressures, girls are at risk for becoming overwhelmingly disorientated and depressed (Pipher, 1994). When a girl fails to produce the required ideal feminine traits and does not achieve success, within the 'Reviving Ophelia' construct, it is viewed as a result of individual personal failings on their part (Gonick, 2006).

## **Can-Do Girls**

Conversely, the can-do girl is one who openly embraces the discourse of girlpower (Harris, 2004b). Typically, privileged, white, and middle-class, the can-do girl is “confident, resilient, and empowered” (Harris, 2004b, p. 16). Packaged within neo-liberal values, the can-do girl is largely understood within the context of her individual success, which is based solely on personal efforts, ambition and making the right choices (Harris, 2004b). Portrayed as confident and independent, the can-do girl is highly motivated when it comes to academic and career success (Harris, 2004b). She is also more likely to embrace gender normative practices, like heterosexuality and deferred motherhood (Harris, 2004b). Known for her flexibility, the can-do girl “easily follows nonlinear trajectories to fulfillment and success” (Harris, 2004b, p. 16). For Harris (2004b), ultimately the can-do girl’s “success is defined as a personal project of good choices achieved through effort, and this effort is the subject of public display” (p. 152). Lest she become reconstructed as the at-risk girl, the can-do girl must be ever vigilant, with her efforts to reinvent herself (Harris, 2004b; Projansky, 2014).

A significant problem with the girlpower can-do girl narratives is the fact that they are limited in nature and provide minimal space for non-dominant girls to explore their identity in a meaningful way (Harris, 2004b). The can-do girl and girlpower discourse are for the most part associated with privileged, white, and middle-class girls. A critique of this association is that it ignores the multiple categories (e.g. race, class, sexuality, and ability) that make up girls’ identities (Harris, 2004b). An extension of the can-do discourse is the myth that leads girls to believe that with a little hard work, they can achieve anything and avoid becoming an at-risk girl (Projansky, 2014). In a “neoliberal consumer culture, this narrative promises unbelievable happiness and achievement—girl power—for the girl who embodies can-do status through

career, fashion, and lifestyle choices” (Projansky, 2014, p. 5). Unfortunately, for those girls who are unable able to achieve this ideal, they risk being Othered, stigmatized, punished, or dismissed as an aberration (Harris, 2004b).

Contrary to the modern success story of the can-do girl, the at-risk girl, is thought to suffer from bad choices, apathy, and irresponsible family practices (Harris, 2004b, p. 24). Unlike the can-do girl, the at-risk girl is typically an ethnic minority from a lower socio-economic status, with limited networking skills and resources (Harris, 2004b). Since success is limited to girls who are deemed most hegemonically appropriate, achievement is not a reality for many at-risk girls (Harris, 2004b). Lacking both economic and personal resources, these girls are almost certainly destined for failure (Harris, 2004b). Rather than acknowledge their lack of success as the result of structural disadvantage or diminished opportunities, it is often cast as individual problems (Harris, 2004b). Girls categorized as at-risk are also more likely to be subjected to early interventions, like surveillance and management, by the welfare and justice system, (Harris, 2004b).

To date, few studies involving sorority girls have been used to examine how femininity is produced within historically white sororities (Berbary, 2008). The introduction of traditionally white sororities to post-feminism and girls’ studies adds yet another population to these theoretical traditions that has been missing. Through the use of post-feminism and girls’ studies as a conceptual framework, this gap in the literature is addressed. This study provides a perspective on how sorority girls interpret, negotiate, reproduce, and resist femininity within a framework that has thus far excluded sorority populations. This analysis allows for comparisons to be drawn against the, traditionally examined can-do and at-risk girls (Harris, 2004b). Examination of historically white sororities provides a more complete picture of the female

undergraduate campus experience to be constructed. Given the prominence of sorority girls on University campuses, this gap in the literature results in a glaring deficiency in the understanding of how girls perform femininity (Bordo, 1989).

Having discussed literature related to post-feminism and girls' studies, specifically the theoretical constructs of double entanglement, the post-feminist masquerade, 'the perfect,' and girlpower, Chapter III will discuss my methodical approach to investigating how femininity is produced in historically white sororities and how sorority leaders interpret, reproduce, negotiate and resist femininity.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

With roots in sociology and anthropology, qualitative inquiry, provides “the foundation for reports about and representations of ‘the other’” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 1). In the last twenty years, qualitative research has gained increased popularity and as a field of study and is now considered a serious mode of scientific inquiry (Merriam, 2009). Central to the qualitative study is the notion that reality is constructed through interactions with the social world (Merriam, 2009). For the qualitative researcher, comprehending the meaning and impact that a phenomenon has on individuals is of utmost interest (Merriam, 2009).

The strength of qualitative research is its ability to collect the stories, experiences, and impressions of society, including segments of the population that are traditionally ignored or purposefully silenced (Glesne, 2011). The common critiques of qualitative research include, but are not limited to, the notion that it is subjective to the views of the researcher, that it is more concerned with impressions and viewpoints than verifiable facts, and lastly that it is not easily generalized (Glesne, 2011). This research study hoped to reveal not only how traditional femininity is produced within the institution of historically white sororities, but also how sorority leaders interpret, negotiate, reproduce, and resist femininity.

### **Research Method**

Inherently an inductive and comparative process, with the focus of qualitative research on understanding the meaning of the experience (Merriam, 2009). In this particular mode of inquiry, the researcher served as the primary instrument and was directly involved in the collection of

rich data (Merriam, 2009). Through interviews and participant observations, researchers were situated in close contact with their research subjects, thus exposing them to their research subject's individual lived experiences (Merriam, 2009). It was these interactions that researchers are allowed "to explore deep meanings of the phenomena of interests and thus develop new theories and understandings that have rich and nuanced dimension" (Gilgun & Abrams, 2002, p.42).

Derived from constructivism, phenomenology, and symbolic interaction, the basic qualitative study focuses on meaning, understanding, and process (Merriam, 2009). Researchers conducting a basic qualitative study, therefore, have interest in "(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). In the basic qualitative study, data are traditionally collected through the use of interviews, observations, or the analysis of documents (Merriam, 2009). An inherently interpretive process, data analysis, which produces rich and descriptive findings, involves identifying recurring patterns that are presented as themes or categories (Merriam, 2009).

### **Researcher Positionality**

As a member of a sorority and someone who has professionally advised Greek-letter organizations for over twelve years, I have an obvious vested interest in sororities and their members. By nature of my position, I am also afforded "insider" access to study an elite subpopulation that is often difficult to research. Due to the private nature of fraternities and sororities, it can be difficult, if not impossible to gain access for the purpose of research. While some might view my positionality as a conflict of interest, I contend that my "insider" status provides a foundation of trust that allows for the solicitation of more truthful and insightful

responses. Glesne (2011) touches on the participant-observer role, acknowledging that being an “insider” and researching in your own community can be stressful and difficult to navigate in that the researcher may have to play conflicting roles.

Conversely, being an “outsider” can be just as challenging for a researcher as they will likely struggle to navigate an unfamiliar environment, while building trust and rapport with research participants (Glesne, 2011). A challenge in working with an elite population is their ability to manage the interviewer drawing upon their experience in interviews (Aguiar & Schneider, 2012). This experience allows elites, participating in an interview, to control the message or the interaction with researchers (Aguiar & Schneider, 2012). To address this possibility, the researcher needs to be aware and prepared for this potential (Aguiar & Schneider, 2012). As a result, preparation is paramount during these interactions (Aguiar & Schneider, 2012). Acknowledging the potential of “insider” bias, efforts to tame one’s subjectivity will now be discussed.

### **Taming One’s Subjectivity**

According to Peshkin (1988), “one’s subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed” (p. 17). While subjectivity is unavoidable, it does not mean that researchers should be granted a pass in terms of accountability (Peshkin, 1988). Given that persuasions and bias can shape not only a study but also its findings, just acknowledging one’s subjectivity is not sufficient (Peshkin, 1988). Enhanced awareness is a formal systematic process that researchers can utilize to tame their subjectivity (Peshkin, 1988). Peshkin (1988) suggests monitoring feelings as a means of determining engagement of one’s subjectivity. Experiencing feelings that are positive or negative, wanting to engage or avoid certain experiences, and desiring to undertake roles not required of the research process are all indicators that subjectivity may have

been evoked (Peshkin, 1988). Being particularly attentive to one's own personal biases and monitoring for personal qualities that have the potential to filter, skew or inform research is therefore, extremely important (Peshkin, 1988). Recognizing my subjectivity, I employed a peer review process to add a layer of reflection to my interpretation of participant interview transcripts, coding of the data sets, and interpretation of findings.

### **Study Setting**

Located in the Southern region of the United States, USouthern (a pseudonym) is a large, public research institution, with a predominantly Caucasian population. USouthern has over 37,000 undergraduates, professional, and graduate students, of which, 46% are in-state residents. Greek life has a rich tradition at USouthern dating back over 150 years. Approximately 33% of the USouthern student population is affiliated with a social Greek-letter organization and USouthern is home to over 60 fraternities and sororities, each of which is associated with one of four Greek Governing Councils. Each council has a distinctive history, focus, operational structure, and procedure for the recruitment of new members.

Sororities have had prominent presence on the campus of USouthern since the early 1900's. USouthern currently has twenty-one sororities, of which seventeen are affiliated with the National Panhellenic Conference. Participants in this study were sorority members who have served, or are currently serving, in a leadership position within their respective sorority. For the purpose of confidentiality, pseudonyms for sorority chapters were used.

### **Participants**

In this study, I interviewed eleven girls, who were members of historically white sororities at USouthern. Participants had an average age range of 21, are female, a member of a sorority, and considered a sorority leader. Given the targeted nature of this qualitative research

study, the sample selection was non-random and purposeful (Merriam, 2009). My targeted sample did not take into account race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, sexual identity, or non-NPC sororities. Due to the limited number of minority members in sorority leadership positions, this population was too easily identifiable and therefore was not included in the study.

Potential participants were identified through recommendations submitted by University faculty and staff, who via their position have knowledge of and interaction with sorority girls (see Recruitment Email in Appendix E). In response to the email request, faculty and staff members were asked to share the names and contact information of potential USouthern students who meet following criteria: (1) 18- 25 years of age, (2) female (3) a member of a NPC sorority, (3) currently serving or have previously served in a sorority leadership position, and (4) perceived to be leader. Faculty and staff were also asked to share their definition of leadership and success as well as why they perceive the participants they recommended to be leaders.

After receiving participant recommendations from faculty and staff, the potential participant pool was stratified to include a range of girls representing the various NPC sororities, leadership positions, and geographic locality. Once prospective participants were identified, an email describing the purpose, procedure, risk and benefits of the study, was sent inviting them to participate in this research study (see Participant Invitation Email in Appendix F). A follow-up email was sent to all prospective participants, who had not responded within a week of the initial invitation (see Appendix G). After two weeks, all non-responsive prospective participants were replaced with alternates. This process resulted in 11 study participants. While the specific criteria for participation in the study is a limitation, it allows the researcher to gather baseline data on an elite and often difficult to access population that remains understudied, despite its access to power and impact on social relations (Kahn, 2012).

## **Data Collection Methods**

From March 2016 to July 2016, I actively collected data for the study. In total, twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 sorority leaders from USouthern. Two separate audio-recorded interviews took place; an initial interview (see Initial Interview Protocol in Appendix C) and a second interview (see Follow-up Interview Protocol in Appendix D), which consisted of a member check (i.e. validation of the original interview protocol) and follow-up regarding questions from the initial interview. The length of interviews was between 60 and 90 minutes and took place at a time and place convenient for both the researcher and participant.

After each interview, a transcript of the audio-recorded interview was produced. Prior to the second interview, participants received via email, a copy of their transcript from the initial interview, along with a note advising that they review the transcript for accuracy. Following the second interview, an optional final fact check was offered, by email, to ensure accuracy of the data obtained from this process. A compilation of participant quotes that were included in the study were sent to each participant to ensure quotes were representative of the participants' thoughts and experiences. Participation in the final fact check was optional and at the discretion of the participant. While interviews served as the main source of data for the study, throughout the process of data collection and data analysis, the researcher also utilized document analysis and a research journal.

### **Interviews**

As a research method, the interview is structured and purposeful; "it goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views in everyday conversations, and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 3). Within qualitative research, the semi-

structured interview is the most commonly used format for interviews (Merriam, 2009). Containing a combination of more and less defined questions, the semi-structured interview is an alternative, to the highly structured or standardized interview (Merriam, 2009). More so a conversational approach to interviewing, questions are open-ended and flexible, allowing “the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). In order to understand how femininity is produced within sororities, semi-structured interviews were used to explore participant experiences interpreting, negotiating, reproducing, and resisting femininity.

Semi-structured interviews were held with each participant from April 2016 to July 2016. Interviews ranged in length from 60-90 minutes and were audio-recorded using a Sony IC Recorder. Prior to starting the initial interview, the Researcher thoroughly explained the study to each participant, verbally providing relevant information (i.e., purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, alternatives to participation, etc.), while still allowing the participant the opportunity to ask questions or share concerns if need be. Following this verbal explanation of the study, the participant received a written consent form and was provided adequate time to consider whether or not to participate in the research study (see Informed Consent Form in Appendix B). After allowing the participant ample time to read the Informed Consent form, the Researcher answered additional questions regarding the study. Permission to audio-record the interview was obtained at this time and participants were given the option, of selecting their own pseudonym to be used in the study.

Active measures were undertaken to ensure confidentiality. The only place where the participant’s name appears in connection with this study is on the Informed Consent Form (see Informed Consent Form in Appendix B). The consent forms were kept separate from audio files

and interview transcripts, in a locked file drawer in the researcher's office. The researcher did not use a name-number list so there is no way to link a consent form to an interview. During the course of the study, the researcher stored all copies of digital data files (i.e. typed transcript and audio files of recorded interviews) on UA Box and on a password-protected external hard-drive, in a locked filing cabinet at her personal residence. Audio recordings will only be used for study/research purposes and will be erased and disposed of within twelve months or upon completion of the study.

An interview protocol, consisting of open-ended questions, was employed in the initial interview to explore the production of femininity within sororities. In order to gain a more nuanced understanding of the various meanings attributed to femininity as well as how sorority girls interpret, negotiate, reproduce, and resist femininity; follow-up questions were used in the second interview as a means of identifying themes, concepts, and patterns. Probing questions were also used to gain clarification and/or solicit specific examples from participants. Body language, non-verbal cues, and participant tones were documented in a research journal during the interview using handwritten notes.

### **Research Journal**

Throughout the study, a research journal was utilized to produce and document thoughts and ideas related to the research study. Known as research memos or 'memos to yourself,' these writings serve as a catalyst for engaging with the data and provide a space for the researcher to think critically about the research process (Glesne, 2011, p. 29). Memos serve to link data, thereby helping the researcher to further develop thoughts about the study (Hays and Singh, 2011; Glesne, 2011). Memo writing is also a useful tool for self-reflexivity, in that writing and

capturing a researcher's thoughts in the moment, frees the mind, leaving the researcher open to new ways of thinking (Glesne, 2011).

While I initially intended to utilize a researcher reflexivity journal, early on the process, it became apparent that a researcher journal would be more beneficial. Before, during and after interviews, as well as throughout the research and data analysis process, I used a researcher journal to capture my thoughts, observations and experiences.

The journal also provided a space with which to work through and grapple with "insider" status and documented personal thoughts and potential bias related to this research process (Hays and Singh, 2011). These notes were particularly important in that they allowed me a space with which to produce new ideas as well as work through existing ideas.

## **Documents**

According to Merriam (2009), the term document is an overarching term used to refer to a wide range of materials (i.e., written, digital, graphic, and physical) that apply to the study in question. Common forms of documents include government documents, letters, newspaper articles, diaries/journals, photographs, and videos. While documents can constitute most anything that exists prior to the start of the research study, two types of documents frequently used in qualitative research include public records and personal documents (Merriam, 2009). For the purpose of this study, participant recommendations were used as personal documents in that they provided personal perspective and are representative of the attitudes and beliefs of the USouthern Faculty and Staff offering the recommendations (Merriam, 2009).

Participant recommendations (see Recommendation Email in Appendix E) were solicited from faculty and staff members at USouthern, who by nature of their position have knowledge of and interaction with sorority girls. These recommendations were used both to recruit participants

and to provide context about participants' leadership qualifications. Faculty and staff through this process were asked to share their personal definition of leadership and success.

Through the process of content analysis, which entails describing the substance and nature of the communication (Merriam, 2009), these documents were used to understand how USouthern faculty and staff view leadership and success, particularly with regard to leadership positionality. This perspective was incorporated into data analysis and included in Chapter IV.

### **Methods of Analysis**

Marshall and Rossman (2011) contend “the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to a mass of collected data is messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative and fascinating” (p. 207). Moreover, the process is not neat, nor does it transpire in a linear fashion (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). According to Patton (2014) a common challenge associated with qualitative inquiry is synthesizing large amounts of data. Specifically, Patton (2014) notes,

Qualitative analysis transforms data into findings. No formula exists for the transformation. Guidance yes. But no recipe...In short, no absolute rules exist, except perhaps this: Do your very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study. (p. 521-522)

Seen by many as mysterious and complex, data analysis is an ongoing process in which the researcher makes meaning of the data by moving back and forth between tangible data and theoretical concepts (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) further explains that “making sense out of the data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read---it is the process of making meaning” (p. 176).

In qualitative inquiry, it is suggested that the researcher concurrently perform data collection and data analysis in order to ensure the development of a sound interpretation of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Baxter and Jack (2008) emphasize that data is like a puzzle piece, with the addition of each new piece to the puzzle, the researcher gains a greater

understanding of the entire phenomenon. Simultaneously performing the data analysis and data collection, allows the researcher to narrow down and structure the study as it progresses (Glesne, 2011).

### **Data Transcription**

Prior to coding the data, each digital audio recorded interview was transcribed verbatim using Express Dictate Digital Dictation Software v 5.91 © NCH Software. Specifically, the researcher listened to the interview through a headset, repeating the recorded text into the computer microphone, thus enabling the voice dictation software to convert the audio data to text. Once transcribed, each digital audio recording was reviewed and compared to the interview transcript for accuracy. Fillers in in speech patterns, such as um, ah, and like were removed from the interview transcripts, unless needed for comprehension.

The top of each interview transcript contained a title descriptor (i.e., initial or follow-up interview), the name of the participant, and the date of the interview. The interview start time was provided at the beginning of the text and the end time was provided at the conclusion. After transcription, each interview transcript was de-identified to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Once the transcription was completed, the audio recording of the interview was played back to correct any errors that had been made to guarantee the validity of the transcription.

### **Data Analysis**

A crucial component of qualitative analysis, coding is primarily interpretive, and by no means a precise science (Saldana, 2013). The process of coding entails the use of qualitative codes, “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2013, p. 3).

An intermediate process between data collection and data analysis, coding is the cyclical act of categorizing data, for the purpose of meaning making (Saldana, 2013).

For this study, data analysis, using a two-cycle coding method (Saldana, 2013) that featured descriptive coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldana, 2013, Wolcott, 1994) was employed in the first cycle. In the second cycle, pattern coding (Miles et al., 2014) was performed on the data corpus, which consisted of interview transcripts, participant recommendations, and research journal entries. To get a feel for the data, many qualitative researchers perform descriptive coding, as a first step in data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Useful in summarizing large segments of data, labels are assigned to data as a means to summarize via “a word or short phrase – most often as a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (Saldana, 2013, p. 88). Requiring little interpretation, Descriptive Coding provides researchers with a list of themes for categorizing (Saldana, 2013). Of further benefit, Descriptive Coding is appropriate for use with varied data forms (e.g. interview transcript, documents, artifacts, field notes, researcher journal, memos) utilized in qualitative studies (Saldana, 2013).

**Descriptive coding.** After multiple readings of the data, low inference codes were identified using Descriptive Coding (Saldana, 2013). This task was completed by reviewing participant transcripts, highlighting key passages, adding notes along the margins, and circling or underlining key words and phrases (Saldana, 2013).

**Pattern coding.** The goal of Second Cycle coding is to use the codes extrapolated from the First Cycle to further organize the data into themes, categories, or concepts (Saldana, 2013). During Second Cycle coding, data previously coded using Descriptive Coding was reorganized and reanalyzed, allowing for the development of more specified categories, themes and/or

concepts (Saldana, 2013). According to Saldana (2013) it is Pattern Coding that allows for the development of the ‘meta-code,’ a category label identifying data that is similarly coded. More of an abstract concept, Pattern Codes allow a researcher to not only organize the data corpus but to further simplify the data into smaller, more meaningful categories (Saldana, 2013). From the analysis of participants’ interview transcripts, 44 concepts were generated (see Table 1).

Table 1

*First-Round Concept List*

First-Round Concepts	
1-Girl vs. Woman	23-Success
2-Teach Feminine	24-Leadership
3-Feminine Practices	25-Femininity
4-Girl Meaning	26-Leader Tensions
5-Most Girl	27-Challenging Experiences
6-Least Girl	28-Gratifying Experiences
7-Girls Act	29-Leader What Expected
8-Girls Dress	30-Relationships Changed
9-Typical Day	31-Life Changed
10-Personal Dress Style	32-Sorority Leader
11-Event Participation	33-Conceal
12-Sorority Sisters Out	34-Benefactors of Feminism
13-Fraternity Party Out	35-Regional Femininity
14-Relationship Sorority Women	36-Non-normative femininity
15-Relationship Fraternity Men	37-Girl Power
16-Activities	38-Secondary to Men
17-Relationships	39-Role in Sexual Assault
18-Pressure Act, Talk, Dress	40-T-shirts
19-Girl Thoughts	41-Sorority Video 1
20-Other's Expectations	42-Sorority Video 2
21-Expectation's Influence	43-Vulnerable
22-Challenging Decision	

In order to generate more meaningful categories, interview transcripts were analyzed using Leximancer, a content analysis software program. Designed as an analytical and data mining tool, Leximancer extracts “themes, concepts and ideas, while concurrently attaching

contextual meaning and understanding” to qualitative data (Brady, 2013, p. 56). The software was used to perform both a conceptual and relational analysis. Employing semantic clustering of key concepts, the frequency and presence of concepts as well as the co-occurrence between and among concepts was determined (Brady, 2013). According to Brady (2013) “Leximancer defines *concepts* as collections of words that generally travel together throughout the text. The terms are weighted according to how frequently they occur in sentences containing the concept, compared with how frequently they occur elsewhere.” (p. 57).

Based on the frequency of co-occurrence, concepts are contextually clustered on the map using circles that represent broader themes (Brady, 2013). Using a heat-map approach, the most significant themes are color coded using hot colors, while the less relevant themes are represented by cool colors (Brady, 2013). Concept Maps, when generated, allow the researcher to view the interrelationships of the concepts within the interview data (Brady, 2013). From the analysis, four prominent themes emerged: double entanglement (see Figure 1), post-feminist masquerade (see Figure 2), and ‘the perfect’ (see Figure 3), and the can-do girl (see Figure 4).

**Theoretical analysis.** Using theoretical analysis, higher level themes were developed from the 44 related concepts. During the second reading, etic concepts from girls’ studies and post-feminism were read against interview transcripts. As themes emerged from the iterative reading and analysis of participants’ transcripts, these themes were compared against the theoretical frameworks of girls’ studies and post-feminism. This iterative process identified four higher level themes that were consistent with the can-do girl (see Table 2), double entanglement (see Table 3), post-feminist masquerade (see Table 4), and ‘the perfect’ (see Table 5). These themes will be discussed further in Chapter IV and Chapter V.









## **Validity and Trustworthiness**

Validity and trustworthiness are often highly debated topics within qualitative research (Glesne, 2011). Validity, as defined by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), is “the strength and soundness of a statement; in the social sciences validity usually means whether a method of investigates what it purports to investigate” (p. 327). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) further assert, “validation rests on the quality of the researcher’s craftsmanship throughout an investigation, on continually checking, questioning, and theoretically interpreting the findings” (p. 249). Triangulation, peer reviews, research journal, member checks, and thick description were used as a procedure in this study for increasing trustworthiness (Creswell, 1998).

### **Triangulation**

A powerful technique that adds trustworthiness to a study, the process of triangulation remains a fundamental strategy of confirming validity (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 2009). Triangulation involves the use of multiple sources of data, methods of data collection, researchers, or theories to verify research findings (Merriam, 2009). In this study, multiple methods of data collection, in the form of interviews, document analysis, and a research journal were employed.

### **Peer Review**

Peer reviews are yet another strategy for establishing validity (Merriam, 2009). Similar to the process used for publication in a peer-reviewed journal; individuals, who are either familiar with the topic or methodology are asked to review the manuscript, examine data, and offer feedback regarding findings (Merriam, 2009). Stringer (2004) explains “the purposes of debriefing are to review the appropriateness of research procedures and to clarify the participant’s ways of describing and interpreting events” (p.58). Also called peer debriefing, this

process engages an impartial peer with the goal of challenging interpretations of the data throughout the research process (Stringer, 2004).

The peer reviewer selected to assist the researcher has a doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy with experience in higher education assessment and planning within student affairs at multiple institutions. The peer reviewer has expertise in both quantitative and qualitative research methodology and prior to this study had limited experience with Greek-letter organizations. The researcher and peer reviewer met on a number of occasions to discuss the study, including interview transcripts, coding of the data sets, and interpretation of findings. The peer reviewer's limited experience with Greek-letter organizations was an asset as it required the researcher to unpack insider knowledge and explain in detail elements of the Greek experience that are assumed. This collaborative experience with an outside peer reviewer led the researcher to engage with and consider alternative perspectives when interpreting the data. Having a peer reviewer with no vested interest in the study adds rigor to the selected themes that are presented in Chapter IV and the discussion presented in Chapter V.

### **Research Journal**

A researcher journal was utilized throughout the study to record the researcher's thoughts and clarify researcher bias (Merriam, 2009). More specifically, the journal was used as a tool to reflect upon and monitor researcher subjectivity (Merriam, 2009). Throughout the research process, it is important for researchers to explain how personal perspectives, biases, and assumptions may affect the study and the understanding of the data (Merriam, 2009).

## **Member Checks**

Member checks, also known as respondent validation, are another common strategy used by qualitative researcher to demonstrate validity (Merriam, 2009). According to Maxwell (2005), member checks are,

[...] the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed. (p. 111)

The process of member checks involves the researcher sharing a preliminary analysis of the findings with participants for verification of correctness and truthfulness (Merriam, 2009). In this study, member checks with participants occurred after the initial interview. Following the second interview, an optional member check was offered to all subjects to ensure correctness of the data. A final member check was offered after the completion of Chapter IV.

## **Thick Description**

While thin descriptions have breadth and address “the outer, observable, ‘photographable’ characteristics of a person, action, or event” (Katz, 1999, p. 1), they are not sufficient to interpret data (Geertz, 1973). By contrast, thick description provides depth and illustrates “what a given event or action can *really* be presumed to mean, what it *is*” (Gustafsson, 2001, p. 59). Thick descriptions provide a more “complex understanding of context and underlying meanings,” (Katz, 1999, p. 1).

## **Limitations**

One limitation of this study was the narrowly scoped population. As a result, this study should not be generalized beyond the population examined. This study has, with the use of the majority, established baseline data on the experiences of an elite, privileged population to be compared at USouthern. Particularly of interest in future research, are leaders of different race,

ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Future studies would include non-Panhellenic sorority leaders from other Greek governing councils.

The timing of this study may reflect unique elements related to the circumstances and conditions on USouthern's campus immediately preceding and during the interview timeframe. A final limitation of this study is the researcher's insider experience, which includes more than 13 years working with fraternities and sororities at five different campuses as well as undergraduate membership in a Panhellenic sorority. In the next chapter, I discuss my findings in relation to the study's research questions.

## CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS

Every August in the sweltering Southern heat, more than fifty percent of the female freshman class at USouthern participates in what is known as “Panhellenic Sorority Recruitment.” Their goal, being to get a “bid”<sup>5</sup> to one of USouthern’s sixteen National Panhellenic Conference sororities. Based on previous statistics, of the girls that begin the process, more than ninety percent will eventually receive a bid. But it is a long, arduous process, and what is at stake is one’s gendered presentation, as explained by Vicki, a senior student, who is the judicial chairman of her sorority.

So it's interesting how gender expression can then be evaluated into whether or not she can be a part of our sorority. I think sororities uphold really major feminine ideals in the fact that we sometimes feel the pressure to be the ideal woman, in a sense. So when we're doing recruitment, when you have so little time to get to know them, if you have any suspicion that she is not a part of that feminine ideal or at least doesn't seem like she could be early on, then it's very easy to let her go. We have to process so many girls and we've only got so many seats<sup>6</sup>. I think it gets better as rush goes on, if girls who maybe are not as feminine in their gender expression make it into later rounds. Ironically, those girls typically do better, if they get past Pref<sup>7</sup> cause then usually they're showing off more of their personality, if they made it that long. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

In this chapter, I examine the form of femininity that is produced within USouthern’s historically white sorority system. The various ways that sororities, through the discourse they use and the practices they adopt, teach or socialize their members about what it means to be feminine are also discussed. I then move to a discussion about how notions of “leadership” and

---

<sup>5</sup> A bid is an official offer of membership.

<sup>6</sup> Also known as quota, the maximum number of PNMs a sorority may pledge during sorority recruitment.

<sup>7</sup> Preference Ceremony, the final round of sorority recruitment.

“femininity” play out in the lives of sorority girls, who serve or have served in formal leadership positions in their chapter and on campus. I end by discussing the tension between current notions of leadership and traditional notions of femininity that are reproduced in sororities.

### **Becoming a Sorority Girl/Woman**

In order to participate in sorority recruitment at USouthern, a Potential New Member (PNM), must be a regularly enrolled female student or plan to be a full-time student in good standing with USouthern at the time of recruitment in August. As designated fraternal organizations, sororities function as single-sex organizations as allowed by federal law through an exemption of Title IX regulations regarding discrimination on the basis of sex.

#### **Pre-Recruitment**

For girls participating in sorority recruitment at USouthern, preparation is essential. In the spring semester of their senior year of high school, girls interested in joining a sorority, begin the recruitment process. From completing the online recruitment registration application to securing letters of recommendation and procuring the appropriate outfits for recruitment week; attention to detail is a must.

**Recruitment registration.** Prior to arriving on campus for recruitment, a PNM must complete the online recruitment registration form and pay the required registration fee. Opening at the beginning of May, the online recruitment registration form, is exhaustive. In addition to demographic information, the application also requests the following: standardized test scores, grade point average, extracurricular involvement, leadership, service, honors, athletics, work experience, and sorority legacy status. Applicants are also encouraged to upload a social resume, a copy of their high school or college transcript, and a photograph (preferably a headshot). The

online application, which closes on the last day of July, can be updated anytime during this timeframe.

**Letters of recommendation.** While not required to participate in sorority recruitment, letters of recommendation (or reference letters, Recs, or RIFs) are preferred by the majority of sororities at USouthern. Depending on the sorority, a letter of recommendation may be necessary for membership eligibility. Policies on letters of recommendation are unique to each sorority and an official letter of reference form is provided by the inter/national organization to alumnae. Alumnae utilize this official form as means of introducing potential new members to the local chapter.

**What to wear.** By its very nature, recruitment is an appearance driven process. In an effort to put their best foot forward, PNMs will spend countless hours searching for the perfect outfits to wear during recruitment. Excluding the most causal round, where a t-shirt and nice shorts are recommended, dresses are a staple for much of the week. According to Rebecca, a sophomore, who serves in the role of recruitment chair for her sorority, “we're expected to wear dresses during all of rush. That's obviously, a pretty feminine attire choice.”

While PNMs are encouraged to showcase their personality and are free to wear what they want during recruitment, recommendations on *What to Wear*, are shared on the USouthern Panhellenic website and included in USouthern’s sorority recruitment guide. Since a number of the event rounds take place over several days, a total of five dresses, three pairs of shorts, and a tank top are recommended. Given that PNMs do a lot of walking during recruitment, several pairs of comfortable sandals and wedges are also a must. These suggestions mirror what active sorority members wear in the houses and having a clear definition of the attire for each round helps to put PNMs at ease.

As demonstrated above, there is a significant amount of energy and preparation required of PNMs prior to arriving on campus for the formal recruitment process. The next section will discuss how this preparation plays out over the nine-days of formal recruitment.

### **Formal Recruitment**

Sorority recruitment at USouthern officially begins with Convocation on Friday evening and culminates nine days later on Saturday, with Bid Day. Each day of the PNMs' experiences will be detailed in the following section.

**Move-in.** Before recruitment officially begins, 18-year-old girls descend upon USouthern's campus throughout Thursday and Friday, often accompanied by their parents and family. Through a coordinated process, based on hall and floor, housing staff and campus volunteers assist girls with moving into their campus residences for the upcoming year.

**Convocation.** Around 6:00 pm on Friday evening, buses begin transporting PNMs from their residence halls to a large on campus auditorium for Convocation. This event marks the beginning of the formal recruitment process. Given that many of the PNMs will move into their residence halls on Friday, the attire for Convocation is casual and a T-shirt and shorts are encouraged. Upon arrival at the auditorium, PNMs are greeted by members of USouthern's recruitment team, which includes members of the Panhellenic Executive Board, Judicial Board, and Sigma Rho Chis. Sigma Rho Chis, also known as sorority recruitment counselors, are active sorority members who have voluntarily disassociated from their sorority for the purpose of assisting PNMs to navigate the recruitment process. The intent of Sigma Rho Chi disaffiliation during recruitment is to provide unbiased information that will not unduly influence membership decisions of the PNMs. The Sigma Rho Chi selection process, which occurs in January, is a competitive process comprised of group and individual interviews. Once selected Sigma Rho

Chis participate in a spring training class where they are taught skills related to listening, counseling, and ethical behavior. Their disassociation during this timeframe gives PNMs an unbiased advocate that can provide insider perspective without pressure.

Convocation begins with an official greeting from USouthern's President, followed by a "Welcome" from the Vice President of Student Affairs. Throughout the program, PNMs hear from various university speakers, who address first year transition topics paying particular attention to, getting involved, campus resources, and advice on health and wellness. Proceeding the keynote speaker, who shares an inspirational message about being true to yourself, the Panhellenic Director of Recruitment offers an overview of the recruitment process and provides an in-depth review of the schedule of events. The Director of Judicial Affairs then outlines PNM expectations and provides details about the PNM Bill of Rights.

At the conclusion of Convocation, PNMs break into their recruitment groups, which are guided by four or five Sigma Rho Chis. In their recruitment group's initial meeting, Sigma Rho Chis disperse hard copies of the recruitment guide, hand out the Philanthropy Day t-shirts, and discuss what to expect during the first round of Open House.

**Open house round.** The Open House Round begins early in the morning with a Sigma Rho Chi group meeting on Sorority Row. Here the PNMs check-in, receive their name tag, and are given their party schedule for the next two days. At 8:45 a.m. PNMs are greeted by Judicial Board members at the first of 16 houses they will visit over the next two days. The Judicial Board member lines up all the PNMs alphabetically to assist the sorority chapter in their recruitment efforts. This process is repeated at every house and every party PNMs attend over the next seven days. Organizing PNMs alphabetically is used by the sororities to assign active members to PNMs as their host during parties. At 9:00 a.m. the front doors of each chapter house

simultaneously swing open as Sorority Row is filled with chants and cheers, affectionately known as door songs. Sorority members can be seen stacked in the front doors of the sorority houses clapping, snapping, shaking their heads, and flipping their hair as they sing their sorority's specific song; welcoming the PNMs to their house. These door songs will be repeated numerous times over the next two days, as PNMs are welcomed to all 16 houses during the Open House Round.

For the first round, or Open House, each party is 20 minutes in length, and majority of the PNMs will wear sandals and a casual sundress. Southern designer Lily Pulitzer is a classic favorite and preferred by many PNMs. Since this is the only opportunity for PNMs to visit with each chapter, first impressions are important given all following rounds are by invitation only. For many of the PNMs, preparation for recruitment through securing of letters of recommendation and support from sorority alumnae has already determined if they will receive an invitation back. For those PNMs who have not engaged in pre-recruitment efforts of securing recommendations, these short 20 minutes are their only chance to impress. Here the expression of femininity and the ideal sorority girl is critiqued as many of these girls, have limited time to make an impression about their potential fit with a chapter. Vicki, speaks of her frustration with using femininity as a membership selection criterion.

I was never really a huge fan of the definition of femininity when we were choosing PNMs, whether or not we would grade them because you got what, 20 minutes to talk to these girls so that, especially in the first couple rounds, it'd be a lot about their appearance so, if they didn't appear feminine enough or if they appeared that maybe something was off about their female nature... then they could be, not invited back. So that wasn't as great cause I feel like you didn't have enough time to really get to know the person, judge them by how they presented themselves and, especially if they haven't presented themselves well as a female. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

Vicki's description of how femininity is used as criteria for judging PNMs is sobering. In this short window, chapters determine who will fit with their membership and PNMs make decisions

about where they would feel comfortable. At the conclusion of the second day of Open House, PNMs will meet in their recruitment groups to make selections for the Philanthropy Round. This process entails PNMs selecting their top 12 chapters and ranking their bottom four chapters, from favorite to least favorite. Having provided insight into the first two days of a PNM's recruitment experience and the Open House Round, the Philanthropy Round will be discussed next.

**Philanthropy round.** Participation in the Philanthropy Round entails engaging in a selection process where the PNMs sorority selections are matched with sorority chapters' ranking of PNMs. Through this matching process,<sup>8</sup> PNMs have the possibility of attending up to 12 philanthropy events, however, an average number of matches for philanthropy events is between five and eight. While it is possible for a PNM to not receive any invitations from sororities to the Philanthropy Round, it is rare for a PNM to be released<sup>9</sup> at this point in the recruitment process. When it does happen, however, it is relatively small number. If a PNM does not receive any invitations to the Philanthropy Round, she will receive a phone call from her Sigma Rho Chi prior to the start of the Philanthropy events. Given that Sigma Rho Chis are disaffiliated from their chapter, they are not privy to why a PNM was not extended any invitations, however releases this early in the process are often a result of a low high school or college grade point average. Sigma Rho Chis are available and trained to support a PNM who finds herself in this position.

In the Philanthropy Round, PNMs wear coordinated shorts and sandals, with one of the two philanthropy t-shirts they received at Convocation. Because PNMs will be sitting on the floor at a many of the sorority houses, very short shorts and skirts are discouraged. Philanthropy

---

<sup>8</sup> A process which takes into account the preferences of both the PNMs and the sororities.

<sup>9</sup> No longer actively participating in sorority recruitment as a result of receiving no invitations to events.

parties are 30 minutes in length and start with door songs comparable to that of the Open House Round. Unlike Open House, however, PNMs are not with their recruitment group and are instead given an individual schedule based upon their matching. Similarly, at the beginning of each party, PNMs are lined up alphabetically and greeted by an active member of the sorority.

The Philanthropy Round allows PNMs to learn more about each chapter's national philanthropy and local community service partnerships. A tenant of fraternal organizations is service and this is how chapters share with PNMs their dedication to this value. During this round, chapters will typically show videos and make presentations. While chapters employ different approaches, they all use this time to get to know each of the PNMs better. During this round, PNMs are encouraged to ask questions of the active chapter members in an effort to see if they are a fit with the chapter. At the conclusion of these two days of philanthropy events, PNMs again meet with their Sigma Rho Chi group to make selections, this time for the Sisterhood Round. Having detailed the Philanthropy Round, this next section will discuss the Sisterhood Round.

**Sisterhood round.** PNMs will select up to eight chapters to attend for the Sisterhood Round. If they attended 9 to 12 events for the Philanthropy Round, they are asked to rank any remaining chapters from favorite to least favorite. For those PNMs, who attended eight or less chapters, they select all chapters as an option for the Sisterhood Round. PNMs selections are then matched with sorority chapters' rankings to determine Sisterhood Round invitations. Through the matching process, it is possible for a PNM to receive invitations to a maximum of eight chapters for the sisterhood round, but the majority of PNMs will receive invitations for three to five chapters. While it is rare for PNMs to be released during the Philanthropy Round, the odds increase for the Sisterhood Round. Consequentially, there are PNMs who do not receive

invitations from any chapters for the Sisterhood Round, and subsequently are released from the process. If a PNM does not receive any invitations to the Sisterhood Round, she will receive a phone call from her Sigma Rho Chi prior to the start of the Sisterhood events. Given that Sigma Rho Chis are disaffiliated from their chapter, they are not privy to the reason a PNM was not extended any invitations; however, they are available and trained to support a PNM who finds herself in this position. While not exclusive to Grade Point Average (GPA) issues, releases at this point in the process are often the result of not meeting the recommended 3.0 GPA minimum required by majority of the chapters for membership. Reputation can also play a part in the membership selection process, resulting in negative consequences for those PNMs having deviated from what is deemed normative femininity and acceptable feminine behavior.

It is during the Sisterhood Round that we also see some women voluntarily withdrawing from the process after receiving their invitation schedule and realizing it does not include invitations from their favorite chapter(s). When this happens, PNMs are encouraged by their Sigma Rho Chi to stay in the process and give all remaining chapters a chance, however, some PNMs will chose to withdraw from recruitment at this point. At this stage the Sigma Rho Chi is a valuable asset. For many of these girls, this may be the first real rejection they have encountered. For these PNMs, Sigma Rho Chis serve as an advocate, encouraging them to trust the process and continue to learn more about the chapters they still have as an option, rather than dropping out of the process.

The Sisterhood Round is replacing what previously was known as the Skit Round. NPC, in an effort to move to a more values-based recruitment, officially abolished in 2016 the use of skits and elaborate costumes in the recruitment process. In the early 1990's, NPC made a similar push to do away with skits, which had morphed into elaborately staged large-scale productions.

This effort was not initially well received and many schools continued to perform skits until very recently. In place of the Skit Round, many schools have implemented what is known as Values or Sisterhood Day. The purpose of this round is to communicate to PNMs, the chapter's definition of sisterhood. Through videos and conversations, sorority members share their sentiments about what sisterhood means to them.

More formal than the previous two rounds, PNMs typically wear a nice dress with wedges, high heels or flats for the Sisterhood Round. Taking place over two days, at the conclusion of their last Sisterhood event, PNMs will again meet with their recruitment groups to make selections for the Preference Round. Having provided background on the Sisterhood Round, the last and final round, Preference is discussed next.

**Preference round.** The Preference Round is the final round of recruitment and often referred to simply as Pref. In the selection process for this round, PNMs who attended four or more chapters for the Sisterhood Round, will select their top three chapters and rank any remaining chapters, from favorite to least favorite. PNMs who attended three or less chapters for the Sisterhood Round will select all remaining chapters. Of those released throughout the formal recruitment process, the majority of releases happen at this point. Of note is that all PNMs invited to a chapter's Preference event must be included on their bid list. For this reason, chapters will release any and all PNMs, who not meet their chapter specific membership standards (i.e. GPA, involvement, recommendations, reputation, etc.). If a PNM does not receive any invitations to the Preference Round, she will receive a phone call from her Sigma Rho Chi prior to the start of the Preference events. Given that Sigma Rho Chis are disaffiliated from their chapter, they are not privy to the reason a PNM was not extended any invitations; however, they are available and trained to support a PNM who finds herself in this position.

Of note is that for many inter/national organizations an invitation of a legacy to the Preference Round requires that a PNM be listed high enough on the chapter's bid list that she would match during regular Bid Matching. Consequently, if a chapter is not interested in pledging a legacy, the legacy will not be invited back to that chapter for the Preference Round. As a result of this membership selection requirement, a large number of PNMs voluntarily withdraw from the process upon receiving their invitation schedule, which does not include invitations from their favorite chapter(s) or legacy chapter.

Given that the Preference Round is the most formal of all four rounds, PNMs will wear high heels with a nice dress; similar to what one might see at an evening wedding. Preference Round parties are 50 minutes in length and PNMs can attend up to three parties. As the occasion is more elegant and solemn, this is the first and only round in which PNMs are not greeted with door songs. Depending on the chapter, during the Preference Round, PNMs will either participate in or observe a Preference Ceremony. During Preference, active members of the sorority will talk about what their chapter means to them personally and why they choose to become a member. As a result of these conversations, emotions are high and PNMs often cry knowing that they will soon make their final selections. After participating in the Preference Ceremony, PNMs have the chance to talk privately with an active member of the sorority. During this time, the member may share what sisterhood means to her personally and why she decided to join her sorority. When asked about feminine practices within her sorority that are particularly meaningful, Ginny, a senior student, who is the events coordinator for her sorority, offered the following statement:

I think the ones that are meaningful to me are definitely our Preference Day. We all wear the same color dresses, no makeup and which seems to me very pretty, very emotional songs as that'd be one of the main ones that I think of a positive connotation. (Ginny, senior, events coordinator)

After their last party, PNMs walk in silence to complete their final selections. Different than the previous three rounds, final selections consist of completing and signing the Membership Recruitment Acceptance Binding Agreement (MRABA), a binding contract that is in effect for one calendar year. Per NPC Policy, if a PNM matches and receives a bid to a sorority that she listed on her MRABA, then she cannot pledge another sorority on that campus for one calendar year (National Panhellenic Conference, 2015). As a result of this policy, some PNMs choose to not maximize their options, thereby not listing every chapter they visited during the Preference Round.

A PNM has several options related to her final selections. First, she has the option to not complete her MRABA and withdraw from recruitment. Second, a PNM can list all sororities whose Preference events she attended, knowing that she could match with any one of the chapters listed on her MRABA. This is called maximizing her options. At this point she will rank all the sororities she attended for the Preference Round, in order of favorite to least favorite. Finally, she can list fewer chapters than Preference events she attended, with the understanding that by not maximizing her options, she may not receive a bid on Bid Day. USouthern has a policy in place that guarantees a PNM a bid for membership, if she makes it to the Preference Round, attends all events she is invited to during recruitment, and lists all chapters that she attended for Preference on her MRABA. This policy does not guarantee that a PNM will receive her first or second choice; only that she will match to a sorority that she attended during the Preference Round. Once a PNM's selections have been submitted, she cannot make any changes to her MRABA. Following Preference events, sororities also submit their final new member selections and the process of bid matching ensues in preparation of Bid Day. Having outlined the Preference Round and the MRABA, the next section will detail Bid Day.

**Bid day.** Through Bid Matching, PNMs are matched with a chapter based on the PNMs order of preference and the Chapters ranking. For those PNMS who did not match through the process of regular Bid Matching and did not maximize their options, they are released from the process. Any PNMs who are released are notified by their Sigma Rho Chi prior to the start of Bid Day activities. As a result, if a PNM does not receive a phone call, she knows that she has received a bid for membership and should report to the stadium at the scheduled time. In anticipation of receiving the coveted sorority jersey on Bid Day, PNMs will wear a tank top, shorts and comfortable shoes. After arriving at the stadium, PNMs report to their recruitment group, where their Sigma Rho Chi hands them a sealed manila envelope containing their bid card. Upon receipt of this envelope, PNMs are instructed to sit on the envelope until the bid opening ceremony. Once all PNMs have arrived at the stadium, Bid Day officially starts with a “Welcome” by members of the USouthern Panhellenic Executive Board. Sigma Rho Chis, Judicial Board members, and Panhellenic Executive Board then participate in the annual tradition of the sorority affiliation reveal. Following this activity, PNMs are instructed to open their manila envelopes reveling their sorority bid, resulting in a massive squeal that can be distinctly heard outside the stadium. PNMs are then divided into their new sorority chapters and released from the stadium, where they run to their new sorority houses. Greeted at their new house by active members, PNMs are given the coveted Bid Day jersey emblazoned with their new sorority letters, along with a Bid Day bag containing sorority items. PNMs will wear their new sorority jersey over their tank top and join their new member class for pictures on the front lawn of their new sorority house. Following photos with their new member class and active chapter members, PNMs and their parents or guardians, will join chapter members for

refreshments at the sorority house. Depending on the chapter, PNMs will leave for a new member retreat either on Bid Day or the following day.

While PNMs have a high likelihood of joining a Panhellenic sorority at USouthern through the recruitment process, historically 92% of girls who participate in the Open House Round have received a bid over the last three years; it is a competitive process, that is mentally, physically, and emotionally draining. Following the excitement of Bid Day, the new member experience commences. The next section details the expectations of girls to be involved in their first year of sorority membership at USouthern.

**First year.** Upon acceptance of a bid for membership, a potential new member officially becomes a new member of her sorority. As a new member at USouthern, one can expect the first semester to be the busiest, as validated by Vicki, who insists “freshmen were expected to go to everything.” Vicki goes on to share her thoughts as to the importance of being present at events, “I definitely think it was important for my freshman year to get me plugged in, that it was that expectation that you can't miss anything.”

In addition to participating in required events like new member meetings and chapter meetings; new members may also be required to complete a specific number of study hall hours and participate in a certain number of philanthropy events, sisterhood activities, and Greek-wide programs. While optional, new members can anticipate attending various social events throughout the year. A new member can also expect to participate in ritual ceremonies, which represent one's transition through the various stages of the sorority experience.

So it was very structured my freshman year with planned activities. You had breakfast, lunch, and dinner. You don't have to go to every meal but you'd have meetings with your pledge class and your new member educator every week and you'd have, social events you'd go to with your sorority and study hall hours so definitely my most involvement would probably be freshman year (Carrie, senior, treasurer).

***Pledging.*** Within a few days of accepting a bid, a new member will participate in a formal pinning (or pledging) ceremony, in which she will commit to being a new member of the sorority and pledge to uphold the standards of membership. In recognition of her commitment, she will receive a pin, which signifies that she is pledging her sorority. Following the pinning ceremony, the new member will begin the process of new member education.

***New member education.*** New sorority members will participate in the new member education process, a program in which a new member learns about the history, mission, and values of her sorority. Prescribed by the Inter/national organization and overseen by local alumnae, the new member education period for Panhellenic sororities can last anywhere from four weeks to an entire semester. Many sororities also have an initiated member, commonly referred to as a new member educator, whose primary responsibility it is to guide the new members through the new member education process. Often a combination of both online training modules and in-person education sessions, the purpose of the new member education program is to educate the new member about the organization's values and history. During this process, new members are also taught the responsibilities of membership as well as the expectations and standards of the sorority. According to Joy, a senior student who is the president of her sorority, "when you're a new member in a sorority, they lay out ground rules and values of that particular sorority. You learn the creed; you learn what everything stands for, for your specific sorority." The new member experience culminates in what is known as Initiation.

***Initiation.*** Initiation is ritual ceremony in which a new member takes a formal pledge or vow to uphold the values and ideals of the sorority. While specific requirements for initiation are dependent upon the sorority, on a broad level, a new member at USouthern can anticipate being

required to meet the following: maintain full-time student status, completion of the new member program, current on financial obligations, and adherence to chapter standards and policies.

Written by the sorority's founders or early members, the most sacred of the ritual ceremonies is the Initiation ceremony, a new member's formal induction into the chapter (Callais, 2002). Intended to introduce and teach a new member the meaning and significance of the sorority's symbols, Greek letters, and mottos; Initiation is the final step in the process of becoming a full-fledged member of the sorority (Callais, 2002). While Initiation rituals are specific to an organization's standards and values, the ceremony itself may involve the use of special clothes, ritual items, candles, and a ritual book (Callais, 2002). During the Initiation ceremony, the rituals of the sorority are disclosed to the new member, who will take an oath to keep the secrets of the organization and uphold the standards of membership (Callais, 2002). Once initiated, an individual is permitted to wear the badge of the sorority and is provided all the rights and privileges associated with sorority membership (Callais, 2002). While Initiation will typically occur at the end of the first semester, the following activities take place for new members throughout the first year.

***Study hours.*** As part of the new member process, many Panhellenic sororities at USouthern have a mandatory study hall requirement for new members. In an effort to promote a culture of academic success and reinforce good study habits as well as personal responsibility, new members must complete a specific number of study hall hours per week. Carrie describes what she perceives as the benefits of study hours.

[I]t's kind of like you're taken into sorority life, from zero to 100 very quickly and that was the scary part about it...It was overwhelming at first but it was also nice because sororities have structured study hours so that made me work on homework and not be on my phone, not go to gym, not do anything else, take a nap. (Carrie, senior, treasurer)

Typically held in an academic classroom, at the chapter house, or in the library; study hall is proctored in the evenings from 5-8pm Monday through Thursday.

***Eating at the house.*** One of the perks of joining a sorority with a full-service kitchen in the chapter house, is the opportunity to share meals with sorority sisters. Eating together promotes community and togetherness, so all members, even those not residing in the house, are encouraged to eat at the house as often as possible. Participating in meals at the sorority house is a fundamental way of engaging in sorority membership.

For these lucky new members, there is no longer a need to take their meals in the University's dining halls. Since meals are included in sorority membership dues, new members' University meal plans are downgraded to allow them to eat at their sorority house. A new member, therefore, can expect to eat approximately fourteen meals a week, which includes breakfast, lunch and dinner Monday through Thursday and breakfast and lunch on Friday at her sorority house. Unless warranted by a special occasion, meals are typically not offered Friday evening through Sunday evening. While many sorority houses have what is known as a snack/weekend kitchen, which includes staples like bread, bagels, peanut butter, yogurt, fruit, and granola; members on the weekends, for the most part, prefer to eat out at local restaurants with friends.

***Social events.*** While technically considered optional, there exists unspoken obligations and a perceived pressure for new members to participate in chapter social events like date parties and swaps as well as attend fraternity parties. Hosted by the sorority at a local restaurant, bar or event venue; a date party is a social event specifically for members and their dates. Depending upon organizational policies, each sorority member, is allowed to bring at least one guest. A swap, on the other hand, is a co-sponsored social event between a fraternity and sorority.

Typically held on a Thursday night at either a fraternity house or at a local restaurant, bar, or event venue; a swap can include all chapter members or be limited to just new members.

Using a rave-theme as an example, Emily, a senior student who is president of her sorority, describes a swap from the point of preparation through the end of the event. Of importance is her mention of the word pre-game. Frequently used by USouthern fraternity and sorority members to mean drinking alcohol before the event, a pre-game is an informal get together of a group of friends that generally involves hanging out, listening to music, and drinking alcohol.

If it's a rave, everyone will make their shirt the day before on the patio of the sorority house and then hang them up in the laundry room. You go watch the pre-game, go to the swap, hang out with your friends there, and then come back to the [sorority] house.  
(Emily, senior, president)

While date parties and swaps are inherently different, alcohol is synonymous with both, as is typically the presence of a theme, as previously described by Emily. If the social event is themed (e.g., Toga, 80's, Famous Couples) then there is an expectation that members dress accordingly. For new members, who have a strong desire to fit in with their sorority, there can be immense pressure to please the active members.

This expectation is described by Katherine, a senior student who served as a Panhellenic officer. In her narrative below, she outlines the socialization of new members by initiated sisters and describes the process of getting ready for swaps as ritualistic.

When I was a freshman you would get ready for a swap to go to a fraternity house, usually all the freshmen or, not all the freshmen but, a big group would go to some sophomore or junior's house to get ready and they'd help you pick out an outfit and get ready with you there. So that was a big ritual my freshman year. And then my sophomore year, you would do the same for the freshmen, you know, it wasn't about us anymore but we'll be taking the freshmen to go, help them pick out an outfit or help them get ready.  
(Katherine, senior, panhellenic officer)

For Shelby, a junior student who is the vice president of her sorority, there is considerable effort and intention required of new members in relation to expectations of dress at social events. Of note is her mention of need for new members to impress and stand out.

They plan out their outfits and they try really hard on making them impress the boys and also impress their sisters and look the best in whatever the outfit is. So if it's a toga theme, they try to wrap it a different way and not the normal anymore. So I think standing out is one of the biggest things that we've seen. (Shelby, junior, vice president)

Ginny echoes Shelby sentiments, talking about the expectation that new members go all out and buy into the party theme. Ginny also describes the pressure that new members feel to dress provocatively and put comfort secondary to that of looks.

Oh, my goodness. The number of times I've been called a slut and a whore in relation to a swap--on the way there, on the way back into the dorm, out there--all by men. Obviously, our own women were not that crude but, in, general you were ... expected to dress pretty provocatively and also to really buy into the theme, which is not always my thing. I'm not a costume person that much. So you were expected to look like whatever was going to be the norm at that party. If you wanted to dress down, that would be somewhat frowned upon. And dressed down just in terms of not totally going all out for the theme. Comfort was generally expected to be secondary behind your looks. (Ginny, senior, events coordinator)

Taylor, while candid about her dislike for swaps, adds an interesting perspective. For her, participation in swaps was more about the opportunity to spend time with her new sorority sisters, versus impressing a fraternity member.

I would definitely go to swaps almost every Thursday. I was not a huge swap person. I didn't really care for them. I don't know why. But I would definitely try and go just to get close with my pledge sisters and the off chance of I'd meet a boy in a fraternity house. (Taylor, junior, new member educator)

In addition to attending social events hosted by her sorority there is also the expectation that a new member attends fraternity parties, which are typically hosted Thursday through Saturday.

I definitely think a fraternity party is kind of an experience you're probably not going to get anywhere else. I mean ... I can't imagine another, you know, outside of college, a

time where it's just a huge house or a venue just filled with college-aged students. [I]t's definitely something that's very fun but, in terms of, that ever being the norm, probably not likely. You kind of know what to expect when you go to a fraternity party. It's a lot of people. (Katherine, senior, panhellenic officer)

While some of these parties are held at local restaurants, bars and event venues; majority take place at the fraternity house, either outside in the yard or in what is known as the band room, a designated space within the fraternity house for social events. Typically opening up into the back courtyard, band rooms at USouthern often come equipped with a stage, a bar, and a state of the art sound and lights system. While events held in the band room are understandably referred to as band parties, the terminology for events held in the front or back yard can vary depending on location, season, or time of day. For example, a party held during the spring semester in the front yard, might be called a front yard party or a spring party, depending upon the chapter. If the party was held during the day in the front yard, it would most likely be referred to as a 'darty,' which is short for day party. Regardless of the name, when it comes to fraternity parties, one can almost guarantee that alcohol will be present and readily available. Allison, a senior student who serves as a panhellenic officer, describes her typical experience when attending fraternity parties with her sorority sisters. In her narrative we can see that boys are considered, however, other factors are more heavily weighted in preparing for these parties.

We used to go to fraternity parties a lot and we would go when they had band parties, and if we knew somebody in that fraternity, we'd kind of go early so we could stake out our spot near the stage or, upstairs on the balconies of the fraternities where we'd have the best view. I don't even remember logistics, [it] definitely involved drinking and just hanging out with mostly girls rather than boys because there was not that many boys in the fraternity but there were hundreds of girls smashing, in this little tiny area near the band. I can recall hanging out with my girlfriends more than any guys at these parties. If we were going to a fraternity party, definitely dress for the occasion so that would be probably not your nicest pair of shoes cause you're probably going to get stepped, something you can sweat in because it's going to be very hot, and shorts and a shirt or something like that. But definitely something that you want to look good in, you don't want to go in a t-shirt or, a sweatshirt or anything like that. You would definitely want to

dress like you're going to see some boys so you want to look good. (Allison, senior, panhellenic officer)

***Fitting in.*** Participants narratives overwhelmingly illustrate the desire of new members to fit in with their sorority. Carrie, a senior student who was treasurer for her sorority, talks about how she would spend money, without consideration, to accomplish this effort: “I think when I first was a freshman, I just wanted to fit in. I would just buy clothes and not think a thing about it.” Through consumerism, Carrie used money to accomplish her goal of fitting in. Vicki reinforces this notion by talking about how fitting in requires a different outfit for every event: “You need to know what you're wearing and then it's also a very high expectation that you'll look different for every event as well, no outfit repeated” (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman). Allison similarly details how sorority girls feel a certain pressure to fit in with the sorority’s desired image.

[W]hen you're a freshman and you have no idea what being in a sorority means. You want to dress appropriately; you want to act appropriately. I remember freshman year, I wanted to abide by the rules perfectly so I would shower every day, wear a full face of makeup every single day. I would not leave my dorm with my wet hair ever. I went to the campus bookstore and bought the biggest t-shirt they had before my sorority specific ones could come in. So I wanted to fit this mold. (Allison, senior, panhellenic officer)

Allison further describes how meeting the expectations of fitting in included buying new clothes and application of makeup, both of which support and reinforce active consumerism. She also indicates that her desire to fit in is associated with her eagerness to be considered for leadership opportunities within her chapter. The quote below demonstrates that her desire to be a chapter leader motivated her behavior in dress and appearance.

I wanted to get involved in my chapter and wanted to be a leader in my chapter, I couldn't be the girl that left the house with wet hair every day and didn't wear makeup and looked horrible and didn't dress appropriately, you couldn't do that if you wanted to be well liked. (Allison, senior, chief panhellenic officer)

**Subsequent years.** While fitting in is a prominent theme for new members in their first year of membership, participants' narratives illustrate that the salience of sorority membership changes over time. There exists a distinct transition from freshman year to senior year, with membership having the most meaning the first two years as detailed by Carrie, a senior:

[D]efinitely my most involvement would probably be freshman year and sophomore year. Sophomore year, it kind of slacks off a little bit but you also have a little [sister] ... a girl that comes in in the freshman class so you're a little bit more involved in that pledge class too and there's a lot expected of you to take care of her. Junior/senior year, [I was] not as much involved. I took the leadership path outside of my sorority. [I]t was more kind of different avenues on campus rather than my sorority house all the time. I think requirements of member definitely slow down as you get older, especially senior year, there's not that much at all. (Carrie, senior, treasurer)

As new members, freshmen have a need and desire to fit in, which continues well into their sophomore year. Katherine's, a senior student who served as a panhellenic officer, narrative expands upon Carrie's example and adds details about the desire of freshman and sophomore members to fit in.

My freshman and sophomore year, I was extremely involved in my chapter. I loved going to all of our sisterhood events, anything we were doing. I still do but, my freshman and sophomore year, that was extremely important to me as I was still kind of searching out my friend group and trying to fit in with everyone around me. That was something I really enjoyed doing. (Katherine, senior, panhellenic officer)

Since the construction of self is fluid and continually evolving, over time, the importance of sorority membership may lessen. By junior and senior year, unless a sorority member has specific chapter leadership responsibilities or she lives in the chapter house, she will likely start attending fewer and fewer events, eventually becoming less engaged. Katherine provides an example of this, saying:

My junior/senior year, [I] kind of didn't necessarily drop off, I just focused my attention to other aspects. When I became involved [outside] my chapter, I was still very close to my friends but I wouldn't go to as many chapter events. I was usually busy doing something else or there were other people I wanted to hang out with or other events I wanted to go to. (Katherine, senior, panhellenic officer)

Emily details the challenges that sorority leaders experience as they try and engage junior and senior members to be actively involved in chapter events. Her narrative further supports Carrie and Katherine's statements about older members not being as involved in chapter activities.

That was really the most stressful thing when I was president, getting people to participate in events because I feel like, once you get past freshman/sophomore year, you're kind of just in the sorority for the social lifestyle and so people didn't realize that you had to contribute to the sorority to get something out of it rather than just parties and so I had a really hard time motivating my chapter to like go to our philanthropy events, go to community service events, go to campus events, whether they were like speakers for Greek points or like the basketball games where you're being invited to go to. It was really, really hard to encourage people to participate. (Emily, senior, president)

Emily's struggles detail the evolution of sorority members as they explore their own identity independent of the chapter, which often involves finding a role for themselves via other avenues. This change in attitude toward the chapter and fitting in is often expressed in participant's discussions of outlined expectations of dress, appearance and presentation.

Carrie's narrative provides recognition of this transition during her time on campus.

Now, I'm a lot more frugal and I'm a lot more picky about what I wear. I like to wear things I can wear over and over again. I think it's really just evolving as a person. I didn't really know who I was when I came here [...] I'm trying to look back on it. I guess I was more susceptible to wearing what other people wore freshman and sophomore year. Now if I see that on campus these types of wedges are popular, I'm more like is it really worth it to buy those cause they're probably going to be out of style in six months. It's more about wearing what I'm comfortable in and what I think I'm going to wear and use the most. (Carrie, senior, treasurer)

This transition not only describes her move towards individuality, it is also indicative of a shift toward less pressure to follow societal trends around consumer culture. The need to conform lessens over time, and members embrace a more individualized style as compared to the very defined expectation of femininity required of new members.

For Allison, this shift is not so clear cut. While her narrative describes a desire to still be identified as a member of her sorority, it also indicates a change in attitude about the importance of conformity.

So I wanted to fit this mold and, obviously, I still try to fit in because I'm still wearing the uniform [oversized t-shirt and Nike shorts]. But I think I also don't really care, if I'm not wearing mascara that day or if I don't shower every single day or if I leave my house without doing my hair or shaving my legs every day. [F]reshman year, it's like your expectations... you had to be that perfect little model initiate and now, I'm a senior, nobody's going to tell me how to do anything. (Allison, senior, panhellenic officer)

This narrative clearly represents Allison's shift in attitude from a desire to be a model initiate to that of an individual. Carrie provides a good summary of the developmental nature of the sorority environment, describing what she feels is a transition from girl to woman.

It's more of a mindset but I feel like when I first [...] came to the university and joined a Greek organization, almost felt as though, I was just 18, and I almost felt that I was just a girl. I had no idea what I was getting myself into. But [...] when my time ended after my four years, I felt like I'd developed into a woman through my sorority. I'd kind of been able to flourish, as a leader on campus so I definitely think it was more of a transition period. I think when I kind of came in, I thought of myself as a sorority girl but then my mindset definitely changed by junior/senior year. I felt more confident that I'd grown up a lot and had a lot of different experiences that changed the person that I was. It depends on the person too. Many sorority girls, sorority women don't really think about the difference between the two. I guess I never thought about the difference until you brought it up but I think, for me, it is a significant difference just because when you're 18 to 22, when you're in your sorority and your Greek organization, it's a time where you learn a lot and you're growing a lot and it's a huge transition period. (Carrie, senior, treasurer)

Carrie further recognizes that this development is not ubiquitous, it depends on the individual is facilitated through experiences associated with sorority involvement.

***Living in the house.*** Sorority houses at USouthern can sleep anywhere from 40-80 members and have a fulltime live-in house director, whose responsibility it is to manage the upkeep and operation of the house, including oversight of the full service kitchen. Sorority houses vary in their sleeping accommodations including sleeping porches with community style bathrooms or single/double bedrooms with either community style or Jack-and-Jill bathrooms.

Living in the house is a very interactive engaging environment for these sorority girls. Katherine expresses how living in the house enabled her to stay connected with her chapter throughout her collegiate experience.

So I always felt very connected to my like chapter because I lived in the house. I've lived in the house for three years. [T]hat was always my biggest way to stay connected with everyone. [O]ver the past couple of years, chapter events kind of became less important for me as I was involved with other Greek activities. (Katherine, senior, panhellenic officer)

Since less than a quarter of the chapter members can live in the house based on the total chapter size and capacity of the house, living in a sorority house is competitive. Unique to USouthern is that mostly juniors and seniors live-in. As a result, there is selection criteria for sorority members to have this privilege. The process takes into account a sorority member's GPA as well as leadership position within the chapter. With such a small portion of the chapter membership able to live-in, keeping members involved and engaged in the chapter after their freshman year (when they are living on campus) is a challenge. Since juniors and seniors, who are not in formal leadership position do not live-in, this population, even if they are still dues paying members, is most likely to disengage from active participation. This is the population Emily laments as not actively participating in chapter activities.

***Leadership positions.*** Sororities leadership positions are primarily held by seniors, juniors and to a smaller degree sophomores. Due to the size of chapters at USouthern, there are limited leadership position opportunities for members. Chapter leadership positions are elected in the fall but take office at the beginning of the spring semester. This calendar is tied to the recruitment cycle which was outlined in detail earlier in this chapter. There are requirements to hold leadership positions, and while these requirements do vary by chapter, in general they call for good academic, financial, and social standing.

Examples of typical leadership positions within chapters include president, vice president, treasurer/finance, recruitment chair, new member educator, social chair, house manager, and panhellenic delegate. Each sorority will also have leadership positions unique to their chapter, such as various committee chairs. Beyond these typical leadership positions, there will be a variety of ways for chapter members to be involved, such as serving on the judicial/standards board, however, these leadership roles may not warrant their living in the house.

The previous sections outlined how sorority girls are judged and evaluated on their femininity. This is clear through the discussion on recruitment and how PNMs are given 20 minutes to demonstrate if their femininity will fit with a particular chapter. Participants recognize how the status quo is perpetuated through formal recruitment and insight reveals how a certain form of femininity is expected. USouthern sorority girls are evaluated by how they present themselves in concert or in resistance to that expectation.

While sorority girls are expected to embody a certain type of femininity, the sorority also spends a significant amount of time teaching members how to be the ideal sorority girl, meaning to embody a certain form of femininity. Looking forward, the next sections will detail how sororities look for this ideal femininity in their new members and use formal and informal practices to teach and reinforce this idealized image. How sororities look for the right girl will now be detailed.

### **Looking for the Right Girl**

Participants' comments are consistent with literature discussing the fluid notion of being a girl. Participants had a difficult time with the question "what it meant to be a girl." Of note, is that several asked to come back to the question, so they could think more about what this concept

meant to them. Emily in her response, is very contemplative about what it personally means for her to be a girl. She provides a large number of contextual elements that she is aware of and deals with as a girl in today's society.

Being a girl to me, I take it very, I don't want to say seriously but, I'm very proud of it and I know that there's a lot of obstacles against me, whether it's the wage gap or, law school leans heavily toward males; women are seen as the underdog and that kind of excites me. But I think there's so much power in being a girl embracing your feminine features and women are physically, they are weaker but mentally they are so much stronger, they can handle anything that comes their way. (Emily, senior, president)

Her highlighting of the “wage gap” and being an “underdog” shows the challenges participants are aware of. Further, this socialization, of being a girl starts early; as indicated by Ginny, who describes the early development of these societal expectations.

A differing level of societal expectation on a day-to-day basis and the thing about being a girl that I can remember long before hitting puberty is that I am ... have always been expected to be nice to everyone, sweet, polite, to not correct others, to not stand out, especially not to stand out at the expense of overshadowing someone else, to never put myself too far forward is what I think of a lot being a woman. Now of course, I don't think that these are rational expectations and they're also a product of the fact they I come from a very small, very traditional town. But there're also plenty of upsides. I am often looked to as a light to be around, a supporter, someone who is loyal, who is comforting, who is steady. Just waking up and being female, I'm expected to be somewhat of a rock to society. I'm not transient the way men are expected to somewhat be. (Ginny, senior, events coordinator)

In looking for the right girl, formal recruitment uses an elaborate process where sorority chapters portray a highly stylized image of themselves. Conversely, PNM's also engage in an overly regulated presentation of self that signifies their ability to fit with a chapter's image. This begins on both sides with recruitment videos and letters of recommendation. The formal recruitment process is discussed by the participants, who remark on the fact that it is a large component of their sorority experience. The participants detail the impact of recruitment on them as a new member as well as the work and effort involved as a sorority leader in preparation for this annual event. Of note, participants' discussion about how recruitment perpetuates femininity.

From the sorority leadership perspective, Vicki explained the traditional feminine aspects of the formal recruitment process.

When you talk about being a woman, when you have to pick all those outfits, it's a very controlled definition of femininity that you need to wear this dress. And dry shampoo's not going to cut it for Icewater Tea<sup>10</sup>. You need to actually shower and stuff like that, not that people are not practicing proper hygiene, you get the point. That very defined image of the woman as well during recruitment was definitely something that I became more aware of cause it was so controlled for that week, especially when you're on the other side of it. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

Vicki's discussion about dress and preparation, details the feminine constraints embedded within the process of formal recruitment. As a leader, her recognition of how recruitment reinforces traditional definitions of femininity is illuminating. Rebecca adds to this narrative by outlining the expectations of current sorority members to represent their chapter in the formal recruitment process. When asked about these expectations, Rebecca, a sophomore student who is recruitment chair of her sorority, explained:

We're expected to wear dresses during all of rush. That's obviously, a pretty feminine attire choice. We don't require them to wear makeup but expect them to look nice, have their hair and makeup, nails done (Rebecca, sophomore, recruitment chair).

Joy, on the other hand, provides important context about dress norms and standards that Potential New Members need to adhere to when participating in the formal recruitment process. Joy, a senior student who is president of her sorority, shares her perspective, saying:

I think there's a lot of girls who go through rush or women who go through rush that aren't into makeup and aren't into wearing dresses, so recruitment was a big shock for them when they had to wear a dress. It's because that's what sorority women do at USouthern, is wear dresses and maybe they were like whoa, that's not my cup of tea. There are a few girls who maybe enjoy sports and like being outdoors and there're definitely some girls who never want to get their hands dirty. So I think there are a few people I can think of right now that maybe when they came through were in for a wakeup call, when they had to wear a dress during recruitment. And nowadays, I don't think you

---

<sup>10</sup> Participants often refer to the Open House Round as Ice Water Tea, since the only beverage that can be served to PNMs is ice water.

have to wear a dress to go through recruitment. That's what's suggested but I think people are able to still be their own person, if they want to wear a romper or if they feel more comfortable in dress pants and a shirt or something like that (Joy, senior, president).

While Joy acknowledges that dress is an important element of the formal recruitment process, she also recognizes that this standard may be uncomfortable for certain girls, who do not readily embrace USouthern's traditional feminine norms. Further, Joy also recognizes that this standard is changing but that this may not be widely known to PNMs participating in formal recruitment. Vicki's narrative, however, provides a stark contrast to Joy's perception that there is flexibility in the PNMs dress code. Vicki illustrates this point, saying:

I was never really a huge fan of the definition of femininity when we were choosing PNMs, whether or not we would grade them because, you got what, 20 minutes to talk to these girls. Especially in the first couple rounds, it'd be a lot about their appearance. If they didn't appear feminine enough or if they appeared that maybe something was off about their female nature, then they could be, not invited back. That wasn't as great, cause I feel like you didn't have enough time to really get to know the person, judge them by how they presented themselves and, especially if they presented themselves well as a female. Girls who came in Converse were more likely to be turned away than a girl who came in nice wedges. So if sneakers could be seen as a more masculine shoe, then wedges, I'm sure you understand. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

Vicki is blunt about her assessment of her chapter's judgment related to a PNMs feminine expression, particularly during the initial stages of formal recruitment. She goes on to explain that because of the large number of girls that participate in formal recruitment, femininity is used as means for managing numbers. Vicki describes the membership selection process in this way:

So it's interesting how gender expression can then be evaluated into whether or not she can be a part of our sorority. I think sororities uphold really major feminine ideals in the fact that we sometimes feel the pressure to be the ideal woman, in a sense. So when we're doing recruitment, when you have so little time to get to know them, if you have any suspicion that she is not a part of that feminine ideal or at least doesn't seem like she could be early on, then it's very easy to let her go. We have to process so many girls and we've only got so many seats. I think it gets better as rush goes on, if girls who maybe are not as feminine in their gender expression make it into later rounds. Ironically, those girls typically do better, if they get past Pref cause then usually they're showing off more of their personality, if they made it that long. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

Vicki recognizes this is a subjective process that is dependent upon interpretation of feminine expression, in that those girls, who are not as feminine, but are invited back beyond the initial Open House Round of formal recruitment, do well once members are given the opportunity to know them. Vicki further reinforces the value placed on appearance and feminine ideals as a means of evaluation. She highlights that girls who adhere to traditional feminine norms do better in the formal recruitment process than those who do not, saying:

Girls who, know what to wear, know how to do their hair and really present this, magazine cover of feminine ideal are more likely to make it past Icewater Tea<sup>11</sup>. I think it's interesting to notice that. It's definitely a time, when we're looking at PNM's, their femininity is questioned almost off the bat, in a way that we don't typically consider one's womanhood for the rest of their membership other than, people sometimes stepping outside the norms. Whether that be they got a funky ear piercing or a nose ring or a lip tattoo. PNM's have to be the most feminine and that's something that's easier for us to process, she'll fit in here, she's already wearing the right shoes, her hair's in appropriate style, her makeup looks good, she's wearing the right amount of makeup, not too much, not too little, she seems knowledgeable about different types of feminine subjects. Small talk is awful, but you end up talking about what'd you do this summer, did [she do] something similar to you or what'd you do in high school. Oh, you were a cheerleader, half my sorority's cheerleaders. And these very feminine things are just very easy to identify. If you don't have enough or if you seem like you're going against that then it's hard to say that necessarily you'll be placed cause you're processing so many girls. So it's a lot easier, I think to just [say] this girl will fit in cause she fits in with my norm of what's a sorority girl. Physical appearance is huge. Probably one of the times that it's critiqued the most throughout your time of being Greek is when you're a PNM. Clothing, hair, shoes, makeup, tattoos, piercings, even scars sometimes could be questioned. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

These participants demonstrate how feminine norms are reinforced at the very beginning of the sorority process. While narratives clearly demonstrate the importance of appearance and physiological traits in recruitment, when asked to describe the ideal sorority girl, participants did not emphasize looks but instead focused on behavior characteristics, as corroborated by Emily.

[The] ideal sorority member is a dedicated, four-year member who is involved in other parts of campus in addition to her Greek affiliation. She holds her chapter to the highest

---

<sup>11</sup> Participants often refer to the Open House Round as Ice Water Tea, since the only beverage that can be served to PNM's is ice water.

standards and holds herself to the highest standard, very supportive of our chapter leadership, goes to chapter, goes to meetings, walks on campus and people are just like wow, what a great person. She's involved, she's nice, she's kind, she's fun, definitely fun, someone who can go out with others and have a good time in a very respectful way, isn't throwing up in the bathroom. [J]ust someone that people want to be around. Definitely academic expectations. She goes to class, she tries her hardest, makes good grades, has good relationships with her teachers. As far as the way she looks ... I think a sorority woman can look however they want. (Emily, senior, president)

Similar to Emily, Shelby's definition of an ideal sorority girl is not dependent upon dress or appearance. Rather Shelby's definition follows her chapter's creed, particularly with regard to four main points.

They [chapter] tell you exactly what the ideal sorority woman would be and would be like in general. So for us, we have different categories so there's like four points. One would be, education, one would be morals, high standing morals, one would also be your respect to others, and the last one is the way in which you uphold community service. [...] We all have different ways in which we dress and represent ourselves. But I think just as a full, complete sorority girl or a sorority woman, I think one of the biggest things that I could see is those couple points. I think all sororities have pretty much the same creed and it involves community service, having high morals, making sure that you are, academically sound, making sure that you are a leader. I think those are the biggest things that I want to see in sorority women when I go through this recruitment process, when we, basically interview thousands of people and when I look at them and I talk to them about stuff that they were involved in, what did you do, what do you want to do, that appeals to me versus talking about where you're from, do you like to horseback ride or do you like to surf or do you like to go shopping. I think it needs to be more narrowed and what do you want to do, what are your options, what would you bring to us in that sense so ... I think my ideal sorority girl would be part of those four main points. (Shelby, junior, vice president)

For Shelby, the recruitment process does not lend itself to identifying the ideal sorority girl. She recognizes and details the need to be intentional and purposeful in the limited time available, during the initial stages of recruitment. While Vicki has a similar sentiment to Shelby and Emily, she diverges in her portrayal, explicitly stating that her definition differs from that of her chapter.

See I guess for me; I think my definition differs from my sorority's definition. If I were to define the ideal woman, it would probably be someone who's confident and compassionate cause I think that compassionate is really unique to being a woman but I think is not as much valued in male communities. But then the confidence to do whatever that person wants so then this woman isn't bound by her compassions. Cause I see that as

being the downfall of some of my good friends who are leaders, caring for people. So willing to ask for what you want but sometimes people won't ask for it cause they're worried about other people's feelings. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

Vicki places high value on what she sees as uniquely female qualities. She also recognizes that in excess, this quality of compassion can be counterproductive and sees the ideal woman as someone who is caring but also willing to ask for what they want. The examples provided above show that leaders recognize the dissonance between what they see as an ideal sorority girl and an emphasis on stereotypical portrayals of femininity rewarded during the recruitment process. Having discussed challenges of finding the right girl, the next section will address how Panhellenic sororities teach femininity.

### **Teaching Femininity**

Participant narratives validated literature and research around sororities and their role in the active construction of feminine identities. While initial socialization of members traditionally takes place during the new member period, standards of femininity are reinforced to all members through the use of formal and informal practices. A discussion of the various practices used to communicate sorority ideals and standards of femininity were detailed by participants. Of particular importance, were guidelines given to new members in the sororities around dress, appearance, and presentation.

### **New Member Education Process**

It is during the four to twelve-week new member process that new members are formally taught the “rules” of femininity regarding adherence to standards of dress, appearance, and presentation. As mentioned earlier in the previous section, Shelby elaborates on how her sorority formally teaches expectations of membership to help new members achieve the “ideal sorority woman.”

I think it really starts off as a freshman when they go through their new member training sessions, they tell you exactly what the ideal sorority woman would be in general. So for us, we have different categories, there's like four points. One would be education, one would also be your morals, high standing morals, one would be your respect to others, and the last one is the way in which you uphold community service. (Shelby, junior, vice president)

While Shelby discusses the why and how, Emily provides an example of how her chapter annually communicates to its new members, the norms of dress and behavior. Emily also discusses how femininity is a regional construction through an example of a sorority sister, who transferred from a different university, where they did not have a similar emphasis on traditional southern femininity as practiced at USouthern.

We have a talk with our new members at the beginning of every year and we talk about what you should wear and how you should act and those are pretty basic. When we talk about what to wear, it's more about modesty rather than femininity. It's more about covering yourself up and knowing the dress code for every situation you're going to be in. And then as far as how to act, just manners. You are part of this esteemed organization and it was very selective, so you need to act like it. So telling new members to just have respect for yourself and for others. [...] So we had one girl transfer and we were just shocked by what she was wearing. We're like she's not a Psi Delt, like no Psi Delt would ever wear that but then we found out that's what they wore at her university, that's what was acceptable there. [...] because we're in the south and a traditionally classic Southern university, I think our femininity stems from the Southern way. (Emily, senior, president)

This difference in defining femininity and how it varies by region is an important element of its construction. On the other hand, Katherine addresses the challenge chapters' face in balancing the socialization of new members, while still allowing them individuality to express themselves.

I think each sorority here on campus definitely has a very strong internal kind of monitoring system that they try to explain to their women the importance of presenting your best self. I know in my chapter specifically, for the freshmen, that's a big topic, when they first come in. When date parties or swaps are coming up, anything like that .... to explain to them, the correct way that we want to be represented on campus and how we want to show ourselves to everyone else. I think most of the chapters do have a good system in place to try to do that. [...] So I think a lot of chapters are struggling right now to see a balancing act to allow people to express themselves and dress how they want but, at the same time, still hold the chapter standards to a high level. (Katherine, senior, panhellenic officer)

Joy, however, goes beyond what is taught, articulating why defining femininity for new chapter members is an important part of the teaching and socialization process; particularly with regard to communicating to new members that these standards of femininity situate members as part of the larger whole.

I think the overall message that they try to portray to new members is that you are representing everyone who came before you, everyone who'll come after you, that this is not just you having a good time in college, this is you making it, a new experience for yourself and developing the chapter to be better. You're taught that everything's bigger than yourself. So I think they try to use femininity [...] to empower you during your time. (Joy, senior, president)

These feminine expectations are recognized as regionally based and used to provide context about overall chapter values. In reviewing the teaching and socialization of sorority new members, the following thematic patterns emerged from participants' narratives: dress and appearance, public presentation, communal living, and academic success. These thematic patterns will be detailed in the following sections.

### **Dress and Appearance**

Dress and appearance have been discussed extensively throughout this chapter. Each round of formal recruitment has different dress and appearance expectations that have been previously described. Participants' narratives detail the reliance on dress and appearance in making first impressions about PNMs that ultimately influence matching with chapters. The new member's first year and a desire to fit in is grounded in dress and appearance, such as dressing properly for various social activities. Moving into subsequent years, older members used examples of their dress and appearance to demonstrate their identifying of self beyond their sorority membership. Recognizing the central nature of the dress and appearance theme in the formal recruitment round and beyond is important, as it provides context in understanding the

impact of the formal and informal practices chapters' employ to teach members about dress and appearance expectations.

**Fashion shows.** Many of USouthern's dress norms are communicated through fashion shows staged by sorority chapters. Shelby explains how fashion shows are used to teach new members about accepted feminine norms.

The new member coordinator sometimes will recommend [what] you should wear and should not wear here at USouthern. They do a fashion show and they say [...] don't wear big bows and don't wear pearls with T-shirts. I think it does sometimes freak the freshmen out who have already gone and purchased all this USouthern attire that they thought was cool. I know I did it, my parents bought me a bunch...and [the sorority said] you cannot wear it. (Shelby, junior, vice president)

Shelby's example of her chapter's prohibition of certain items underscores the impact of fashion shows. She recognizes that this new member socialization process can cause freshmen to "freak" as they learn how to "fit in" as a new member. It is important to recognize that this process has a purpose from the chapter's perspective. Allison provides a concise narrative about how and why this socialization takes place.

Well obviously the chapters tell their members how to represent their chapter, tell them what to wear, what not to wear. There's always fashion shows that new members get shown how to do their makeup, what is appropriate to wear to class in order to not embarrass their other sorority members if you're wearing your letters, things like that. I think that's as far as sororities will go. (Allison, senior, panhellenic officer)

While Allison only addresses limited aspects of instruction for new members, Taylor provides an in depth narrative that explains both the chapter's purpose for fashion shows and how she as a new member, experienced this socialization.

I was told by uppers to have a fashion show and to tell [new members] what to wear and what not to wear. I remember when I was a freshman, we went in and there was a fashion show and I remember them telling us little things. You can't wear camo and we can't wear crop tops. So little things like that, I was confused initially. When it became my turn and I was teaching it to the new members, I took a little bit different direction. I took it more as this is what you can expect when you're going out. I didn't tell them this is what you should wear, cause I don't think you should tell that. I don't think it's fair that we accept

these girls into our chapter and start just telling them what to wear, telling them how to change themselves. I don't think that's fair. I think there's a difference between guiding them and helping them and forcing them to do something. (Taylor, senior, new member educator)

Through the narrative above, Taylor is validating the use of fashion shows to teach new members about accepted dress codes and displays of femininity. Where Taylor's narrative deviates from Shelby's is in her adaption of the fashion show to communicate what to know versus what is required. While fashion shows are a more formal way of communicating a chapter's standards of femininity, trunk shows are an informal approach chapters use to convey appropriate displays of femininity.

**Trunk shows.** Trunk shows provide local designers or companies' space in the sorority house to sell, jewelry, clothing, accessories, and makeup. These private events perpetuate traditional feminine norms and encourage consumer behavior amongst sorority members. By sponsoring these events, chapters are clearly articulating their brand of femininity. As explained by Allison, "[T]runk shows come to our chapter and sell certain items. That might be a Mary Kay trunk show or a Kendra Scott trunk show and they sell their products out of our living room." Allison conveys an interesting perspective about the trunk show process, as she addresses the consumerism being brought into to her living room.

I don't necessarily usually attend those trunk shows. If I really want something Kendra Scott, then I'll go and get it. I don't feel the need for them to come to my house to sell their things, so that's not really that important to me (Allison, senior, panhellenic officer).

Her rejection of the chapter endorsed consumerism is important to note, however, it is not known if she has always felt this way about trunk shows. Regardless, trunk shows in and of themselves represent an informal chapter endorsement of an image and brand that for all intents and purposes is reflective of upper class, white femininity. While fashion and trunk shows can be seen as perpetuating classic feminine southern stereotypes, the sorority uniform at USouthern is a

fascinating example of how sorority girls redefine what femininity means for them in pursuit of their academic goals.

**Sorority uniform.** USouthern's sorority community has embraced the wearing of a ponytail, oversized T-shirt, and Nike shorts. Described by many of the participants as a "uniform," Carrie confirms that this attire has been normalized as the de facto dress code for sorority girls.

If you're in a sorority, especially freshman/sophomore year, you want to fit in cause, when you're 18 to 22, your self-esteem, my self-esteem was not high at all so I just wanted to fit in in any way I could. So I'd wear a T-shirt and shorts and just kind of blend in with all the other sorority girls. (Carrie, senior, treasurer)

Socialization of sorority members is explained through Joy's narrative of how, as a new member, she was introduced to the oversized t-shirt and Nike shorts. Joy came to USouthern wearing more form fitting clothes and smaller t-shirts, however, after an intervention from her Big Sister in the sorority; she was encouraged to embrace the sorority uniform<sup>12</sup>.

When I first got here, I was used to wearing small and medium sized T-shirts and everyone here wears Large and X-Large and I immediately started. My big told me oh, no, no, no, you want a big shirt, everyone wears it like that. My mom would make comments like you look like you don't have shorts on, or you look like you don't have pants on. I hate that you look like you just rolled out of bed with a huge t-shirt on. Now I'd never go back to that, I guess. So not that anyone told me, I guess my big kind of was like oh, you should order a larger shirt but I guess just societal pressures to want to adjust to Southern life since I'm not from here. (Joy, senior, president)

Rebecca elaborates on this expectation but also talks about how sorority girls dressing up for class; deviating from this casual norm, elicits attention and prompts questions about their activities for the day.

So I think a lot of times, sorority girls are expected to be in a big t-shirt and Nike shorts on the way to class. One thing I've noticed I've had to be dressed all semester in business casual. And every single time when I'm at the sorority house getting lunch people are like

---

<sup>12</sup> The uniform, which is a symbolic declaration of an individual's adherence to group norms and values, is used to identify group members from non-group members (Joseph and Alex, 1972). According to Joseph and Alex (1972), by reducing visible differences in a group, "the uniform suppresses individual idiosyncrasies in behavior and appearance," thereby promoting conformity (p. 723).

you look nice, where're you going. It's so weird that I have on a dress. It's just not normal to be dressed up nice whereas, independent girls dress nicer to class, even if it's just jeans and a top. Sorority girls think they have to dress like they just rolled out of bed for class. In terms of going out, I would say [sorority] girls are wearing wedges and skirts and nice tops and the [fraternity] boys are wearing t-shirts and shorts, as I always thought as weird. (Rebecca, sophomore, recruitment chair)

Similar observations about the regulating behavior of the t-shirt and Nike shorts were made by Vicki and Taylor. Taylor describes the need to explain non-adherence to the sorority uniform.

Specifically, on days that she assists with Greek life presentations, she takes the active measure of wearing her nametag to class; signifying that she is an executive board member and is functioning in an official capacity, thereby explaining why she is dressed up.

I think when people are going to class; people are really focused on going to class. It's very rare that you'll see somebody walking to class with full everything. Girls are like I haven't washed my hair for two weeks. For example, I had a [Greek life] presentation [for prospective students and their parents] directly after one of my classes and I have to go into class with my nice dress on, full face of makeup and that's weird. People don't do that. So I always wear my nametag, just to make sure everybody knows that I'm not just dressing up for fun, there's a reason I'm dressing up. (Taylor, junior, new member educator)

Vicki's narrative extends this observation, confirming that deviation or non-adherence to the sorority dress code prompts questions.

It's almost this expectation of a very certain physical persona that we're expected to portray. Like I swung by the sorority house for lunch, before I came to meet you, and people asked me why I was dressed up. I do not feel very dressed up today but there's part of that physical presentation. For the record, I'm wearing jeans. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

The above examples of attention given to sorority members who have deviated from the sorority uniform speak to the ubiquitous nature of the uniform. In discussions with participants, the purpose of the uniform as a mechanism of desexualizing the female body and differentiating “study time” from “going out time” was also introduced.

Taylor in the following quote details this phenomenon:

But that's not what class is for. It's not why people go to class. I think people don't care as much and, obviously, big t-shirts are accepted here, so I guess everybody just makes the most of that. I mean, I do. [W]hen I'm going to class, if there's a cute boy in my class, I'm not going to make myself look any different for class just cause there is a cute boy in there. I'm in there because I'm learning and I want to get a good grade. I want to get a degree and there's a time and a place for dressing up and getting boys' attention. I just don't think class is that place. (Taylor, junior, new member educator)

While not representative of all participants, a recognition and rejection of how dress sexualizes females by a few participants is noteworthy. Participants recognize that fraternity members, faculty, staff, and others on and off campus do not understand the broader social context of the t-shirt and Nike shorts sorority uniform. Vicki's narrative further supports this sentiment.

I think it's funny cause guys hate the big t-shirts or, at least in all the experiences that I've had, they're like I don't know why girls don't dress up for class or I only meet girls when I'm at the bar, it's the only time they look decent. But yet none of the sorority girls care, they're all dressed how I'm dressed right now with the big t-shirts, every single day and I think that's so funny. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

Despite judgment from external groups about the social acceptability of what is perceived as unfeminine attire, an emphasis on academic success and academic preparation is prioritized over perpetuating a feminine masquerade. Vicki continues to explain this position:

It's almost like a time that I'm not sexual, I'm just going to class, this is not a time that I'm really trying to [impress]... I mean, I've met men on campus in class but I feel like it is different, it's almost like a way to differentiate, now is study time and then I'm going out and I [will] look nice for your band party. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

Proud of their academic ability and accomplishments, sorority members are not afraid to highlight or advertise their scholastic success relative to their male peers. This uniform has become institutionalized by the entire Panhellenic community and is used according to Vicki, as a means to identify sorority members around campus.

[A]ll the sorority girls are wearing large t-shirts then, we're all identified as Greek. So even if we're not being identified necessarily as I'm a Beta Sigma or I'm an Eta Chi, I'm Greek. So I think it's another layer of that identity. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

According to Vicki, this non-feminine look is not about being lazy, rather, it is about comfort and placing academic success as a priority over heteronormative femininity. Vicki further elaborates on the purpose of the uniform by dismissing any notion that it is about being feminine.

I don't think it's supposed to be feminine. I think it's the ultimate I'm part of this tribe identifier. I've got this large piece of clothing that I could look like anything underneath so comfort is a factor that's being considered. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

Ginny expands on the concept of the sorority uniform and how it works as part of a tribe.

So I think women are, during the day, actually expected to actively try not to outshine each other, to not impress with their daytime apparel cause it would make all the other women look bad. "Why can't we just wear our comfy clothes and you not try to upstage us?" (Ginny, senior, event chairman)

The use of the uniform so as to not 'upstage' other sorority members can be seen as women not wanting to cause undue strife or tension in the community. This view is somewhat in conflict to the view that the use of the sorority uniform is to desexualize women in the classroom.

Regardless for the rationale behind the sorority uniform, sorority members overwhelmingly conform with traditional femininity in social settings outside the classroom. This transformation is discussed in the next section.

***Being a butterfly.*** Sorority members' metamorphosis from the sorority uniform into the feminine ideal in social settings, like swaps, fraternity parties, and bars, shows the socialization of members through formal and informal practices specific to accepted dress and appearance. For example, as discussed earlier, new members are formally educated through fashion shows and informally mentored by their big sisters through the process of getting ready in groups prior to social events. As outlined by Vicki, a dress code, or standard of appearance, is communicated to new members and is generally adhered to when participating in designated social activities.

Ironically, on campus, we have this butterfly persona, in the sense that sorority women specifically will wear these giant t-shirts all day, but then come out of their cocoons at

night with these beautiful outfits on, which I always find fascinating. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

Pressure to dress up for fraternity parties, Game Day, and going out to bars, shows a major dichotomy between a very casual approach to dress for class and maximum effort for social settings. Emily in the quote below, addresses the effort around “getting ready” as discussed earlier.

[For] football games, [you] dress up. When you go out, you would never go out in a t-shirt. If you're going to a fraternity house or a date party, you're looking very nice. (Emily, senior, president)

Taylor’s narrative validates Emily’s position, as she details the effort required of sorority members.

[G]etting dressed up is a huge part of our culture here. It's very rare that I'll see a lot of people at the bar with flats on. Girls are always head to toe, just completely done, completely ready, hair done, makeup done, just really nice outfits and heels. I think that's almost borderline expected. (Taylor, junior, new member educator)

Carrie’s recollection of an experience where she did not seemingly adhere to the dress code provides credence to Taylor’s narrative about expectations for dress and appearance.

I wore sandals one time to a bar and people laughed at me. I didn't really understand why that was a problem or like [wearing] a t-shirt. So guys'll wear t-shirts to bars and shorts but, if a girl wears a t-shirt, it's like you need to dress up when you go out, and you need to put on makeup, you need to straighten your hair. It's a little bit frustrating sometimes because I would love to go to a bar and I still do, go to a bar in t-shirts. (Carrie, senior, treasurer)

Carrie introduces a double standard around dress and appearance where men do not have a similar expectation of adherence to a standard of dress. Rebecca echo’s this sentiment.

[I]n terms of going out, I would say girls are wearing wedges and skirts and nice tops and the boys are wearing t-shirts and shorts, as I always thought as weird. (Rebecca, sophomore, recruitment chair)

Participants’ comments about dress for social settings, are consistent with the post-feminist masquerade. Participants’ engage in consumer behavior as part of performing in their social

setting. Examples of this are the “endless closets,” Vicki mentioned. Fashion shows were detailed at great depth as well as trunk shows. Carrie discusses the consumer mentality she had as a young sorority member, “I think when I first was a freshman, I just wanted to fit in. I would just buy clothes and not think a thing about it.” These comments are consistent with McRobbie’s (2009) discussion of the fashion beauty-complex with an emphasis on clothes and accessories as necessary for fitting in.

As part of going out, there is a makeover paradigm that trains sorority members about what is acceptable. Part of this process is described as going “all out” for swaps, date parties, and other social outings. Members’ appearance or dress is validated through the getting ready in the houses’ communal setting. Katherine’s comments clearly show how opinions are sought prior to going out, “[G]etting ready to go out, it's a lot of going back and forth to each other's rooms, asking for outfit opinions or borrowing a shirt, just, taking your time and talking with everyone as you're getting ready.” This opinion seeking, Katherine describes, carries with it a peer pressure influence by what others are wearing along with self-judgment. This self-judgment is described by Vicki,

I mentioned earlier where you're grading yourself next to the other women that will be at the event. So I definitely can think of times where I came out and I saw other people getting ready as well. And I was like I'm going to have to step this up a little bit. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

Vicki goes on to say that this is a good thing, however the impact of seeking others validation in an effort to dress appropriately is described by McRobbie (2009) as perpetuating “female symbolic violence” (p. 128). The danger of this approval seeking behavior among women becomes evident as Vicki later describes an evening where her desire for approval resulted in painful discomfort.

I remember going to a date party my junior year and I put on this outfit that was a bit too tight. I remember it pinched me in the back and I felt distinctly uncomfortable but I remember everyone kept telling me how pretty I looked. I remember that giving me a boost through the pain [was] that everyone thought I looked really nice. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

Vicki's description of an uncomfortable evening, validated through external approval, seems to be consistent with the post-feminist masquerade and can-do girl. Both of which prioritize consumerism. According to Harris (2004), "young women's increased capacity to wield power as consumers, to buy what they like, and to spend their discretionary income on carefully selected products that make a statement about who they are" (p. 89). In their social environment, participants are actively engaged in production of self through prescriptive femininity.

Emily provides a comprehensive summation of the sorority uniform and butterfly effect.

I feel like there's like a negative connotation around the way that sorority women dress, [the] t-shirts and shorts, which I don't really understand because we're not offending anyone by dressing like this and we're not hurting anyone so why is it such a big deal? I know a lot of other schools where people, might not wear this exact outfit but they definitely dress leisurely to class, it's not anything to dress to your leisure to go to class. Some people prefer to dress up, but other people prefer to dress down. In class, a lot of sorority women wear this [sorority uniform]. And then [at] football games, dress up. When you go out, you would never [wear a t-shirt]. Senior year you'd go out in a t-shirt but, if you're going to a fraternity house or a date party, you're looking very nice. (Emily, senior, president)

Understanding the sorority uniform as a socialization mechanism and how sororities have adopted it as a tribe identifier has been outlined. The large t-shirt and Nike shorts have a clearly defined space on campus and their role in identifying sorority members is a clear theme discussed by participants. Narratives about questions sorority members receive when they are out of uniform are particularly noteworthy, in that they demonstrate enforcement of community norms. Having discussed the formal and informal practices chapters' employ to teach members about dress and appearance, public presentation will be discussed in the next section.

## **Public Presentation**

Chapters are actively engaged in teaching and regulating member behavior. How members publicly present themselves is a direct reflection on the sorority and can bring about negative consequences for the chapter and sorority sisters. The extent to which chapters regulate the behavior of members, however, is disputed by Ginny. She expresses the opinion that while chapters have a role in regulating member behavior, they can sometimes go too far and over reach their scope of authority.

I would give slight credence to the fact that yes, all national sororities should take an active hand in the policies and messages of their official chapter but I don't think it's proper to regulate the individual conduct of their women as long as it is legal, relatively non risky. (Ginny, senior, events coordinator)

For Ginny, chapters should reserve their regulation of members to illegal or risky behavior.

Members' actions outside of these areas, according to Ginny, should be off-limits.

And to some degree, I think that sororities should try not to regulate the individual non-illegal or non-incredibly risky behavior of their members on an individual level. (Ginny, senior, events coordinator)

This perspective is not widely accepted by the majority of participants in this study who seem to express that chapters do have a role in regulating the public presentation of members. Katherine, details how sororities are engaging in member regulation, particularly outlining expectations in social situations on campus.

I think each sorority here on campus definitely has a very strong internal kind of monitoring system ... they try to explain to their women, the importance of, presenting your best self. I know in my chapter specifically, for the freshmen, that's a big topic when they first come in. When date parties or swaps are coming up, anything like that, it's always the first couple of months for our freshman class, a big topic to explain to them, the correct way that we want to be represented on campus and how we want to show ourselves to everyone else. I think most of the chapters do have a good system in place to try to do that. (Katherine, senior, panhellenic officer)

Rebecca's narrative supports Katherine but extends the concern, beyond just chapter reputation, to also incorporate member safety.

People like to just say we're being over controlling but it's definitely for safety. [T]here are rules for a reason. When we're telling members, not to do this and not to do that, it's because we're looking out for their best interests and for the best interests of the sorority. (Rebecca, sophomore, recruitment chair)

From Rebecca's perspective, the safety of members and the reputation of the chapter are not mutually exclusive concerns. These two motivations can co-exist, however, the position it puts a chapter's leadership in is difficult.

I think that it's unfair, but I think it's important that sorority leadership does take that action to help protect their girls and say don't go home with boys, we're not allowed to go upstairs in a fraternity house, you're not allowed to wear crop tops. It's things that fall under this category of over controlling your members but, it's important so your member's reputations aren't ruined and it's unfair but it's kind of the nature of the beast. I think that you have to set up these very strict rules so people don't go around and say that, well the Psi Delta spend the night every time they go to a date party. (Rebecca, sophomore, recruitment chair)

Sorority leadership has to draw a line somewhere and where they draw that line is not easy to discern. As a result, Rebecca knows that chapters will err on the side of overregulation, as the ends justify the means.

My opinion it's better to take this route and maybe overregulate or you're shamed by the whole nation because you put yourself out there. I think it's hard but it's important to be aware of the way people are going to react. People like to just say we're being over controlling but it's definitely for safety. Of course, it's for our reputation but there's reasons. I think that there [are] rules for a reason and I think that when we're telling members, not to do this and not to do that, it's because we're looking out for their best interests and for the best interests of the sorority. (Rebecca, sophomore, recruitment chair)

Joy essentially agrees with Rebecca and sees standards as an important process in how members' represent their chapter, sharing "but at the same time, I do think fraternities and sororities hold their members to a standard to represent their organization well overall." Having policies in place to protect new members through standards of dress and decorum are not just to control

young members but to also protect them as well as the chapter. Ginny further explains that rules and policies are more about safety and protection than regulation.

I think my sorority does a very poor job of explaining that the reason we don't want you to do some of these things is not because you'll make yourself or us look bad but because activities like binge drinking, like going home with men you have just met, are dangerous to your well-being. There are risks of grave bodily and emotional harm involved and I think that we fail to adequately prepare our members for society, as a woman, a female identified person [...] to lay a difference between our expectations societally and our attempts to actually protect and help your well-being. (Ginny, senior, events coordinator)

Ginny argues sororities are doing a poor job of communicating the reason for chapter regulations, even those standards of behavior that are in place for the sake of member well-being. While Ginny holds a minority view over where chapter regulation of members should lie, participants for the most part seem to agree that regulations are in place for the benefit of both new members and the chapter. While on one hand teaching new members what it means to be feminine and on the other, recognizing the double standard of gender oppression that situates sorority girls as complex gendered beings in constant flux.

Having discussed how chapters are actively engaged in regulating the public presentation of members, the next section will address the role of communal living in teaching and reinforcing ideals of femininity.

### **Communal Living**

For sorority girls, the live-in chapter housing facility serves as an incubator of informal socialization. It is within the group living experience of the sorority chapter house that femininity is socially constructed, through the practice of 'body routines' or 'getting ready' (Arthur, 1998; Esposito, 2002). As part of this socialization, the process of 'getting ready' is discussed extensively by participants, particularly in regards to how the sorority house facilitates feminine

interactions through the practices of applying makeup, styling hair, sharing clothes, and discussing of fashion.

These living arrangements allow for social interactions through meeting space, meal service, and residential living space. Consistent with Risman (1982), it is within this communal setting that group and institutional norms are used to socialize members. Risman's (1982) argument is confirmed by Vicki, who lived for two years in her sorority's chapter house.

[T]here were a lot of natural spaces where people could congregate that felt very feminine in the sense that we would just spend hours talking. And I feel that was a very supportive environment, that it felt very open and natural and very different than some of the fraternity house layouts that are not really intended for people to sit down and get to know each other. I always really appreciated that about my sorority house. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

The socialization of members that is taking place informally through space, as outlined by Vicki in the above quote, is reinforced by Taylor, who when asked in what ways do sororities teach or socialize their members about what it means to be feminine, says,

Just living there as a whole. Getting ready, living with somebody in the house, just being in the house in general, just talking with all of your sisters. I mean, it's very, very rare that there's a boy in the house, so it's very rare that the equilibrium of just women is thrown off and I think that that's a place that people count on to go and be women and be comfortable. (Taylor, junior, new member educator)

Taylor's description of how the sorority house provides a safe leisure space where girls interact, as active consumers, away from men, is consistent with McRobbie and Garber's (1976) findings on 'bedroom culture.' Beyond the safe leisure spaces discussed, participants also describe the perceived benefits of these social interactions and how this is an enjoyable part of their socialization. The following excerpt from Emily illustrates the social nature associated with the process of getting ready:

[E]veryone kind of props open their door and you're getting ready, you're taking a shower, you're blow drying your hair, everyone's playing music, everyone's looking in

each other's closet, everyone's borrowing makeup, everyone's asking other people to do their hair. (Emily, senior, president)

Echoing Emily's sentiments, Vicki likewise describes the social nature of the sorority house.

[I]t becomes a social event because, it takes forever to get ready for these things. So especially at the sorority house, before a big date party or before a big game day, it becomes something that all the doors would be open, music would be playing, girls are going in and out of rooms, borrowing, this pair of earrings and this pair of shoes, do you think this goes with this, do you have a game day button I can borrow. It's an incredibly social environment getting ready. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

Katherine, expanding upon the social nature of 'getting ready,' adds how enjoyable the socialization can be. This sentiment is expressed when she says,

[G]etting ready to go out, it's a lot of going back and forth to each other's rooms, asking for outfit opinions or borrowing a shirt, just, taking your time and talking with everyone as you're getting ready. There's usually no rush, when you're going out to dinner. I've really enjoyed living in the house in that aspect to get to just talk with everyone the whole time. (Katherine, senior, panhellenic officer)

While majority of participants' perceived the social interactions of communal living to be beneficial and enjoyable, Vicki describes how this socialization process creates pressure to conform to traditional feminine norms for the sake of social validation. The following interview excerpt from Vicki explains her perspective:

I mentioned earlier where you're grading yourself next to the other women that will be at the event. So I definitely can think of times where I came out and I saw other people getting ready as well. And I was like I'm going to have to step this up a little bit, which is good cause I definitely think then that I had a better time with the event because I felt appropriately dressed. Probably one of the funnest parts is getting ready with everyone, especially in the sorority house. That was always really fun cause it was like 60 girls and it was like endless closets. There's so many different layers to that. I think part of it depends on the function but I do think a big part of it, at least for me, is comfort in what I'm wearing. And part of that can be defined by how other people at the event view me, whether or not they're giving me compliments or whether or not they're giving me the opposite of compliments like oh, interesting choice, Vicki. So I think definitely being aware of how you look in a group combined with your comfort. I remember going to a date party my junior year and I put on this outfit that was a bit too tight. I remember it pinched me in the back and I felt distinctly uncomfortable but I remember everyone kept telling me how pretty I looked. I was like... I got to commit to this now, plus I'd already left the sorority house [...] it was too late to change back. I remember that giving me a

boost through the pain [was] that everyone thought I looked really nice. [F]or me, comfort is definitely a part of it cause, if you don't feel comfortable in what you're wearing, that's evident in how you carry yourself. I definitely was sitting a lot cause, when I would stand, it would catch and this is not fun. I stuck through it cause, at that point, I couldn't go back [to the sorority house]. So if I could've changed, I would've but I'd already left and then everyone did say I looked pretty, so I think that helps. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

Vicki's narrative further outlines the social reality that sorority girls judge themselves against each other and traditional feminine norms, which can leave little space for individual style. In her example, Vicki explains how she eschews comfort for social validation through praise about how she looked. Vicki's example shows that this socialization of 'getting ready' in the sorority house is a complex interaction where sorority girls negotiate their femininity. Embedded in these interactions is the consumer culture that pervades the make-up and clothes. Having discussed the impact of communal living on the construction of femininity within the sorority, the role of Candlelight ceremonies will now be discussed.

### **Candlelights**

A Candlelight, also called a Candle Pass, is a ritualistic ceremony held to announce the romantic commitment of a sorority sister (Berkowitz and Padavic, 1999). Called by the president at the conclusion of a chapter meeting, sisters will form a circle, holding hands and singing the candlelight song (Berkowitz and Padavic, 1999; Robbins, 2004). After the initial pass of the candle has come full circle, the president will announce the reason for the candlelight, which depending on the chapter can include lavaliering, pinning or engagement (Berkowitz and Padavic, 1999; Robbins, 2004). Meredith, a senior student who serves as a panhellenic officer, shares how she views the practice in her chapter, "we do have candlelighting which I think is pretty cool for like engagements and lavalieres." Lavaliering and pinning, are both traditions specific to fraternities (Berkowitz and Padavic, 1999). A lavalier, also referred to as drop letters,

is a charm with the fraternity's letters that is to be worn as a necklace (Berkowitz and Padavic, 1999). A lavalier is given to a girlfriend to signify the existence of a serious romantic relationship (Berkowitz and Padavic, 1999). Pinning refers to the tradition of a fraternity member giving his fraternity pin (or badge) to his girlfriend, in what is a symbolic statement acknowledging that he values his girlfriend over his fraternity (Berkowitz and Padavic, 1999). Pinning is akin to getting 'promised' and is representative of a forthcoming engagement (Berkowitz and Padavic, 1999). After the reason for the candlelight has been announced, the candle is again passed around the circle until it reaches the intended member, who reveals her identity by blowing out the candle, evoking shrieks and cheers as well as hugs of congratulations (Berkowitz and Padavic, 1999; Robbins, 2004). After the celebration has died down, the sorority members will gather around to hear their sorority sister recount the story of the lavaliering, pinning or engagement (Berkowitz and Padavic, 1999; Robbins, 2004).

I do love the candlelight service that we do. It's usually for people who just got engaged. We've had a couple in the past and that's kind of a thing that brings us all together as women we can relate to [the] engagement process. (Shelby, junior, vice president)

Shelby's comment reflects how these ceremonies bring the sorority sisters together to celebrate a traditional heteronormative coupling.

Finley (1965), asserts that the celebration of candlelight ceremonies is an intentional effort on behalf of sororities to reinforce traditional gender roles. Rebecca says, "I think definitely candlelight, I think that's a really sweet tradition celebrating engagements in our chapter." Rebecca's perspective on the candlelight ceremony is consistent with Finley's argument. Finley (1965) further asserts that sororities put immense pressure on members to marry members of fraternities, as opposed to non-members, because of their elevated social and financial status. Specifically, Finley (1965) argues that "to keep high the rate of engagement and

marriage, sororities rely heavily on emotionally potent ceremonies and rituals to sanctify matrimony. Exposure to and dating of the right man are not enough; if endogamy is to be maintained the dates must lead to engagements and the engagements to marriage” (p. 526). Berkowitz and Padavic (1999), similarly contend that historically white sororities encourage romantic male-female pairing, as evidenced by their participation in social events and emphasis on formal ceremonies that recognize members who have achieved a romantic milestone. An organized event in which members can be publically celebrated for attaining a man, candlelights are considered by many to be an honor as well as a major achievement (Berkowitz and Padavic, 1999). According to Berkowitz and Padavic (1999), this traditional emphasis of historically white sororities on finding a husband as the key to a successful life, is inherently “at odds with both a modern reality that dictates labor force participation for all women and with members’ career aspirations” (p. 530). Carrie’s perspective shows that not everybody is looking for this form of validation. Carrie’s thought process shows that for some members, career aspirations and professional goals carry more value than traditional relationship norms.

I didn't really understand what a candlelight was when I first came to Alabama, I definitely didn't really know what it [was]... I'd heard about them before but I think it's to each its own. I'm not one to ... get married very early on in my life but I can definitely see where [possibly] other individuals and their beliefs, it is in line with that. So not to discount that moment for them but, for me, it just didn't have that much significance cause I knew that I probably was never going to get engaged when I was in college. I can definitely see for some of my closest friends [who] have gotten engaged because it was just the right time for them and so it was special for them. I think I had kind of [an] outsider's view of how special it was but I never really appreciated it enough because I wasn't fully a part of it. (Carrie, senior, treasurer)

Carrie’s perspective also indicates that for some of the participants, there is a paradigm shift towards putting career before relationships. However, her acknowledgement of “how special it was” is indicative of her recognition of the importance of relationships and marriage. This

paradigm shifts toward a focus on career parallels an emphasis on academic success, which will be discussed in the next section.

### **Academic Success**

At USouthern academic expectations were observed to be an integral part of the sorority culture. This emphasis on academic expectations observed among the participants is corroborated by institutional data (see Institutional Data in Appendix H) that shows sororities have a higher GPA than their campus peers. For example, over the past 11 academic years the sorority population has an average GPA that is 0.25 points higher than the overall campus population (see Institutional Data in Appendix H). Participants in this study highlighted the significance of academic success as related to sorority culture. Meredith addressed this expectation in that her narrative describes the importance of sorority members embracing their intelligence rather than downplaying it. According to Meredith:

It should be about who you are and what you're comfortable with and, if you're an extremely intelligent woman, you should be proud of that. You shouldn't feel like you should have to dumb yourself down just because people find that intimidating. (Meredith, senior, panhellenic officer)

Carrie expressed similar feelings, yet elaborated on the difference between USouthern male and female Greek members, particularly in terms of their approach to academics.

I'm a lot more focused on my grades than a guy. I feel like for fraternity men, they'll get made fun of if they're really studious, they just seem to have this nonchalant type of attitude, like oh, I'll study when I can and they're expected to make good grades. I feel overall, sorority GPAs are always higher than fraternity GPAs in almost every circumstance. I feel there's more emphasis put on grades and performance in school and involvement in sororities than there is in fraternities. (Carrie, senior, treasurer)

Carrie's argument is supported by institutional data the shows over an 11-year period (see Institutional Data in Appendix H) sororities have a 0.38 higher GPA than their Greek male peers. While Carrie reinforces the importance of academics in sororities, Emily, makes a connection

between the ideal sorority girl and the importance of academics. As mentioned earlier, the ideal sorority girl, “she goes to class, she tries her hardest, makes good grades, has good relationships with her teachers” (Emily, senior, president).

An important part of having it all for participants is academic success. Accepting that academic success is paramount for these girls belies the struggle in achieving success as “high academic performance is routinely understood as ordinary and simply the level that is expected” (Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody, 2001, p. 179). According to McRobbie (2009), a new normative femininity has been constructed whereby academic success and high achievement are reconstituted as unexceptional. In this paradigm, academic excellence is the minimum standard girls must achieve. As a result, participants’ discuss having to work more than their male peers. In Shelby’s words, “you have to be feminine but you also have to work on your academics, your career cause they don't come as easily to us.” What Shelby is validating is that she is responsible for her achievements. This is consistent with Harris (2004b) and the can-do girl, who is required to work hard to achieve and enjoy success, a success that is dependent upon “individual responsibility and choice” (p. 6). Harris (2004b) describes academic success as “the key to safeguarding the future...essential to securing an appropriate adult professional and consumer lifestyle” (p. 27). This quote extends the construction of femininity from academics to career pursuits. This socializing of sorority girls to the new definition of femininity in essence expects effort in the classroom and work towards a career.

Taylor expounds on this distinction to include the importance of balancing personal and professional relationships, so as not to hinder academic or professional aspirations.

I try not to let any of my personal relationships ever get in the way of my professional ones because, like I said, I'm here for school primarily. I'm not here to meet a boy. I mean, if it happens, it happens, great. If I end up somehow engaged by the end of my senior year, then I'm not going to hate that, obviously. But I am here for school and I'm

really trying to keep a fine line in between all of that. (Taylor, junior, new member educator)

Taylor's recognition of the need to balance relationships against professional or career aspirations is indicative of the tenuous position females navigate in today's society. Traditional heteronormative relationships, with expectations of family, are juxtaposed against career aspirations, which are often seen as mutually exclusive to having a family and personal relationships.

Participants' narratives indicate that within Panhellenic sororities, the teaching of femininity is taking place through standards of dress and appearance, public presentation, communal living, candlelights, and academic success. Each of these areas both conform with traditional femininity and present conflicts. Participants show that they recognize these conflicts and are in constant negotiation with them during their time at USouthern. Adherence to norms of traditional femininity is identified through the study participants' comments related to informal and formal teaching and socialization of members. Defining dress, appearance and presentation in connection to the values of the organization, situated within the context of regional norms is documented. Additional to these traditional conceptions of femininity is the socialization of academic success as an emergent element of the new definition of femininity at USouthern.

### **Becoming a Leader**

This section introduces the 11 participants who informed this study. Each participant is a White female who has served in a formal leadership role in a Panhellenic sorority at USouthern. Participants, at the time of interview, were upper-class students and represented eight of the 17 National Panhellenic Conference sororities at USouthern. Participants' classifications represented eight seniors, two juniors, and one sophomore. Six of the participants are from in-state with the remaining five from out-of-state. Out-of-state participants represented two distinct

regions (Southeast and Midwest) of the United States. Combined the participants average GPA is 3.84 and average age is 21.

### **Participant Biographies**

Allison is a junior with a 3.73 GPA, her major is Marketing, and her leadership position is that of Panhellenic officer, in which she serves as the chapter delegate to the College Panhellenic Council. She was raised in the Midwest and advocates that a leader is approachable, accountable, and transparent.

I think those are the three qualities that make up a really good leader. I think I fit it pretty well just because I know that those are the things that make a good leader so I think, when I was a leader, I tried to do those things. I don't think I fit it to a tee. I think there's always room for work on that. I think it's also hard to keep all that in mind when you're trying to get stuff done [...] just keep that tone or approachability and, say the right things to make sure that everybody knows that you are being transparent. I think that it's always hard to incorporate all those things but I would give myself a 7.0 probably.

Allison goes on to say,

Leadership is being that role model and being that figure that people can always count on, being the person that, might make tough decisions or do most of the work or leads the team into the right direction. That's what leadership is.

Allison was recommended because she was able to see ways to be innovative in her approach to increase chapter participation. This innovation was recognized within her chapter and she was recommended for Panhellenic representation to influence all Panhellenic member organizations.

Carrie is a senior with a 3.98 GPA, her major is Commerce and Business Administration, and her leadership position is a chapter treasurer. As treasurer, she is expected to maintain the chapter budget, assist other officers with their budgets, and pay chapter bills. She is an in-state student and for her, leadership is about empathy and collaboration.

I think also being a good leader, what I've learned throughout my years is being able to not strike down other people's opinions but being able to kind of empathize and understand the people's opinions. So like working with a group instead of leading them, like elevating yourself to a whole different level within this group of people, that's never

going to work cause they're going to just not really like you and they're going to have a disdain for you because you think so highly of yourself. But it's more of being able to bring a group of people that have different perspectives together to have a common goal.

She goes on to say this about being a good sorority leader,

Being a good sorority leader, I think, is also about understanding different people's opinions and understanding where they're coming from because, again, we have such a large Greek community and everybody is going to have different opinions, no matter where they come from because we've got a lot of out of state students. They come from a lot of different environments and that's okay. And I think it's just trying to be the best that you can be but also not forgetting about other people's opinions or their feelings, don't be so selfish that you're only worried about yourself but focus on being the best that you can be because in that, you'll be a good role model.

Carrie was selected because she has been described as a genuine and thoughtful leader, who is not afraid of hard work. Never loud about her convictions, Carrie simply acts on them daily by modeling behavior consistent with her principles. She is an influence leader, and provides interesting perspectives on the role that Greek life plays in the campus culture.

Emily is a senior with a 4.0 GPA, her major is business, and her leadership position is chapter president. In her role at president, Emily is tasked with leading and directing the executive board, overseeing functions of the chapter, and presiding over all chapter meetings. She is an in-state student and for her, leadership “means providing guidance to a group of people for a bigger purpose.”

Being a good sorority leader, you have to realize [on] the first day of the job, [...] that you can't please everyone and that's [...] simple but it's the hardest lesson to learn because you still think there is a way you can please everyone. I can do a great compromise, everyone's going to be happy but really that's not how it works.

Emily goes on to elaborate how her leadership style has evolved,

Beginning of the year, not good at all. But later in the year when I learned all my lessons, yes, I feel like I was great at that. But I did not come in being the listener. I came in being the enforcer and the bossy one and realized that was not working.

Emily was recommended as a participant because of her tireless work as an executive officer in her sorority. Emily was recognized for using her influence to successfully lead her chapter through a difficult time. Having been presented with a challenge, she remained a moral constant holding all actions to the standard of being consistent with her principles and those of her sorority.

Ginny is a senior with a 4.0 GPA, she has a dual major of economic and political science, and her leadership position is chapter events coordinator. As the chapter events coordinator, Ginny is responsible for coordinating and planning events with recognized groups such as fraternities, sororities, and student organizations. She is an in-state student and for her, leadership is “simply influence, not positive, negative, or neutral.” Ginny goes on to say that sorority leadership requires intentionality.

I think not just being intentional to know the issues and struggles and triumphs of everyone in the house but also giving every minute of your time that you can spare in order to be there for your sisters, to be a sister in the way that you would hope your blood sisters would react to you.

Ginny describes how she embodied this intentionality in her leadership.

I think I certainly can't say I've been the most intentional about knowing everyone in the house, I mean, not the easiest thing to do when you don't have as much free time as I did in college. But I definitely tried to do as much of the latter as possible, of being a little bit aware of where the quiet girls were, where the smart girls were, where the women who were most likely to get a little bit left out or being sure I knew their issues, their concerns and, ultimately, hopefully, it'd help them with their goals.

Ginny was recommended as a participant based on her willingness to create opportunities for collaboration. Ginny is a passionate leader with a strong head on her shoulders. A courageous and innovative leader, she is not afraid to take chances and challenge the status quo.

Joy is a senior with a 3.7 GPA, she is a finance major, and her leadership position is president of her chapter. As president, Joy is tasked with leading and directing the executive

board, overseeing functions of the chapter, and presiding over all chapter meetings. She is an out-of-state student from the Midwest and for her leadership means,

I think leadership to me means guiding a group of people. You don't have to be in a specific role to do that. That could just be the type of person you are, people look to you for advice.

Joy details her perspective about a sorority leader by saying,

I think it means someone who emulates what it is that sorority stands for, whether it's being a strong, independent person, being respectful, and then someone who just is able to relate to every person in the chapter cause there're always so many different personalities in a group of women that, obviously, people are different. So I think being a good sorority leader is going to be someone who is able to relate to every person and see the good in every situation and how it might affect different people differently. So I think that's important. But someone who overall does what's best for the chapter, and if it's dividing the chapter, maybe not taking that first step until the chapter's more fully on board, if that makes sense. I think being a good sorority leader is someone who unifies their chapter and does what's best for their chapter specifically.

Joy further details how she fits her description of a good sorority leader in the following way,

I like to think I fit it pretty well, that I do feel I'm someone who's able to connect with many different personalities and relate to different people on different levels, whether I'm a senior and they're a freshman where I'm at the end of my sorority career and they're just starting theirs. So being able to relate to them and share stories about my first few months as a sorority member or whether it's someone who is super shy and not outgoing whatsoever, whereas, I'm always in people's faces and outgoing, just being able to relate to them in conversation, help them break out of their shell or understand when they don't want to be a part of chapter's speaking or sharing story and helping them overcome differences. And so they also help me in a certain way too maybe toning it down or being able to put myself in a different situation that I might not see because I have a different personality or a different mentality than that person. So I like to think I did a relatively good job in that sense.

Joy was recommended as a participant because she is a very down to earth, approachable, and has an infectious enthusiasm. Her way of engaging and getting people on board is noticeable.

Katherine is a senior accounting major with a 3.9 GPA, and her leadership position is Panhellenic officer. Katherine in her role as a Panhellenic officer is tasked with promoting good chapter relations within the Panhellenic community. She is also responsible for communication

and enforcement of the USouthern Panhellenic Council's policies and procedures. She is an in-state student and for her, leadership is "being willing to help those around you, working for those around you, and putting other people's needs before your own personal gain. I think that's really what defines leadership." Katherine details her perspective about sorority leadership by saying,

A huge part of it, it's just trying your best to relate to the women around you. I think you have to remember that it's not just your sorority, it's your sisters' sorority. So what you think is the best idea, a lot of other women might not agree with. So I think just trying to always keep in your mind that it's not about you, it's about the chapter at large. I think if you had that mindset going in, that's one of the best things that makes for a good leader.

Katherine outlines how she embodies this leadership style by saying,

I definitely try to fit that description. I know I probably failed many times in thinking more through my own mind than really asking for the opinions of others. But I like to believe that I tried to ask for other people's opinions, we had a lot of different personalities so I think when you sit down at a table and have a lot of different opinions coming in, that really helps to grow everyone.

Katherine was recommended to participate in this study because of her ability to get along with different personalities. She is described as an unassuming leader with a knack for engaging different personality and leadership styles, which has garnered her much respect.

Meredith is a junior human development and family studies major with a 3.4 GPA, her leadership position is a panhellenic officer. As a panhellenic officer, Meredith is responsible for maintaining good chapter relations with the other Panhellenic sororities. She is also tasked with relaying and enforcing the policies and procedures of the USouthern Panhellenic Council.

She is an in-state student and for her, leadership means,

Leadership is being able to take initiative on tough decisions. When the time calls for it, being able to encourage the people that, work with you or work for you. And being a positive role model for them and being the one that they look to in difficult times.

Meredith details her perspective about what it means to be a good sorority leader,

Being a good sorority leader to me is being proud of your organization but then also being able to see things with an unbiased view. So being able to collaborate with other

chapters and taking notes from them when you need to. I feel like being a good sorority leader isn't really different than being a good leader. The difference is just you're in an organization and you're leading [a lot of] women. So being a good role model for your members, being supportive of them no matter what. And I think also being encouraging of your members and the other people you work with is good too.

Meredith embodies this leadership approach and describes how well she fits her description, by saying,

I feel like I fit it pretty well. I try really hard to encourage the rest of the exec board [...] remind them that it's going to be fine, it's all going to work out. I definitely feel like I fit some parts of it a little bit better than others. I'm not always like on time to stuff, which is bad ... But I feel like, for the most part, I fit it pretty well. I try fit the description as best I can.

Meredith was recommended as a participant because she is recognized as a very ethical leader. She is not afraid to do the right thing, even if the right thing is unpopular. She is described as down to earth and easy to work with.

Rebecca is a sophomore public relations and political science dual major with a 3.9 GPA, her leadership position is recruitment chair. As the recruitment chair, Rebecca is responsible for leading the chapter in the recruitment of new members. In her role, she is tasked with planning and coordinating all aspects of recruitment events, including formal recruitment. She is an in-state student and for her, leadership is,

I think leadership is when you're able to inspire or empower a group of people to reach a common goal. It's not necessarily when you're the smartest one and the loudest one in the room but more so when you have the best idea of how to accomplish the goal maybe most efficiently or effectively.

Rebecca details her perspective about what it means to be a good sorority leader,

I think that you need to be objective and thorough and I think that it's hard when you're leading [a lot] of your friends but I think that it's really important to hold your friends to the same standard as the freshman new member that you don't know well at all. You need to be consistent and make sure that every detail's thought out because it's very quickly that'll eventually unravel if you don't do so.

Rebecca describes how well she fits her description by saying,

I think I've done a pretty good job of that, making sure I'm crossing my Ts and dotting all my Is cause, a lot of times, I've found that people are waiting to see you mess up and, if you give them that little bit one time, you had a typo in an email or you misspoke at a meeting, then they're going to question everything you say from then on. So I think you have to be really cautious of that and that's outside of the sorority world as well. That's if in any exec meeting I have or even a meeting with an administrator that one mistake, then you have to sometimes find yourself having to catch up and prove yourself. That's one thing I've learned is just to make sure I'm a perfectionist on the front end so I don't have to go prove myself on the back end.

Rebecca was recommended as a participant because she is very accomplished for such a young leader. Having taken advantage of positional leadership opportunities, she is an influential leader in her chapter, the Greek community, and throughout campus. Rebecca is described as affable and conscientious in her work and actions.

Shelby is a junior Restaurant Hotel and Meeting management major with a 3.8 GPA, her leadership position in her chapter is vice president. As vice president, Shelby is tasked with reporting to the chapter any business that occurs within executive board and committee meetings. She also acts as a liaison with alumnae, advisors and the inter/national organization. In the absence of the chapter president, she would serve as a proxy. She is an out-of-state student from the Southeast and for her, leadership is,

Leadership to me means someone who is driven, who sees the bigger picture, who also can be sympathetic to people around them. I think as a leader, you have to take in a lot of different people's interests and ideas and thoughts all at once and be able to balance that in a larger scheme in order to formalize the best outcome and best answers to move forward.

Shelby details her perspective about what it means to be a good sorority leader, “so I think for a leader, it's just building other leaders up into their roles, also make sure that they're recognized.”

Shelby describes how well she fits her description by saying,

I feel that I definitely strive for it. Plus, my ongoing goal for myself was to set that example, to be that person that picks me up and said oh, you should join this organization

and the teacher that I am, touching the lives of our underclassmen as well as our upper classmen, making sure that they keep involved, that they're still wanting to be a part of the sorority, making sure that our retention rates are still high. I feel like it's an endless battle. There's no full success, no one's going to be able to be super successful in all of these aspects but I think being able to implement programs and seeing the long-term effects of it.

Shelby was recommended as a participant because she is a go-getter and her involvement in various organization across campus beyond her sorority is noteworthy. She has been described as motivated and an innovative leader.

Taylor is a junior Criminal Justice and Communication dual major with a 3.5 GPA, her leadership position is chapter new member educator. As the new member educator, Taylor is responsible for implementing the chapter's new member program, which entails educating new members and promoting interaction of the new members within the chapter, including oversight of the Big Sister program. She is an out-of-state student from the Southeast and for her, leadership mean being inclusive. Taylor details her perspective about what it means to be a good sorority leader,

I think being a sorority leader you have to think about everybody. When you're making decisions, you can't exclude anybody in any type of decision because people are going to be hurt and, especially on [this] campus. That's probably the biggest thing I've learned is just inclusion, is making sure that everybody, not only feels heard, but that they're actually being heard. I think there's a difference between being heard and feeling heard.

Taylor describes how well she fits her description by saying,

I do think I'm a good sorority leader because I understand [the] bigger picture. I'm not so short minded and I understand that I am a little fraction on this huge campus and I'm only a little impact on a timeline of hundreds of years. I'm not just thinking about my chapter when I'm thinking about sorority leadership, I'm thinking about Greek life as a whole. And I think my perception of leadership is just a little bit bigger than maybe your average person's.

Taylor was recommended as a participant because she is very independent and not easily influenced. She has been described as a very open and honest person who is candid with others.

Vicki is a senior Public Relations and Political Science dual major with a 3.9 GPA, her leadership position is judicial chairman. In the role of judicial chairman, Vicki is responsible for overseeing the chapter's internal judicial process. As chairman, she leads the judicial committee in adjudication of violations of the chapter's Constitution, Bylaws, or established policies or procedures. She is an out-of-state student from the Southeast and for her, leadership is,

I think leadership is a wide view almost in the sense that what's best for the group or what's going to push forward or how can I improve the lives of others and/or maybe an institution. Something that's not necessarily a select group of people. And then taking the responsibility to step forward, even when it's not necessarily easy or popular.

Vicki details her perspective about what it means to be a good sorority leader, "I think it's definitely putting your house first and thinking in terms of the whole house and not necessarily just your group of friends." Vicki describes how well she fits her description by saying, "I've tried to uphold that and it can be tough, especially when motivating the middle and the lower third." Vicki was recommended as a participant because she has an impressive resume having held numerous leadership roles across campus in a diverse group of organizations. She has been described as very impressive, thoughtful, and a champion of people. A bridge builder, who is respected by her peers throughout the campus community, Vicki seeks opportunities to learn, grow, and progress the Greek community by working with those outside of it to change the culture.

There is no one path that these sorority girls took to becoming leaders in their chapters and in many cases across campus. While some were very intentional about their leadership path, such as Rebecca, others, like Carrie, ended up in their roles by happenstance. As described by one faculty/staff nominator,

By excelling in the classroom and being involved in campus and community organizations, these girls represent the best of Panhellenic life. They live their rituals by

promoting leadership, sisterhood, scholarship, and service, and they set a positive example for the other member of their chapter.

Despite the path these leaders traveled to their positions, they each have brought their own unique sorority experiences and perspectives to their leadership roles. The above narratives detail the diversity they bring in their approach to leadership. The next section will discuss the challenges these girls face as they serve in formal leadership roles.

### **Leadership Roles**

The various leadership experiences of the participants run the gamut and include serving as chapter president, vice president, new member educator, treasurer, recruitment chair, judicial chair, events coordinator, and panhellenic officer. Participants' narratives revealed that negotiating femininity is a complex process for sorority members, particularly when it involves serving in a formal leadership role. A range of challenges were identified by the participants and this section will focus on expectations of female leaders, limited opportunities, and competition.

**Expectations of female leaders.** Rebecca provides an example of how girls are taught that in their youth they can be whatever they want to be or do whatever they want to do.

However, there is a reality that sets in as these can-do girls experience USouthern's culture.

I think that in high school and middle school, you're taught a girl can be class president, a girl can be captain of the team, whatever. It's very much like you're taught, and I agree. In college when it actually is our turn to do what we've been taught, it's harder. And we think oh no, they just told us that in 7th grade. (Rebecca, sophomore, recruitment chair)

Expectations of female leaders at USouthern show they do have aspirations for leadership opportunities, yet they find that these opportunities are not as readily available as they assumed given their leadership experiences prior to college. These leaders have been taught and prepared to achieve at a high level throughout their adolescence. Recognition that their opportunities are limited based on cultural norms at USouthern, provides a sobering reality that the narrative from

their youth is not consistent with their current circumstances. These leaders struggle with the fact that they are qualified for positions but not given the chance to lead based on Southern cultural norms. As these leaders experience USouthern's culture, how they embody traditional Southern femininity is a factor they must navigate. How Southern femininity is produced and enforced at USouthern as the traditional form of femininity will be discussed in the next section.

***Southern femininity.*** Expectations of traditional Southern femininity and the various pressures experienced are evident by the participants' narratives. Southern norms around femininity create expectations for a passive girl, who does not "rock the boat" in her leadership position. Prior to exploring Southern femininity, participants' ideas of femininity will be discussed. For a number of the participants, femininity was directly associated with being comfortable and proud. For example, Joy defines femininity as "being proud of who you are as a woman and as a female, just embracing who you are as a person," while Meredith, defines femininity, as "a sense of being proud of being a woman and being different than men."

Femininity for Allison is indicative of,

[B]eing comfortable with your womanhood and ... everything that encompasses being a woman, whether that's what you wear, how you act, what you say, not particularly what you do, but how comfortable you are in it and how being a woman affects your life.  
(Allison, senior, panhellenic officer)

For Carrie, however, it also means, "having to balance being a woman and people's expectations of a woman." This challenge of balancing femininity, as constructed in their youth, with the traditional Southern femininity, as experienced at USouthern is further detailed by participants. Participants' recognition of the difference between Southern femininity and other regional constructions of femininity is apparent regardless of their region of origin.

Emily, who is from the South, talks about how femininity is a regional construction through an example of a sorority sister who transferred from a different university. Where this

sister previously attended, did not have a similar emphasis on traditional Southern femininity as practiced at USouthern.

So we had one girl transfer and we were just shocked by what she was wearing. We're like she's not a Psi Delt, like no Psi Delt would ever wear that but then we found out that's what they wore at her university, that's what was acceptable there. [...] because we're in the south and a traditionally classic Southern university, I think our femininity stems from the southern way. (Emily, senior, president)

Shelby, likewise offers her perception about the expectations of Southern femininity compared to that of femininity in the North, saying,

Being from the South, you're supposed to look feminine and you're supposed to look like you're a girl or a woman in that sense. I think that's an interesting phenomena versus, back at home ... My sister, as an example, she's a very Northern girl and she is very liberal in that sense. [S]he's very outwardly spoken for certain women's issues, which is great. But myself, being from the South region, definitely more so kind of embodying that realm and culture [of] a little more inward. (Shelby, junior, vice president)

Rebecca connects the ideals of Southern femininity to that of the Southern Belle. Her narrative brings in an interesting element of the Southern experience for these female leaders.

The South is dressier and talks slower and has more of the Southern Belle theme going. I think that we're a little more caught up in...girls should wear dresses and pearls and be sweet whereas, some of the more Northern regions or in the West are, I don't want to say more progressive, they just don't really see the need. (Rebecca, sophomore, recruitment chair)

Allison, who is from the Midwest, provides comments about Southern femininity that are consistent with her Southern peers. An emphasis on tradition and dress is similarly used to describe qualities of a proper Southern girl.

I can definitely see the difference between the South and just being a couple hours North. I think the South is obviously rooted in tradition so they see women in a certain light that is kind of behind the time ... [A]s you think of femininity in the South, it's like everybody wears pearls, frilly dresses, and lipstick. That's just kind of what comes to mind when you think of the deep South, when you think of the stereotypical Southern culture. (Allison, senior, panhellenic officer)

Her characterization of “behind the time” does not portray traditional Southern femininity in a positive way. When asked specifically about Southern femininity, participants were more likely to offer a sex-stereotypic response. As demonstrated by Ginny who says,

I have always been expected to be nice to everyone, sweet, polite, to not correct others, to not stand out, especially not to stand out at the expense of overshadowing someone else, to never put myself too far forward. Now of course, I don't think that these are rational expectations and they're also a product of the fact they I come from a very small, very traditional [Southern] town. (Ginny, senior, judicial chair)

Emily likewise outlines her experience with expectations for Southern girls as nice, polite, and non-threatening.

They're definitely not programmed to act but, society wants them to act Southern. Yes, ma'am, no, ma'am, very polite. Not submissive but sit down and not have a voice or contribute. I say this very broadly, girls still do it but when I first started getting involved on campus, people were sometimes surprised when I would speak up or voice my opinion. (Emily, senior, president)

Emily's recognition of how her willingness to “speak up” and “voice her opinion” that did not conform to the norms of southern femininity is noteworthy. She recalls that her peers were “surprised” by her non-conformity to what she perceived as Southern feminine values. Ginny reinforces Emily's position that peers expect conformity.

I would say both on campus and within sororities, women are expected to not rock the boat, to go with what appears to be whatever the tide is, what appears to be the majority opinion, it may not actually be [the majority opinion] but to move along, to not make a scene, to not be confrontational, is one of the big expectations on campus. (Ginny, senior, events coordinator)

Conformity is expected and the idea of “rocking the boat” in this sense is seen as negative for girls. Yet, in this traditional Southern culture, girls have gained access to education, a progressive idea in and of itself. Meredith sees access but laments the fact that girls are not taking advantage of these opportunities. Meredith's perception is that competition with male peers is a barrier.

We have access, we have the chance to apply for the same leadership roles, we have the chance to apply [for certain privileges] ... We just haven't because we felt like we couldn't because the boys did and so we couldn't do it. But now we're kind of realizing that way of thinking doesn't correlate with how we were raised and it doesn't make any sense. (Meredith, senior, panhellenic officer)

Meredith's statement that this way of thinking "doesn't correlate with how we were raised" shows a disconnect between the traditional Southern values discussed by Emily and Ginny and the expectations of female leaders detailed by Rebecca earlier in this section. This difference in defining femininity and how it varies by region is an important element of its construction. These feminine expectations are recognized as regionally based and used to provide context about overall chapter values. Conflicts between traditional Southern femininity and progressive attitudes toward girls' access, and opportunities, to education appear to create a pressure on female sorority leaders. Participants' discussion of the pressure that they experience at USouthern is manifested in how they approach their appearance in professional leadership settings.

***Professional appearance.*** Shelby provides an unambiguous example of her perceptions about differences in expectations of professional dress in the North and the South.

But down here, it's very much, I think, as a woman in business, you're supposed to wear a dress or a skirt but not pants and I think that's just the different regions of being from the South, you're supposed to look feminine and you're supposed to look like you're a girl or a woman in that sense. (Shelby, junior, vice president)

As detailed earlier in teaching femininity, dress is a tool sorority girls use to fit in with their environment. While the desire to "fit in" wanes respective to sorority membership; it is heightened around participation in campus leadership positions as, further explained by Shelby.

So we're expected to look business or professional but I think also as a sorority woman, you have to make it flair. So you have to wear cute business clothes. It can't just be the basic black dress, black shoes. I think nowadays that's kind of gotten on the wayside. You have to have a really cute blazer and a really cute necklace and bright popping shoes in that sense. So I think that's something I've been seeing is it's not business anymore. It's

kind of like business with a fashion flair to it, so you have to stick out with that because those are the girls who, when you walk into the room, you notice, my gosh, she has a really cute jacket. I try to fit into that, what will stand out a little more than the regular black dress outfit. (Shelby, junior, vice president)

Shelby's quote exemplifies McRobbie's (2009) description of the "highly stylized disguised female" (2009, p. 66). The post-feminist masquerade is embodied as participants describe a form of dress that is fashionable, yet non-threatening to their male counterparts.

A successful young woman must now get herself endlessly and repetitively done up (dragged up), so as to mask her rivalry with men in the world of work (i.e. her wish for masculinity), and to conceal the competition she now poses because only by these tactics of re-assurance can she be sure that she will remain sexually desirable. (McRobbie, 2007, pp. 725-726)

While this masquerade, according to McRobbie (2007), makes it appear that women are doing it for themselves, it is in essence a form of self-regulation endured to remain desirable to men.

As these girls negotiate femininity as leaders on campus, they work to be professional in their various roles and settings, as noted by Meredith.

[D]efinitely within my leadership roles, I want to always look professional, especially if I'm going to be speaking with administration, if I'm going to be speaking with the Vice President of Student Affairs or if I'm helping conduct an interview, obviously, I want to look professional, presentable because it's my job. (Meredith, junior, panhellenic officer)

Rebecca talks about how there are perceived expectations about appropriate attire and certain professional femininity that she has to display when she is in her leadership role meeting with the USouthern administration. Rebecca recognizes that she has never been explicitly told what she needs to wear in these meetings, however, she feels a pressure to present herself in a certain way in order to receive respect.

[L]ike black nail polish, I used to always have dark colors on my nails. I used to always wear graphic t-shirts, just however I wanted to dress and now I have to be a lot more aware that people are expecting me to be professional and to be put together all the time and I can't really go for the funky trends as much anymore. I still have to be presentable which, I really don't have a problem with, but it's definitely been something I've had to change. USouthern's President has never told me don't wear big t-shirts to our meetings

but I think it's just something that I know based on societal norms, Southern norms that, if I were to walk into a meeting with ripped jeans and Converse that they would not hold me to the same standard. They wouldn't respect me or really see me as much of an equal as I would like to be. (Rebecca, sophomore, recruitment chair)

This statement is indicative of Rebecca's perception of Southern societal norms and how they apply to her as a female in a formal leadership position. She also sees a double standard, in that male leaders on campus do not have the same expectations around professional dress. According to Rebecca, "boys can definitely get away with dressing more casually than girls can." Ginny likewise expands on what she perceives as a double standard related to men and women in leadership spheres, particularly how dress is an important element for women to consider when demonstrating capacity.

I think it's more about perception of what women wear is a reflection of their ability to lead. If a woman can't stay on trend, have perfect hair, have, matching necklace and earrings on, then maybe, if she can't manage her own appearance, then how can she manage this organization. If she doesn't care how she presents herself, which may not be. If they think she doesn't care enough, then why will she care enough about this organization to do [her job] well. What I like about being a woman, the ability to personalize your look, is a double edged sword. [F]or guys, since they have so fewer options, they're not expected to wear makeup. So they have less room to screw up. [...] We have way more room to accidentally be wearing a dress that's too short on a stage or to have the wind blow our hair crazy as we are walking. I think that's always been the free association if, she can't bother to put on makeup today, then how do we know she'll bother to do the day-to-day tasks. (Ginny, senior, events coordinator)

Ginny's critique of the association between a girl's appearance and credibility is blunt and sobering. Her perception that a female's leadership ability is evident by their ability to "stay on trend" or "have perfect hair" demonstrates a pressure for perfection that is difficult to achieve. This having to stand out and be on point with dress and appearance in professional settings shows that participants are aware of setting and place when it comes to dress. McRobbie (2009), as part of the post-feminist masquerade, discusses how women self-regulate. McRobbie's (2009) position is supported by Harris (2004) and her findings about the can-do girl. The concept of

self-regulation as a form of competition, is a prominent finding in Chapter IV, as is, how presenting of self is evaluated. According to Harris (2004), “the processes of working on the self and competing with others, especially other women, to be perfect in self-presentation have been extended so that improving oneself is necessary to success in the labor and consumer markets” (p. 19). This self-regulation, particularly when attributed to accepted Southern feminine norms, is outlined by Meredith.

If I know there are going to be men in a meeting, I want to dress, professionally but I also want to dress appropriately. I don't want my skirt to be too short or my shirt to be too low. I would say the underlying thing is being prepared and being confident. Definitely making sure my skirt is long enough, not having your shirt that's too low or a shirt that's see through cause I've seen that and that's pretty bad. Also, I've seen bras, making sure everything's appropriate. If I'm dressing in a professional setting, interviewing for a job, I want people to be able to see me for who I am and be able to pay attention to my answers and why I want the job. I don't want them distracted by my clothes. I know I've been in situations where I've been interviewing women and their clothes were not appropriate and I was distracted by that. (Meredith, junior, panhellenic officer)

Meredith and Ginny describe a level of perfection in dress and appearance that creates pressure for female leaders. The recognition that being feminine is an important part of demonstrating leadership ability is tempered by an understanding that there is a balancing act for girls in how they dress. Concern about a skirt being “too short” or a top “too low” situates clothes as a distraction. On one side not being trendy is perceived as an inability to stay on top of details, on the other hand, too sexy puts girls at risk for being objectified and not taken seriously. Of note is Meredith’s mentioning of her experience interviewing other girls whose clothes were not appropriate and distracting. This statement is indicative of the critical nature of women and how they hold themselves to an impossible standard. Professional dress provides an example of how female leaders negotiate complex socially constructed environments. They use professional dress to fit in while participating in a post-feminist masquerade in order to navigate hegemonic

masculinity. Professional dress is described as part of proving themselves capable to fill their leadership roles. This concept of proving oneself will be detailed further in the next section.

***Prove oneself.*** Participants' feel pressure to prove themselves in their roles as leaders at USouthern. Rebecca's narrative is representative of the breadth of pressure that girls in leadership positions are experiencing.

Prove to people that a girl running [for office] shouldn't be that weird, it should be just as normal as any other guy running. It's a lot of pressure. And tied into that, I feel a lot of pressure to prove [myself]. I want to make sure that I can represent females well, of course, but I think a lot of it is tied to sorority women as a whole, my sorority more specifically, and there's a lot of different levels of people that I have to be able to represent well and it's definitely a lot of different pressures. (Rebecca, sophomore, recruitment chair)

As a sorority girl holding a major leadership position on campus, Rebecca feels a burden to prove herself worthy of her opportunity. She describes an internalized pressure to represent all females, who aspire to be leaders. Ultimately, this pressure to be a worthy representative of the entire female gender at USouthern is recognized to be unrealistic.

Rebecca further articulates a sense of frustration, as she engages in her leadership role.

One thing that's been a little hard about being a girl, is just proving myself that my leadership style might be different but it's in no way inferior. I wouldn't trade it for being a boy, it's not necessarily a bad thing, being a girl. It's just something you definitely have to get used to. I think it's hard. (Rebecca, sophomore, recruitment chair)

Rebecca's narrative talks to a desire to "prove herself" and prove her "leadership style."

While Carrie's statement extends Rebecca's notion of having to "prove herself," it adds to this narrative, the idea that girls have to work "a lot harder than men,"

I've had to work for everything as a woman, I would say, a lot harder than men on this campus and, I mean, not in every circumstance but, definitely I've had to prove myself a lot more than your average man, average boy that comes on campus to get my positions and to be a student leader. But I wouldn't take that back for anything cause it's a lot sweeter to know that you've really, really earned it, than having it just given to you. (Carrie, senior, treasurer)

Participants are holding themselves to an impossible standard of representing all females. They discuss being an example for other girls who are looking up to them. What is not apparent is whether participants recognize that this is not a realistic expectation for themselves. It appears that some of this pressure is a function of the limited opportunities available to female leaders at USouthern. How these limited opportunities impact female leaders will be discussed in the next section.

**Limited opportunities.** Katherine's detailing of the limited leadership roles that are available to sorority members makes the accomplishments of these 11 participants even more inspiring, as they had to rise among the best to achieve their success.

I feel like most women in sororities have come from high school being super involved and so they're all searching out leadership opportunities. So I think there's probably more interest in leadership roles within the sororities. So that makes it more difficult for women. I feel like the men that just want to be involved typically find a good way to do so, maybe a little bit easier because they have less competition or have someone kind of helping them out but I think there's equal opportunities. It's just a little bit, more difficult maybe for the women to all find one. (Katherine, senior, panhellenic officer)

Shelby also recognizes the limited number of roles for females on campus, saying, "I think it depends on the organization, more are dominated by people of the older thinking. More traditional groups don't have as many opportunities for women in general." From Shelby's perspective, the limited opportunities are restricted by old thinking about traditional roles for girls, consistent with Southern femininity. Vicki extends this argument with a discussion about how girls at USouthern are limited to predefined leadership roles,

I feel like I see a lot of sorority women filling vice president roles. I feel like there's a lot of expectations for people to get involved and to do something but, it's very rare that I see women presidents, unless they're presidents of female centric organizations, which I think is interesting. For example, one of my good friends is involved in student government and I don't understand why she's not president. While we have a great qualified president and he's a great guy, etc., etc., I was always still surprised she didn't run for president cause I always thought she is more qualified. But I see that all the time in different organizations as well. I think that's pretty common in a lot of these big, big organizations

on campus [...] you see a lot of men presidents and women vice presidents. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

Joy echoes Vicki in describing the limited leadership opportunities for females.

I think also a lot of times, people think women might not be in a leadership role, whether it's the president of a campus organization that has both men and women because they think the guy might have a stronger voice, might have people listen to them easily. So I think sometimes there's thinking girls might take a vice presidential role or a secretary role, something that's not as weighted as the main leadership role. (Joy, senior, president)

Allison provides a different opinion that is consistent with the can-do girl as described by Harris (2004). Alison focuses on the equality of opportunities and how success is dependent upon effort and good choices.

Women can be anything on this campus. I think if you're not determined and you're not willing to fight, then no, because there's a lot of work to be done. I definitely believe that's true. I think our whole ... my whole generation probably believes that. (Allison, senior, panhellenic officer)

**Competition.** For sorority leaders at USouthern competition is a prevalent theme.

Participants described competition among the other sorority members and male peers. Consistent with national trends, USouthern has higher a ratio of females to males in the general campus population. This gender difference is even more pronounced at USouthern within the Greek community, as verified by institutional data. These demographic differences, along with traditional Southern feminine norms, create a dynamic that fosters a highly competitive environment. There is a difference between how this competition plays out among sorority members and between fraternity men. The following sections will address participants' descriptions of these differences.

***Competition amongst sorority members.*** Sorority leaders are in a tenuous position as they compete with other girls for limited opportunities. According to participants, girls are very critical of one another and hold each other to high standards.

[F]emales as more competitive personally. I think we're very critical of each other. I think we hold each other to a standard and, if you don't meet that standard then you won't be well liked or, I expect women to act a certain way and, if I see a woman that's not putting women in the best light or something like that, then I'm disappointed in them. I think we can definitely be critical of each other, no matter what the situation we're in. (Allison, senior, panhellenic officer)

Allison is straight forward in her analysis of the subjective nature of how girls judge each other.

Carrie expands upon Allison's analysis and connects this critical nature to socialization beyond

USouthern and its traditional Southern femininity described earlier.

We're in a society where we're always taught to constantly compare ourselves, whether passive/aggressively or, automatically against other girls. Oh, she's way prettier than I am, she's got a flatter stomach than I do when she's just a different body than you do. She's taller, she was born that way and I think it's just the type of mentality that's been instilled and it's a little frustrating because I feel like there's this perfect body and this perfect image when, in all actuality, there's not really. It took me a while to realize that. (Carrie, senior, treasurer)

Carrie admits that it took time to recognize that the perfect image is a façade. However, this socialization to be critical of other girls plays out among sorority member as they compete for limited leadership opportunities.

There's a very select group of sorority women, myself included that have different leadership routes. You could be a panhellenic president or you could be your sorority president or with me, I want to get involved in different clubs on campus. I think it's not really a spoken competitiveness but there's a very passive/aggressive [element]. There's a group of about 20 women in the panhellenic community that are very driven. I think it's not a very spoken type of [competition]. I'm friends with these girls but, when push comes to shove, I'm pretty much competing with every single one of them for an award, for a scholarship, etc. I mean, you're still friends with the person but definitely, here you're going to be competing against [them] for certain things, especially your senior year. (Carrie, senior, treasurer)

Carrie's description about competing against sorority members that she knows personally, provides details about an unspoken passive aggressive subtext that exists between a select group of sorority leaders. It is this existence of limited opportunities and high expectations that drives fierce competition among sorority members. McRobbie's (2015) notion of the 'the

perfect' addresses the negative consequences of competition. This is particularly salient as girls compete against each other and essentially reinforce the heteronormative hegemony by pressuring girls to conform to impossible standards of femininity which include success in academic, career, and relationships. It is within this heightened pressure around impossible standards that girls self-regulate. This is "predicated on calculation and self-assessment against some elevated and rarely described benchmarks" (McRobbie, 2015, p. 9). As will be shown in the following sections, girls self-regulate each other against an impossible standard.

Vicki's provides a more personal story about how competing against a friend and sorority sister changed their relationship.

I was up for [an executive position in] my sorority but I made a decision that I didn't want to run, which was the right call, looking back on it. Me and another woman were being strongly considered for it. I remember that being a very specific situation where I felt competitive with Jane. It was really funny cause I made a decision that I wasn't going to run probably a month out from the election. The chapter was comparing us and then started to scrutinize Jane cause we have very similar personalities. We're both, extroverted. At the time, we were [in similar] majors, [and] it was very interesting that I felt competitive with her. It's something that I haven't really been able to shake. I've noticed it's changed our relationship, even though, she went on to serve as [in that position] and I went on to serve as judicial chair and we were a great team because we are so similar. But it's funny how that competitive environment did change my view of her and it has permanently after that month of being compared ... has [gotten into] my head that I was in competition with Jane. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

Vicki's story demonstrates the toll competition can play on these sorority leaders. Particularly, when it comes to competing with friends.

Vicki, along with others, have pointed out that leadership roles for women are restricted on campus resulting in fierce competition among sorority members for positions that have been seemingly allocated for them in campus organizations. Despite limited opportunities, these participants have forged a path for themselves taking advantage of circumstances and have been

successful. Taylor's comments are indicative of how participants described the competition between sorority members and how this competition is different between girls and boys.

I think I find myself competing with other sorority women solely because of the positions I've chosen to take on ... Looking back now, I probably would find the women more intimidating. When I walked into the interview, I would be looking at the girls and I would be oh, my gosh, look what she's wearing, [look what] I'm wearing ... I guess I didn't really pay attention to the guys. I think we're taught to compare ourselves to other women. I don't think we're taught to compare ourselves to men. I think it's like you're a girl, you compare yourselves to [other] girls (Taylor, junior, new member educator).

Taylor's comment frames how sorority leaders see competition with fraternity members in a different light as opposed with how they view competition with sorority members. Taylor's recognition that girls are taught to compete with other girls is consistent with McRobbie's (2015) notion of the 'perfect.' Taylor's attention to how other girls dress and measuring herself against an unarticulated standard, parallels McRobbie's (2015) findings. Taylor's quote is indicative of this concept that girls are competing with girls and in this competition, impossible standards are being applied. As a result of the limited leadership opportunities among sorority girls, Carrie unveils the fact that competition is fierce between friends, not just an unknown other.

There's a group of about 20 women in the Panhellenic community that are very driven. I think it's not a very spoken type of [competition]. I'm friends with these girls but, when push comes to shove, I'm pretty much competing with every single one of them for an award, for a scholarship, etc. (Carrie, senior, treasurer)

Ginny reinforces this concept and reveals what she perceives as jealousy best described as an "internal tearing down" by sorority sisters.

When it comes to positions, I think you have a lot of the same heat, whether that be a lot of them try to go out for [the same opportunities]. They can get pretty resentful towards those who get it from those who don't. I mean, even with me, there's been always a hint of anger, especially my junior year when [others remarked], "you just got another award, didn't you," "how about you leave something for the rest of us," which should not be what they [say]... I mean, it should not have taken until my senior year for my sorority to acknowledge any of the things that I've done on campus. I think a lot of it is because of that internal tearing down that some people didn't want to reward me for my go-getting because I'm always doing it. (Ginny, senior, events coordinator)

This “tearing down” has prevented Ginny, in her opinion, from receiving deserved recognition for her accomplishments. Participant narratives seemingly parallel McRobbie’s (2015) notion of ‘the perfect’ as girls compete against each other. Consistent with McRobbie (2009; 2015), how participants describe their competition with boys will be detailed next.

*Competition with fraternity members.* While competition with sorority girls can be fierce, competition with fraternity members takes on a much different form. Findings of how participants’ compete with boys at USouthern is consistent with McRobbie (2015) about competition in careers, yet is divergent in how sorority members compete with boys academically. According to McRobbie (2015), “the competitive ethic is internalized for the reason that where gender hierarchies must more or less remain intact, there cannot be open competition in work (and indeed in school) with their male counterparts” (p. 15). Where participants agree with McRobbie (2015) is in their description of competition in leadership positions and careers, with boys. Joy’s narrative provides perspective about the difference in the competition between fraternity and sorority members at USouthern.

I think kind of because of competitiveness or jealousy or whatever it might be. It's easier to be jealous of someone who is more similar to you. I guess I could be jealous of a guy because of a position they hold or their job they're making a lot more money or they have a cool thing. But, a girl, I could be jealous of the way she looks, the way her makeup is, all the cute clothes she has, I could be jealous of that or more competitive with that. Not that I can't compete with a guy but, on certain levels, you can't, like you're just a different person, you do different things, a guy's not going to have a cute skirt that I want necessarily (Joy, senior, president)

Joy’s description of the difference between fraternity and sorority competition is telling.

Essentially she addresses a perception that these groups are fundamentally different and therefore not in competition. McRobbie (2009) argues that this lack of competition with boys is a way for girls to maintain traditional gender boundaries. Embedded within the post-feminist masquerade is knowledge that not rocking the boat prevents reprisals from their male peers. According to

McRobbie (2009), “the masquerade functions to re-assure male structures of power by defusing the presence and the aggressive and competitive actions of women as they come to inhabit positions of authority” (p. 68). This theme persists through many of the participants’ narratives. Another theme that is present is participants’ concern of a double standard applied to fraternity and sorority members.

I just really think that they expect the guys to be like oh, well boys will be boys or oh, they're just those frat stars. Whereas, sorority women are held to such a higher standard. Girls are supposed to have it all together and supposed to be put together at all times. I think it's a different standard. (Rebecca, sophomore, recruitment chair)

Recognition of a double standard between fraternity and sorority members sets the tone for how these different groups will be compared when they find themselves in competition. Rebecca articulates that the standards that will be applied to a guy will be lower than that for a girl competing for the same position. She elaborates on this perception of how this double standard is applied.

[A]ny boy with our resume would blow it out of the water. So, certainly. I think a lot of girls stop and then maybe just settle for being president of some organization they're a part of or just settle for being secretary of SGA where they really could set their sights so much higher. But they think that it's a boy's job and I don't know why. (Rebecca, sophomore, recruitment chair)

While Rebecca addresses a perception of a double standard in term of qualifications, Carrie focuses on the double standards for guys socially.

[G]uys in leadership roles can do whatever they want. They can drink heavily, they can have ten different girlfriends and they're still going to be seen as a leader. Whereas a girl, I think your reputation diminishes significantly, which it should but, I mean, for guys it should as well. (Carrie, senior, treasurer)

Carrie’s comment is consistent with what was discussed previously about competition amongst sorority members. Her comments reflect how girls should hold themselves to a high standard. Of note, is that fraternity members should also be held to a similar standard. The perception being

that currently this standard is only applied to sorority leaders. Perpetuating this model of behavior is a system that is self-sustaining, as noted by Vicki.

I think the boys are looking out for each other. Definitely. The guys will push each other forward, especially in their fraternities or different organizations. It's easier to replace yourself with another man, I think, is a part of that system, a patriarchal system [that] is a good word. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

Vicki's comments about how guys push each other forward implies that this behavior is not similarly observed in girls. Her observation as to how this perpetuates "a patriarchal system," demonstrates an awareness of how girls are competing within a rigged hegemonic system. She goes on to question the effort of fraternity leaders in relation to their positions.

It's so different, at least in my perception, I could be wrong, but that's my perception of fraternity hierarchy from my experience. That's why it's easy for me to respect if a woman has beat me. I know what she put into it. But for a man, I'm oftentimes more critical of his accomplishments if he is boasting his fraternity as his main accomplishment. For a woman saying the same position, typically, I have a better understanding of how much effort actually goes into that job and they hold it at a higher level. It's competition in that group as well, a lot of female competition and, why'd she get this award and I didn't or it can be a supportive environment, that Greek elite, but it can very quickly turn competitive and not necessarily positive. (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman)

Vicki is critical of the accomplishments of fraternity members because she knows they are not held to the same standards as sorority members. She knows the expectations of girls in sorority leadership positions, and in her experience, she does not hold fraternity leadership positions to the same caliber as she does sorority members. Ultimately, there is a recognition that guys hold most of the leadership positions on campus. Allison attributes this to the fact that sorority leaders have low expectations.

I think that we are a male-dominated campus. I feel like the men hold most of the power on campus and there's not many expectations from our female leaders that we do. I think that if the men are pushed to do certain things, act certain ways, and hold, keep this power. I think the women in their leadership roles on campus, they're doing the best they can. They're, trying to be progressive in all of these things but I don't think that the women are being pushed to how much they could be pushed. I don't think I really

realized that until after I didn't have leadership positions anymore and am about to graduate. I've noticed that [the] most, we could have done so much more if we were just pushed one more little baby step, we could have done so much more on campus than we did. (Allison, senior, panhellenic officer)

Allison's assessment is a poignant critique based on her self-reflection. Her recognition that sorority members need to be pushed harder in their roles to achieve their potential will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter V. This section has described the complex process of negotiating femininity as a sorority leader at USouthern. The expectation for sorority leaders to "have it all" will be discussed in the next section.

### **Career, Marriage, and Kids**

Several participants discuss their perspectives on education, career, marriage and kids and how these life events fit their professional and personal goals. Rebecca provides a good overview that is representative of the participants struggle between progressive aspirational goals and traditional heteronormative desires.

I think that it's hard, honestly, because I am very traditional, I love the idea of a guy opening the door for me, buying my dinner and so in that regard, I do like the idea of the boys looking out for us and being protective but, at the same time, I think that women should be in leadership positions. So it's kind of hard to balance that on this campus where it is very Southern traditional. But girls need leadership positions too. I guess it's interesting just to see [that] it's hard in today's world to balance that. To say that you want boys to treat you [with] chivalry. It's hard for that to happen but then, also that you want to be in a leadership position cause a lot of people think it's a contradiction. (Rebecca, sophomore, recruitment chair)

This struggle to balance these "contradictions" is not just a personal choice that girls are freely taking on. Participants describe being taught from a young age that they can be anything and can accomplish anything, if they work hard and make correct choices. These lessons are indicative of the can-do girl narrative, however, along with this positive message about possibilities it also brings pressure to have it all. Meredith expands on balancing these interests and describes how these are not choices girls are making but a pressure they experience to "have it all."

I also feel like there's a pressure nowadays to where women are supposed to have it all and be able to have a family and work. And I feel there's a lot more pressure on women to be able to handle everything and be okay, but it's really hard. (Meredith, senior, panhellenic officer)

Having it all brings with it pressure to handle everything, as expressed by Meredith. For participants this means a pressure to manage traditional Southern expectations of marriage and children, alongside a successful career. McRobbie (2015) warns against this “perfection dispositif” as a way of “equating of female success with the illusion of control, with the idea of ‘the perfect’” (p. 4). McRobbie (2015) defines ‘the perfect’ as, “a heightened form of self-regulation based on an aspiration to some idea of the ‘good life’” (p. 9). Meredith’s comment above is an example that seemingly fits, eerily, with McRobbie’s (2015) description of ‘the perfect’ and embodies the concerns McRobbie (2015) outlines as a result of this self-regulation. Regardless parallels with ‘the perfect,’ the can-do girl, or post-feminist masquerade, USouthern participants’ describe challenges in balancing traditional and progressive desires. This pressure to have it all is not easy for girls to manage as they navigate a shifting paradigm about what they were taught growing up and what they are experiencing in college.

Joy addresses how she has been taught from a young age that a girl can dream and accomplish whatever she wants.

Being a girl means you have the decision to be whoever you want to be. And I think people teach that to girls from a young age. That you can do anything you want to do, it doesn't matter that you're a girl, quote/unquote. I feel like that was portrayed a lot, you can do whatever you'd like to. You can be president of the United States, that kind of thing and, obviously, that hasn't happened yet so you're given the role of being a big dreamer and kind of going against what has been before you. (Joy, senior, president)

Joy's comments are indicative of the participants’ views that they have been taught throughout their lives that they can achieve anything they set their mind to. This is consistent with the can-do girl as described by Harris (2004b). As was discussed previously, these high achieving girls

once in college, are experiencing competition and a social environment where opportunities are restricted based on normative assumptions that guys are leaders and girls serve in support roles. Shelby clearly articulates her feeling about these competing forces, “it's hard to do, to balance all that, academic, social, and leaderships. [To] be that perfect person I feel like they want to see” (Shelby). The other side to this equation is the personal desire toward family and children.

In discussing career, kids, and children, Candlelight ceremonies are used to show how perspectives on the achievement of a marriage proposal are viewed differently among participants and general members. These ceremonies emphasize the male-female relationship as traditionally defined. Participants describe enjoying these ceremonies but they also provide a strong level of critique of this tradition. For example, Meredith refers to these ceremonies as “pretty cool,” while Shelby says “I do love the candlelight service that we do.” These comments are representative of some participants’ views about this ceremony. There is a recognition that these ceremonies bring sorority sisters together and are a “sweet tradition celebrating engagements,” as noted by Rebecca. Despite the acceptance that these ceremonies are ‘pretty cool’ some sorority leaders place more value on careers and academics than marriage proposals and children.

In opposition to this optimism around the Candlelight Ceremonies post-feminism critiques by both Carrie and Ginny will be explored. Both participants are from in-state but were not familiar with the Candlelight Ceremony prior to arriving at USouthern. First and foremost, neither participant views marriage as a defining achievement.

So it heartens me to see that there are fewer engagements and that there is a lot less social pressure towards being engaged. In our pledge class, we would look at the ones who got engaged as the oddball. [Not] that we're all just the disappointments for not being able to go find a man, and we have a good sense of humor about it. Other houses might feel a little more disappointed when they didn't get engaged but, ultimately, I like the trend, I think it's smart. I'm happy to see that, even though it's not quite a conscious thing...about

doing some type of feminist act or self-empowered act. I'm still glad that just the individual rationality of delaying marriage is getting through, even among ones who have been dating for extremely long times. (Carrie, senior, treasurer)

Even though delaying of marriage may not be a conscious feminine protest, Carrie feels this is a positive social trend. This critique of formally celebrating engagements demonstrates how the focus on academics and careers detailed earlier highlights the post-feminist thought on delaying marriage in support of career achievement. This sentiment is further corroborated by Ginny.

But [having a serious long term boyfriend] has changed my perception towards my sisters who do get married relatively young. My Big [Sister in the sorority] is getting married this summer. She got engaged soon after her graduation, so is getting married only a year out of her undergrad. Several of her friend group got engaged and married very, very young. And I've had some slight judgments about them for that cause a lot of them have essentially just decided to hitch their careers with their husbands and follow their husbands wherever they go. (Ginny, senior, events coordinator)

Career and financial independence is a theme among participants critical of the heteronormative feminine message portrayed by the Candlelight Ceremony. Members celebrate both the informal and formal practices of reinforcing femininity among sorority girls but also have strong critiques regarding the messages they are sending to sorority members. Beyond relationships and how marriage would impact careers, children are also a consideration.

Still want a ring by spring but want to delay the marriage two years so they can go work, sort of that dichotomy. Ya. birth control's incredibly [ubiquitous] almost in every cubby in the sorority house now and stuff like that (Vicki, senior, judicial chairman).

Vicki provides an insight to how girls are balancing these concerns as they want the ring, want to get married but still want to be able to work, so they delay marriage and take preventative measures to not interrupt careers. These comments embody how these girls are trying to balance having it all. Emily provides a personal experience about balancing career and personal relationships.

I've been thinking a lot about having kids and [people] they're always just like oh, your opinion will change, you'll want kids one day. And I'm like no. I don't, I don't really think

I want kids and that's been kind of hard. I've told a couple people that at first. I've been thinking a lot. I think it'd be fine if I didn't have children in my life. And they were like oh, no, no, no and that was kind of hard. So this expectation that people have for me is, when I had a boyfriend, everyone was like oh, are you going to get engaged next. And I'm like, I'm a senior in college, why are people just assuming that...I will get engaged, why people are saying that I am going to have kids one day. I think it's all too much.  
(Emily, senior, president)

Emily's narrative is indicative of the gendered expectations that society has for women in terms of marriage and children. To assume that every girl has to aspire for marriage and children devalues their self-worth. To question her choices however, is intrusive and self-imposing. The challenges to Emily's decision about not wanting children is telling of the pressure girls in the South have against being progressive, about putting career above family and kids. Emily is not alone in her desire to put her career first, Taylor likewise, provides a clear and unambiguous statement about her priorities.

I am very, very career driven. I have zero expectations to get married and be a stay at home mom. I do not want kids. I am 110% going to be extremely career based and I am excited about that. That is something that I look forward to and I also understand that that's not your average feeling from maybe a woman of my age. I don't think women should ever be afraid to want to do their own thing just because they feel like they have to put men's needs before their own. (Taylor, junior, new member educator)

Taylor is unapologetic about her desire to place her career above a "man's needs." Her comments, however, connect well the description of the can-do girl as outlined by Harris. According to Harris (2004b), "can-do girls are thus encouraged to delay motherhood until their careers are established; then they can treat it as both an essential feminine moment of fulfillment and a consumer lifestyle experience that enhances an image of success" (p. 25). Through choice Taylor is able to create a success that is independent of a relationship. While delaying of motherhood until 30s and 40s is acceptable, the can-do girl is not supposed to entirely renounce motherhood.

While Emily and Taylor, similarly disclose that they do not want children, these participants represent a small subset, their desire to renounce motherhood is not consistent with the ethos of can-do girls, who “must pursue careers and at the same time factor in children before ‘it’s too late’” (Harris, 2004b, p. 24). Essential for success and fulfillment is the can-do girl’s desire to be a mother and ultimately have children. The timing of children is a fundamental and necessary part of a can-do girl achieving the ‘having it all’ status and ‘the perfect’ that they are seeking to portray. Delaying marriage and children is an approach the can-do girl is using to balance her traditional and progressive desires. For sorority members who are engaging in a neo-liberal society, where girls and young women have been rewarded with access to increased education and employment opportunities, these are complex processes for them to negotiate.

Throughout this chapter the production of femininity within the system of historically white sororities has been discussed. A nuanced production of femininity has been detailed as chapters and PNMs engage in a choreographed display of regulated appearances around an idealized image of femininity. Once matched, new members participate in formal and informal practices that teach and socialize new members what it means to be feminine. Finally, sorority members’ evolution in a definition of femininity is outlined as sorority girls find themselves as leaders in their chapter and across USouthern’s campus.

CHAPTER V:  
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the previous chapter, participants' narratives detail information about the production of femininity in historically white sororities. This chapter provides a summary of the findings, draws connections between the findings and the literature reviewed, offers recommendations, and discusses implications for higher education administrators and broader research on girls' studies and post-feminism. The primary purpose of this study was to understand how femininity is produced within historically white sororities and to expose the various ways in which sorority girls in formal leadership positions interpret, negotiate, reproduce, and resist the different societal messages concerning what it means to be a girl and appropriately feminine. Through exploring participants' unique experiences as sorority leaders, I identified themes around becoming a sorority girl/woman, looking for the right girl, teaching femininity, and becoming a leader. In these themes, I illuminate the competing, and often contradictory expectations and ideals of femininity that sorority leaders face. Results of the study expand current research on sororities by offering a more complete and well-rounded understanding of how femininity is socially constructed within the institution of historically white sororities.

**Findings Related to the Literature**

The studies' findings show within historically white sororities at USouthern that femininity is produced through formal and informal practices that teach and socialize members about what it means to be feminine. At USouthern, femininity, specifically that of white Southern Femininity, is found to be produced through the formal recruitment process and within

the sorority, around practices related to new member education, dress and appearance, public presentation, communal living, candlelight ceremonies, and academic success. Through participants' responses, a nuanced production of femininity has been detailed. Using the tenants of girls' studies and post-feminism, a discussion of how femininity is interpreted, negotiated, reproduced, and reinforced within sororities is addressed.

### **Double Entanglement**

McRobbie's (2009) double entanglement or, "the co-existence of neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life...with processes of liberalization in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations" (p. 12) is observed among the participants at USouthern. Despite benefitting from feminist gains (in terms of educational and career opportunities), most participants still desire and actively pursue traditionally feminine values and norms (i.e. heteronormative love, marriage, and kids). Caught in this entanglement, participants are experiencing anxiety generated by their competing desires to conform with traditional Southern femininity and progressive aspirations related to academics and career (McRobbie, 2009).

This double entanglement is observed as participants hold on to traditional feminine values, as demonstrated by their celebration of candlelight ceremonies, while actively pursuing progressive ideals of educational success and careers. Balancing of these competing, and contradictory normative assumptions, is a necessary prerequisite for girls to 'have it all.' According to Rottenberg (2014), in her response to Slaughter's (2012) article, "Why Women Still Can't Have It All," girls, and in this case the participants, will inevitably have to make a decision between career or family.

Participants in this study believe they can ‘have it all,’ and they do not expect doors to be closed to them. There is also a recognition that they need to work hard, and make the right choices in order to accomplish their goals. Participants further accept that choices have to be made about delaying family and having children. Believing that these sacrifices will result in career success but only as a product of individual effort and proper planning on their part.

Anne-Marie Slaughter (2012), in her widely read article, “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All,” argues that these desires are possible, but not with the current structure of the U.S. economy and society. Equally valuing family and career is in conflict with modern societal values (Slaughter, 2012). Slaughter (2012) controversially tells girls that the current conception of ‘having it all’ is a fallacy, saying that, “many of us are reinforcing a falsehood that having it all is a function of personal determination” (para. 19). Slaughter (2012) concedes that while some women are capable of “having it all” that women who are touted as modern day examples of achieving this pinnacle, are in fact legitimate superwomen and their exceptionalism has become normalized. This standard, however, cannot be applied or used against the majority of women in society (Slaughter, 2012). McRobbie (2009) makes a parallel critique about the exception becoming the norm for which to judge all others in her discussion of girls’ academic achievement.

According to Slaughter (2012), the idea that one can perfectly balance family and career priorities is unrealistic. Slaughter further advises that we as a society need to lower expectations and abandon notions that anyone can fully dedicate themselves to career and family (Slaughter, 2012). Slaughter (2012) also challenges the notion of proper sequencing of children (i.e. when is the best time to start a family) as a strategy for “having it all.” While it appears that participants’ attitudes are consistent with the sequencing fallacy that Slaughter (2012) describes, in reality, no

optional sequence exists. Whether you choose family first and then career or career and then family, each has drawbacks and compromises that are not applicable to men, or choices that men do not have to make (Slaughter, 2012). Slaughter (2012) further argues that this attitude produces an unrealistic expectation and places girls in a difficult position that ultimately could lead to depression and feelings of failure.

### **Post-Feminist Masquerade**

McRobbie's (2009) description of the "fashion-and-beauty complex" creating a feminine agency distinctly shaped by consumer culture is observed among the participant population (p. 9). As a result, the post-feminist masquerade is documented through intentional participation in traditional feminine rituals and practices of grooming and self-maintenance (McRobbie, 2009). As predicted by McRobbie (2009), this adoption of a highly stylized hyper-femininity is part of a post-feminist masquerade that plays out in nuanced ways between the professional, social, and academic settings of participants. Personal choices around the post-feminist masquerade are observed to evolve over time as participants' detail their early years at USouthern compared to that of their current experiences.

It was also documented that girls are actively engaging in production of self, which is dependent upon context and setting. What is consistent, however, across all settings is the use of the post-feminist masquerade is used as a means of negotiation. Participants use dress and appearance to fit in or conform to community standards. In the academic setting the use of the sorority uniform has been discussed as a means of establishing a group identity. In the professional setting, girls likewise use dress to fit in, however, business attire is accessorized to show their femininity and seek attention but not in a way that will challenge the status quo of male patriarchy. Finally, in the social setting participants outline how hyper-feminine attire is

used in unison with their peers to fit-in as a group, while still trying to stand out and seek attention from the opposite sex.

The academic, professional, and social settings all show elements of fitting in and not drawing attention to self or challenging the heteronormative hegemony, consistent with McRobbie's (2009) post-feminist masquerade. However, there may be more to how participants' use dress beyond just fitting in or conforming. While there was consensus about the sorority uniform, consisting of the large t-shirt and Nike shorts, as an identifier that creates a tribe, there is a deeper meaning assigned to this uniform by some participants. Of note, is the possible use of the uniform to desexualize the female body, to create a comfortable setting in the classroom, and to not upstage other members of the tribe. This finding indicates that for some, the uniform may represent more than just a means of fitting in and conforming to community standards. In the professional setting, participants are seeking hyper-femininity while not openly competing with men. This is done through being on-point with fashion and having an attention to detail that stands out but does not draw attention in a negative way. A different hyper-femininity exists within the social setting, where participants dress up together, establishing a minimum threshold of appearance and dress for their night out. In this case in an effort to stand out, participants go all out in with regard to dress and appearance as they compete for male attention. For participants who have gained access to the masculine spheres of education and leisure, the post-feminist masquerade serves as a façade with which to navigate a patriarchal landscape while maintaining a sexual identity (McRobbie, 2009). The post-feminist masquerade also functions to conceal and emolliate any fears associated with the potential loss of feminine appeal.

## **Self-Regulation**

Elements of McRobbie's (2015), 'the perfect,' an intensified practice of self-policing based on the desire to achieve the fantasy of the 'good life,' is observed among participants. For McRobbie (2015), "the idea of the perfect is both part of female 'common sense', something now expected of what Harris (2004) refers to as the 'can-do' girl, and also something potentially dangerous, a mechanism unleashing new waves of self-harm" (p. 4). Beyond the self-harm experienced, this process of self-regulation focuses attention on girls' behavior. For McRobbie (2015), the notion of "the perfect suggests that it is only viable to compete against other women. It thereby intensifies those gender difference which might otherwise be at risk of being dissolved" (p. 17). Through self-regulation girls are measured against unarticulated standards that are not applied to males. It is in this process that girls are maintained within traditional gendered boundaries.

It was observed that among a select group of sorority leaders there exists an unspoken competitiveness, "a very passive/aggressive [element]." Driving this fierce competition among sorority members is limited opportunities and high expectations. This is particularly salient as participants compete against other girls and essentially reinforce the heteronormative hegemony by pressuring conformity to impossible standards of femininity, which include success in academics, careers, and relationships. It is within this heightened pressure around impossible standards that girls self-regulate. This self-regulation is "predicated on calculation and self-assessment against some elevated and rarely described benchmarks" (McRobbie, 2015, p. 9). Where participants align with McRobbie (2015) is in their description of competition in leadership positions and careers opportunities, with boys. As detailed earlier, girls do not see boys as their competition and instead focus on other girls. For McRobbie (2015), "the

competitive ethic is internalized for the reason that where gender hierarchies must more or less remain intact, there cannot be open competition in work (and indeed in school) with their male counterparts” (p. 15). Overall, participants’ narratives seemingly parallel McRobbie’s (2015) notion of ‘the perfect,’ as girls compete against each other.

Where the participants diverge from McRobbie’s (2015) description of ‘the perfect’ is in their participation in open competition with boys in academics. In terms of scholastic competition, the attitude of participants’ is more closely aligned with the can-do girl described by Harris (2004). Despite this departure, the consequences caused by self-regulation are still the same in that participants turn their competition inward resulting in self-beratement. Examples of self-measurement against highly ambiguous benchmarks are present, and participants dangerously self-regulate, in order to fit in with what society deems to be correctly feminine.

### **Can-Do Girl**

According to McRobbie (2009), a new normative femininity has been constructed whereby academic success and high achievement are reconstituted as unexceptional. In this paradigm, academic excellence is the minimum standard girls must achieve. As a result, participants’ discuss having to work more than their male peers, “you have to be feminine but you also have to work on your academics, your career cause they don't come as easily to us” (Shelby, junior, president). What Shelby is validating is that she alone is responsible for the success of her achievements. This is consistent with Harris (2004b) and the can-do girl, who is required to work hard to achieve and enjoy success, which is dependent upon “individual responsibility and choices” (p.6). Harris (2004b) connects academic success as “a key to safeguarding their future essential to securing consumer lifestyle and successful career” (p. 27).

Participants believe, and have been taught, that they can accomplish anything if they simply work hard enough and make correct choices. In this sense, success is believed to be dependent upon individual effort, proper planning, and commitment to career. Having gained access to education and the work force, the can-do girl, in an attempt to 'have it all,' will delay marriage and children to pursue her career. According to Harris (2004b), "can-do girls are thus encouraged to delay motherhood until their careers are established; then they can treat it as both an essential feminine moment of fulfillment and a consumer lifestyle experience that enhances an image of success" (p. 25). While delaying of motherhood until 30s and 40s is acceptable, the can-do girl is not supposed to entirely renounce motherhood. Despite this requisite, at least two participants openly discuss their intentions of never having children and the ridicule they have already experienced as a result of this decision. Consistent with Harris' (2004b) findings of can-do girls, study participants believe that all girls have the same access to opportunities. For those who do not achieve at a high level, it is thought to be a result of "poor personal choices, lazy, and incompetent family practices" (Harris, 2004b, p. 25).

Choice and freedom are central tenants to the can-do girl, with success and opportunities ubiquitous as "educated, young, professional career women with glamorous consumer lifestyles appear to be everywhere" (p. 8). Participants fit Harris's (2004b) construction of the can-do girl in that they associate their achievement with ambition, individual effort, and good choices. As part of this process, participants discuss trying to fit in and how ultimately their ability to do so, is predicated upon their consumer lifestyle. Consistent with Harris (2004b), participants detailed the need to fit in through dress and appearance. Additionally, their ability to stay on trend was perceived to be a reflection of their effectiveness as a leader. Through disposable income, participants are active consumers in producing and reproducing femininity.

## **Implications**

Essentialising of sorority girls' masks their navigation of a complex environment. This study exposed that sorority girls in formal leadership positions at USouthern navigate multiple expectations simultaneously. Expectations exist around femininity within their academic, professional, and social settings. The addition of this research challenges the negative stereotypes espoused by the mass media and academia that produces a one-dimensional view of sororities and sorority girls.

### **Implications for Higher Education Administrators**

Based on the findings of this study, there are implications for higher education administrators. First and foremost is an awareness that sorority members must live up to competing, and often contradictory expectations of what it means to be a girl in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It can be informative for administrators to understand the complexity involved in navigating the ideals and pressures of femininity within sororities. This knowledge assists administrators in providing better support for sorority members as they navigate expectations of femininity within various leadership roles. When sorority girls are essentialized around stereotypes, it ignores the struggles they experience as they seek to navigate femininity. This navigation needs to circumscribe the academic, professional and social environments. Based on these findings, alternative approaches to engaging sorority girls need to be explored. Details on the importance of creating alternative spaces, also known as border spaces, will be discussed in the Recommendations section.

### **Implications for Girls' Studies and Post-Feminism**

Implications for scholarly research are that this understudied population provides a number of insights about the production of femininity. Consistent with Arthur's (1998) assertion,

this study clearly shows that sorority members are active agents in the creation of their own femininity. This finding warrants continued investigation and further efforts to expand the current dearth of literature on this subpopulation. This study challenges the simplistic representation associated with sororities and sorority membership, by resituating sorority leaders as complex individuals navigating a complicated terrain. This study also provides a needed addition to the literature about this understudied population. According to Hevel & Bureau (2014) given the predominance on college campus this population is well understudied. A possible reason for this lack of research is likely based on access along with a reluctance to study privileged populations (Molasso, 2005). By gaining access to this private subpopulation, this study provides baseline information about the production of femininity within historically white sororities as well as the various ways in which sorority girls in formal leadership positions interpret, negotiate, reproduce, and resist the different societal messages concerning what it means to be a girl and appropriately feminine.

### **Recommendations**

Managing appearance carries an expectation to conform. Girls need to conform to these expectations and for those who do not, it is difficult for them to find their place in sorority culture. Despite the findings around managing appearance, when participants describe the ideal sorority member, appearance and dress are not typically used. Rather, concepts of personality traits and intelligence are valued over that of appearance. Yet, in the formal recruitment of new members, traditional norms of femininity are strictly enforced and used as a means of selecting membership. Based on these findings, identifying recruitment practices that address the selection of PNMs beyond that of superficial feminine stereotypes (i.e., appearance and dress) could prove beneficial. With this goal in mind, investigation of values-based recruitment efforts at other

similar universities could be explored, with the understanding that this recommendation will not dismantle the system or challenge the basic structure of recruitment, which is rooted in competition and elitism.

Findings from this study confirm that the notion of ‘having it all’ is not realistic. Idealistic expectations of participants balancing competing progressive and traditional values are observed among this population. Through collaborative programmatic efforts between offices that advise fraternities and sororities, campus Women’s Centers, and Women’s Studies programs, sorority members could learn how to create spaces for engagement and expression that would allow them to “open up a critique of contemporary constructions of young femininity” (Harris, 2004b, p. 172). Because the increase in the regulation of girls has “created problems for their capacity to express social critique and enact subjective positions that are outside the can-do or at-risk categories,” it only makes sense that girls may attempt to identify new techniques for expression (Harris, 2004b, p. 157). Gonick (2006) likewise argues, for “sorely needed spaces for girls to both celebrate their girlhood and to understand and critique prevailing discourses that limit and constrain girls’ lives” (p. 15).

With so many traditional spaces for speaking, recreation, and assembly under scrutiny, the creation of alternative spaces, or border spaces, is needed for members to perform different forms of femininity. Within these border spaces, members would be able to “gather, debate, and critique meaning of young womanhood in later modernity, but also potential new modes of networking and organizing,” free of adult supervision and regulation (Harris, 2004b, p. 179).

Expanding beyond the typical virtual border spaces (e.g., Internet, weblog, online diaries, web pages, etc.), face-to-face opportunities, using the Sustained Dialogue® model (Sustained Dialogue Institute, 2014), could be used to create a more welcoming environment for all

members, not just those who fit into society's traditional notions of ideal femininity. Sustained Dialogue® is conflict resolution “process that addresses issues of community relations including race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, ability status, and other topics that often aren't effectively discussed in diverse groups” (Sustained Dialogue Institute, 2014, p. 6). Affiliated with the Sustained Dialogue Institute, the Sustained Dialogue (SD) Program provides a structured space for individuals to discuss relevant social issues, build relationships, and work collaboratively to address deep-rooted problems (Sustained Dialogue Institute, 2014). Through the process of peer-to-peer dialogue, sorority members would be able “to create a space that allows those involved to be changed by the process itself” (Sustained Dialogue Institute, 2014, p. 6).

Situated between public and private sites, border work allows girls the flexibility of “building collective secret knowledge and then using this carefully to create and manifest activism” (Harris, 2004b, p. 158). Border spaces have “a particular role in undermining, questioning, and playing with the dominant paradigms by which young women's lives are so commonly represented and shaped in current times” (Harris, 2004b, p. 165). Outside of the view of the public, members would have the freedom to challenge “the notion that girls are content to purchase the can-do image,” which is “primarily constructed around neoliberal narratives of choice, self-invention, and consumerism” (p. 166). The creation of these alternative discursive spaces would provide members a safe space to “resist and reconfigure images of girlhood and the place of young women in contemporary societies” (p. 165).

While elements of resistance were not as obvious as I would have thought, forms of resistance did emerge, just in a different way than initially anticipated. Reconsidering resistance, particularly how to go about uncovering it, should be considered in future research. Some

assumptions and biases that I as an “insider,” had about resistance may have affected the questions included in the Initial and Follow-up Interview Protocols. Upon reflection, questions may have not been direct and focused enough to solicit elements of resistance. If given the opportunity to repeat the study, I would probe more about the sorority uniform and student organization seating, both of which hinted at structural resistance.

This study allowed the researcher to gather baseline data on an elite, privileged subpopulation that remains understudied. Further study of sorority girls is needed, including exploration into the experiences of members with varying identities (i.e., race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, class, etc.). Recognizing the limitations of this study’s focus, expanding the population of the study beyond that of upper-class white Panhellenic sorority leaders can provide insight into the experiences of sorority members with varying identities.

### **Conclusion**

This study has documented the various contradictions that leaders of historically white sororities are navigating relative to definitions of traditional femininity. The review of literature showed that sorority girls are essentialized through stereotypes portrayed by the mass media and academic research. Getting into a sorority, however, is not just about fitting a particular look; it involves thriving and using one’s membership as a personal growth platform, which changes over time. Conformity to the ideal notion of white Southern femininity, while extremely relevant at the beginning of one’s sorority membership, decreases considerably over time, having less significance by senior year.

Further, sorority leaders are not exempt from the pressures and expectations that have been identified and documented in previous girls’ studies and post-feminist literature. The idea that these sorority leaders are not academically inclined and do not face pressures to be

successful, is simply not supported by the findings of this study. Sorority girls are experiencing the same challenges and pressures as other high achieving girls.

This study goes beyond essentialized behaviors and documents how sorority leaders are navigating expectations about what it means to be a girl in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As can-do girls, they struggle with the conflicts of double entanglement and engage in the post-feminist masquerade and self-regulation as they negotiate their femininity. Today's girls believe that through individual effort and good choices they can 'have it all.' Yet Slaughter (2012) and Rottenberg (2014) outline their concerns that these beliefs ultimately cause harm for girls when they do not achieve the success that they were told was available to them. Findings from this study confirm that participants do have unrealistic expectations about 'having it all,' which exist in their belief that they can successfully balance competing progressive and traditional values.

Girls are promised the fallacy of 'the good life,' yet they do not see how such optimism can damage them. In this sense, the notion of 'having it all' is an optimistic attachment. The cruel optimism, "the condition of maintaining an attachment to a significantly problematic object" (Berlant, 2011, p. 24) occurs when girls realize structurally they have a long way to go. Ignoring the self-destructive or harmful attachment to the object of 'having it all,' in favor of optimism, prevents individuals from identifying alternate ways of the living in the present (Berlant, 2011).

## REFERENCES

- About AOII*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 30, 2010 from <http://www.alphaomicronpi.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Founding&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=32&ContentID=6847>.
- Anson, J. L., & Marchesani, R.F. (Ed.). (1991). *Bairds manual of american college fraternities*. Indianapolis, IN: Baird's Manual Foundation Inc.
- Aapola, S., Gonick, M., & Harris, A. (2005). *Young femininity: Girlhood, power and social change*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Aguiar, L. L., & Schneider, C. J. (2012). *Researching amongst elites: Challenges and opportunities in studying up*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.
- Alice, L. (1995). What is postfeminism? Or, having it both ways. *Feminism, Postmodernism, Postfeminism*, Massey University, NZ.
- Arthur, L.B. (1992). *Idealized images: The social construction of femininities in two exclusive organizations*. University of California at Davis. UMI Microfilms.
- Arthur, L.B. (1998). Dress and the social construction of gender in two sororities. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 17(2), 84-93.
- Astin, A. W. (1993). *What matters in college? four critical years revisited*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Bailey, A. L. (2015, August 17). Bama sorority video worse for women than Donald Trump. *AL.com*. Retrieved from [http://www.al.com/opinion/index.ssf/2015/08/bama\\_sorority\\_video\\_worse\\_for.html](http://www.al.com/opinion/index.ssf/2015/08/bama_sorority_video_worse_for.html)
- Barnett, G. A. (2011). *Encyclopedia of social networks*. Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications.
- Bauer, L. (2005). A History of sisterhood: women's secret societies, women's fraternities and sororities. *Essentials*. 1(1)
- Baxter, P. & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 544-559.
- Beisel N. (1998). *Imperiled innocents*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press

- Berbary, L. A. (2008). *Subject to sorority: Women's negotiations of competing discourses of femininity*. Retrieved from [https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/berbary\\_lisbeth\\_a\\_200808\\_phd.pdf](https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/berbary_lisbeth_a_200808_phd.pdf)
- Berbary, L. A. (2012). "Don't be a whore, that's not ladylike": Discursive discipline and sorority women's gendered subjectivity. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 18(7), 606-625.
- Berkowitz, A., & Padavic, I. (1999). Getting a man or getting ahead: A comparison of white and black sororities. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 27(4), 530-557.
- Berlant, L. (2011). *Cruel optimism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Biddix, P. (2012). The necessity for research on fraternity/sorority culture. *Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors*, 7(2), 1-1.
- Bordo, S.R. (1989) *The body and reproduction of femininity: A feminist appropriation of foucault*. In gender/body/knowledge: Feminist reconstruction of being and knowing. Alison M. Jagger and Susan R Bordo, eds. Pp. 13-33. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Brady, S. M., & R. M. (2013). Where is the 'system' in systemic risk literature? *Journal of Risk Management in Financial Institutions*, 6(1), 54-66.
- Budgeon, S. (2001). Emergent feminist(?) identities. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 8(1), 7.
- Butler, J.P. (1990). *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. United States of America: Routledge.
- Callais, M.A. (2002). *Sorority rituals: Rites of passages and their impact on contemporary sorority women*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.
- Coser, L.A. (1974). *Greedy institutions: patterns of undivided commitment*. Free Press.
- Creswell, J.W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications.
- de Beauvoir, S. (2009). *The second sex*. The United States of America: Vintage Books.
- Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications.
- DeSantis, A.D. (2007). *Inside greek u.: Fraternities, sororities, and the pursuit of pleasure, power, and prestige*. University Press of Kentucky.

- Driscoll, C. (2002). *Girls: Feminine adolescence in popular culture and cultural theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Driscoll, C. (2008). Girls today – Girls, girls culture and girl Studies. *Girlhood Studies*, 1(1), 13.
- Esposito, J.R. (2002). *Lotions and potions: The meanings college women make of everyday practices of femininities*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Syracuse University. Syracuse NY.
- Fauldi, S. (1992). *Backlash: The undeclared war Against american women*. New York, NY. Three Rivers Press.
- Finley-Scott, J. (1965). The American college sorority: its role in class and ethnic endogamy. *American Sociological Review*. 30(4), 514
- Fuller, G. (2015, August 17). *Sorority video criticized for being 'worse for women than donald trump.'* *Elite Daily*. Retrieved from <http://elitedaily.com/news/sorority-video-criticized-bad-for-women-video/1181285/>
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York, NY. Basic Books.
- Giddings (1988). *Black sorority movement*. New York, NY. William Morrow & Co.
- Gilgun, J. F. & Abrams, L. S. (2002). The nature and usefulness of qualitative social work research: Some thoughts and an invitation to dialogue. *Qualitative Social Work*, 1, 39-55. doi:10.1177/1473325002001001743.
- Gill, R. (2007). Postfeminist media culture: elements of a sensibility. *European Journal of cultural studies*. 10(2): 147-166.
- Gill, R. & Scharff, C. (2011). 'Introduction' in Gill, R. & Scharff, C. (eds.) *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*. Palgrave.
- Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Goffman, E. (1978). Response cries. *Language*, 54(4), 787-815.
- Gonick, M. (2006). Between "girl power" and "reviving ophelia": Constituting the neoliberal girl subject. *NWSA Journal*, 18(2): 1–23.
- Good, C. (1989). The southern lady, or art of dissembling. *Journal of American Studies*, 23(1), 72-77.

- Gore, L. (2015, August 17). An apology to the women of university of alabama's alpha phi. *AL.com*. Retrieved from [http://www.al.com/opinion/index.ssf/2015/08/an\\_apology\\_to\\_the\\_women\\_of\\_uni.html](http://www.al.com/opinion/index.ssf/2015/08/an_apology_to_the_women_of_uni.html)
- Gustafsson, C. (2011), *The production of seriousness: The metaphysics of economic reason*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Handler, L. (1995). In the fraternal sisterhood: Sororities and gender strategy. *Gender and Society*, 9, 236-255.
- Harris, A. (2004a). *All about the girl: Culture, power, and identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Harris, A. (2004b). *Future girl: Young women in the twenty-first century*. New York: Routledge.
- Hayek, J., Carini, R., O'Day, P., & Kuh, G. (2002). Triumph or tragedy: Comparing student engagement levels of members of Greek-letter organizations and other students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 43, 643-663.
- Hays, D.G., & Singh. A.A. (2011). *Qualitative inquiry in clinical and educational settings*. New York: Guilford Publications.
- History: Highlights in ADPI history*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 30, 2010 from <http://www.alphadeltapi.org/contentmanager/page.asp?webpageid=199>.
- The history of pi beta phi fraternity*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 30, 2010 from <http://www.archive.org/details/historyofpibetap00helmrich>.
- Hesford, W. (1999). *Framing identities: Autobiography and the politics of pedagogy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hevel, M.S., & Bureau, D.A. (2014). Research-driven practice in fraternity and sorority life. *New Directions for Student Services*, 147, 23-36.
- Hollows, J. (2000). *Feminism, femininity and popular culture*. Manchester, Manchester University Press.
- Hunt, S., & Rentz, A. (1994). Greek-letter social group members' involvement and psychosocial development. *Journal of College Student Development*, 35, 289-295.
- Johnson, C.S. (1972). *Fraternities in our colleges*. New York, NY: National Interfraternity Foundation.
- Joseph, N. & Alex, N. (1972). The uniform: A sociological perspective. *American Journal of Sociology*, 77(4), 719-730.
- Kahn, S. R. (2012). The sociology of elites. *The Annual Review of Sociology*, 38, 361-377.

- Katz, L.L. (1999). In Pursuit of the multicultural curriculum: Preparing students for a diverse society. *National Association of Independent Schools. Independent School Magazine*, Winter.
- Kearney, M.C. (2006). *Girls make media*. New York, NY., Taylor & Francis.
- Kearney, M. C. (2009). Coalescing: The development of girls' studies. *National Women's Studies Association Journal*, 21(1), 1-28.
- Krane, V., Choi P.Y.L, Bard, S.M., Aimar, C.M., & Kauer, K.J. (2004). Living the paradox: Female athletes negotiate femininity and muscularity. *Sex Roles*, 50, 315-329.
- Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Laidler, J.L., & Hunt, G.I. (2001). Accomplishing femininity among the girls in the gang. *British Journal of Criminology*. 41(4), 656-678.
- Levine, W. (2016, January 20). Miami greek recruitment video lacks diversity. *Daily Trojan*. Retrieved from <http://dailytrojan.com/2016/01/20/miami-greek-recruitment-video-lacks-diversity/>.
- Malaney, G.D. (1990). Students attitudes toward fraternities and sororities. *NASPA Journal*, 28, 37-42.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2011). *Designing qualitative research* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Maxwell, J.A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Washington D.C., Sage Publications, Inc.
- McRobbie, A. & Garber (1976). Girls and subcultures. In S. Hall and T. Jefferson (Eds.), *Resistance through rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain*. Essex: Hutchinson University Library.
- McRobbie, A. (1978) Working class girls and the culture of femininity. In: Women's studies group, center for contemporary cultural studies, Ed., *Women Take Issue: Aspects of Women's Subordination*, Hutchinson, London.
- McRobbie, A. (2004) Notes on postfeminism and popular culture: Bridget Jones and the new gender regime. In A. Harris (Ed.). *All about the girl: Culture, power and identity* (pp. 3-14). New York: Routledge.
- McRobbie, A. (2009). *The aftermath of feminism: Gender, culture and social change*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

- McRobbie, A. (2015). Notes on the perfect: Competitive femininity in neoliberal times. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 30(83), 3-20.
- Merriam, S.B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Middleton-Keirn, S. (1986). Magnolias and microchips: Regional subcultural constructions of femininity. *Sociological Spectrum*, 6, 83-107.
- Miles, M.B. & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis (2nd edition)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis (3rd edition)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Molasso, W.R. (2005). A decade of research on the fraternity/sorority movement. *Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity Advisors*, 1, 1-12
- National Panhellenic Conference. (n.d.). *Meet npc*. Retrieved July 21, 2015, from <https://www.npcwomen.org/about.aspx>.
- National Panhellenic Conference. *Manual of information* (20th Edition, 2015). Indianapolis, IN.
- Newsome, K., (2009). *Factors that influence the decision of black males to seek membership in a historically white fraternity*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. AAT 3385292). Retrieved September 9, 2010, from ERIC database.
- Our history*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 30, 2010 from <http://www.phimu.org/aboutUs/content.aspx?item=AboutUs/WhoIsPhiMu/General%20Phi%20Mu.xml>.
- Patton, M.Q. (2014). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods (4th edition)*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Pipher, M. (1994). *Reviving ophelia: Saving the selves of adolescent girls*. New York: Ballentine Books.
- Peshkin, A. (1988). In search of subjectivity – one's own. *Educational Researcher*, 17(7), 17-22.
- Pike, G. R. (2000). The influence of fraternity or sorority membership on students' college experiences and cognitive development. *Research in Higher Education*, 41, 117-139.
- Pike, G.R. (2003). Membership in a fraternity or sorority: Student engagement and educational outcomes at AAU public research universities. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44, 369-382.

- Projansky, S. (2014). *Spectacular girls: Media fascination and the celebrity culture*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Rottenberg, C. (2014). Happiness and the liberal imagination: How superwoman became balanced. *Feminist Studies*, 40(1), 144-168.
- Risman, B.J. (1982). College women and sororities: The social construction and reaffirmation of gender roles. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 11(2), 231-252.
- Robbins, A. (2004). *Pledged*. New York: Hyperion.
- Robinson (2008). *A postfeminist generation: young women, feminism and popular culture* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Western Sydney University Thesis Collection. (<http://handle.uws.edu.au:8081/1959.7/37397>)
- Robson, J. (1966). *The college fraternity and its modern role*. Menasha, WI: George Banta Company, Inc.
- Rubin, L.R., Nemeroff, C.J., and Russo, N.F. (2004). Exploring feminist women's body consciousness. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 28(1), 27-37
- Saldana, J.S. (2013). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook (3rd edition)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Scheyvens, R., Scheyvens, H., & Murray, W. E. (2003). Working with marginalised, vulnerable and privileged groups. In *Fieldwork and Development Studies: A Practical Guide – 2nd Edition* (2nd ed., pp. 167-193). Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications.
- Schippers, M. (2007). Recovering the feminine other: masculinity, femininity, and gender hegemony. *Theory and Society*, 36(1), 85-102.
- Scott, W. A. (1965). *Values and organizations: A study of fraternities and sororities*. Chicago, IL: Rand McNally & Co.
- Sheets, C. (2015, August 19). Alabama alpha phi sorority video columnist a.l. bailey reacts to uproar from the first time. *AL.com*. Retrieved from [http://www.al.com/news/index.ssf/2015/08/alpha\\_phi\\_sorority\\_video\\_colum.html](http://www.al.com/news/index.ssf/2015/08/alpha_phi_sorority_video_colum.html)
- Slaughter, A. M. (2012, July/August). Why women still can't have it all. *The Atlantic*.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage Publications.
- Stone, A. and Gorga, A. (2014). Containing pariah femininities: Lesbians in the sorority rush process. *Sexualities*, 17(3), 348-364.

- Stringer, E. (2004). *Action research in education*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Sustained Dialogue Institute. (2014). *Sustained dialogue campus network: Leadership manual* [Manual]. Author. Retrieved October 24, 2016.
- Swidler, A. (1986). Culture in action: symbols and strategies. *American Sociological Review* 51(2), 273-286.
- Syrett, L. N., (2009). *The company he keeps: a history of white college fraternities*. The University of North Carolina Press.
- Tasker, Y. and D. Negra, Eds. (2007). *Interrogating postfeminism: Gender and the politics of popular culture*. Durham, North Carolina & London, Duke University Press.
- Turk, D. (2004). *Bound by a mighty vow: sisterhood and women's fraternities, 1870-1920*. New York, NY: NYU Press.
- Whipple, E. G., & Sullivan, E. G. (1998). Greek letter organizations: Communities of learners? *New Directions for Student Services*, 81, 7-17.
- Wilson, C. G. (1956). *We who wear kites: the story of kappa alpha theta, 1870-1956*. Menasha, WI: The Collegiate Press.
- Williams, J. A. (2012). *Between loud girls and finer womanhood: Analyzing black girls' experiences in a social club* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from [http://acumen.lib.ua.edu/content/u0015/0000001/0001305/u0015\\_0000001\\_0001305.pdf](http://acumen.lib.ua.edu/content/u0015/0000001/0001305/u0015_0000001_0001305.pdf).
- Yeatman, A. (1994). *Postmodern revisionings of the political*. New York, Routledge

APPENDIX A:  
IRB APPROVAL

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA  
Office of the Vice President for  
Research & Economic Development  
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

February 26, 2016

Kathleen Gillan  
ELPTS  
College of Education  
Box 870118

Re: IRB # 16-OR-092, "Great Expectations and Post-Feminist Accountability: Negotiating  
Femininity in a Modern Day Sorority"

Dear Ms. Gillan:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed  
research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been  
given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

*(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to,  
research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or  
practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group,  
program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.*

Your application will expire on February 24, 2017. If your research will continue beyond this date,  
please complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the  
application, please complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study  
cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate  
hazards to participants. When the study closes, please complete the Request for Study Closure Form.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved stamped consent forms to obtain consent from your  
participants.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the  
above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

  
Stuart Usdan, Ph.D.  
Chair, Non-Medical IRB  
The University of Alabama

## APPENDIX B:

### INFORMED CONSENT

1

#### AAHRPP DOCUMENT #193

#### UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM

#### Informed Consent for a Non-Medical Study

**Study title:** *Great Expectations and Post-Feminist Accountability: Negotiating Femininity in a Modern Day Sorority*

**Investigator's Name, Position, Faculty or Student Status:** Kathleen R. Gillan, graduate student, College of Education, Department of Educational Leadership, Policy, and Technology Studies

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This study is called *Great Expectations and Post-Feminist Accountability: Negotiating Femininity in a Modern Day Sorority*. The study is being conducted by Kathleen R. Gillan, a graduate student at The University of Alabama. Ms. Gillan is being supervised by Dr. Natalie G. Adams, who is a professor of Education at The University of Alabama.

**What is this study about? What is the investigator trying to learn?**

The investigator seeks to understand how femininity is produced in sororities. Specifically, the investigator hopes to learn how sorority girls challenge, negotiate, reproduce, and understand femininity. Through exploring participants' unique experiences as a sorority leader, the primary investigator seeks to identify specific themes from the stories. Results of the study may be viewed as insight into the particular experiences of the participants involved in the study and may not be generalized to describe a broader population.

**Why is this study important or useful?**

The findings will help University faculty, staff, and administrators understand how femininity is produced in sororities and how sorority girls challenge, negotiate, reproduce, and understand femininity, so they can better serve and support this population.

**Why have I been asked to be in this study?**

You have been asked to be in this study because you are an 18-25 year old female, who is a sorority member, in a formal leadership role. You were recommended, as a potential participant, by a University faculty or staff member.

**How many people will be in this study?**

The investigator hopes to interview a maximum of 15 sorority girls from The University of Alabama within the next four months.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB  
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 2-25-16  
EXPIRATION DATE: 2-24-17

**What will I be asked to do in this study?**

If you agree to be in this study, the investigator will, at your convenience, interview you a minimum of two times, at an on campus place of your own choosing. The initial interview will focus on your experiences as a member of a sorority in a formal leadership position at The University of Alabama. Prior to the second interview, you will receive a copy of your transcript from the initial interview for review. In the second interview you will be asked to confirm that the information included in the initial transcript is correct. The investigator could also ask clarifying questions. Following the second interview, an optional fact check will be offered for both interviews via a face-to-face interview, phone call, or Skype to all subjects to ensure correctness of the data. Participation in the final fact check is optional and at the discretion of the subject. The interviewer would like to audio record the interviews to be sure that all your words are captured accurately. However, if you do not want to be recorded, simply tell the interviewer, who will then take handwritten notes. You will also be asked to identify a pseudonym to be used as a personal identifier (name) in the study and to review transcripts of the two interviews and evaluate for correctness and truthfulness.

**How much time will I spend being in this study?**

Each interview should last about 45-60 minutes, depending on how much information about your experiences you choose to share. The combined time for the two interviews should be no more than 120 minutes. If you choose to participate in an optional final fact check, an additional 60 minutes could be possible. The entire study and review of information will take at minimum two hours and at maximum three hours of your time over eight weeks.

**Will being in this study cost me anything?**

The only cost to you from this study is your time and energy during the interviews and transcript review.

**Will I be compensated for being in this study?**

You will not be compensated for being in this study.

**Can the investigator take me out of this study?**

The investigator may take you out of the study if she feels that the study is upsetting you, or something happens that means you no longer meet the study requirements.

**What are the risks (dangers or harms) to me if I am in this study?**

Little or no risk is expected from your involvement in this study. The chief risk to you is that you may get tired from the interviews, bored by the conversation, or upset discussing your experiences. The investigator will work to reduce these risks by taking breaks or rescheduling interviews as necessary. You may also stop at anytime if it becomes too much. You can also control this possibility by not being in the study, by refusing to answer a particular question, or by not sharing things you find to be sad or stressful. A counselor can be recommended to you if you seem to be upset or depressed. Seeing the counselor would be at your own expense.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB  
 CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 2-25-16  
 EXPIRATION DATE: 2-24-17

**What are the benefits (good things) that may happen if I am in this study?**

While there may not be any direct benefits to you, you may find it helpful talking through and reflecting on your experiences as a leader in your sorority.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

Interviews will be conducted in a location in which you feel most comfortable. The location will be private and free of interference from others. You may share as much or little information as comfortable and end the interview at anytime, if so desired.

**How will my confidentiality be protected?**

This investigator will take active measures to ensure your confidentiality. The only place where your name appears in connection with this study is on this informed consent. The consent forms will be kept in a locked file drawer in the investigators office, which is locked when she is not there. The investigator will not use a name-number list so there is no way to link a consent form to an interview. Each interview will be audio-recorded using a digital voice-recording device for transcription to text at a later time. Audio files will be stored in UA Box and on the primary investigator's removable hard drive; access for both is protected by a password. When the investigator records the interview, she will not use your name, so no one will know who you are on the tape.

During the course of the study, the investigator will store all copies of digital data files (i.e. typed transcript and audio files of recorded interviews) on UA Box and a password-protected external hard-drive, stored in a locked filing cabinet at the personal residence of the investigator. The researcher will use the audio recordings for study/research purposes only and will erase and dispose of all audio recordings within twelve months or upon completion of the study. A dissertation will be written from this study, however, participant names and identifiable information will not be disclosed or publicized.

**What are the alternatives to being in this study? Do I have other choices?**

The alternative is not to participate.

**What are my rights as a participant in this study?**

Being in this study is totally voluntary. It is your free choice. You may choose not to be in it at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. Not participating or stopping participation will have no effect on your relationships with The University of Alabama or the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board ("the IRB") is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

**Who do I call if I have questions or problems?**

If you have questions about the study right now, please ask them. If you have questions later on, please call the investigator Kathleen R. Gillan, [REDACTED] or Dr. Natalie Adams, (205) 348-1161. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB  
 CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 2-25-16  
 EXPIRATION DATE: 2-24-17

rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer at The University of Alabama, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at [http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO\\_Welcome.html](http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html). After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online at the outreach website or you may ask the investigator for a copy of it and mail it to the University Office for Research Compliance, Box 870127, 358 Rose Administration Building, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127. You may also e-mail us at [participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu](mailto:participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu).

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions. I agree to take part in it. I will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

- 
- I agree to be audiotaped.
- I do not agree to be audiotaped.

- 
- I agree to participate in the final fact check interview.
- I do not agree to participate in the final fact check interview.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Research Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB  
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 2-25-16  
EXPIRATION DATE: 2-24-17

## APPENDIX C:

### INITIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview # \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

#### Initial Interview Protocol

##### *Script*

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. My name is Kathleen Gillan and I am a graduate student at The University of Alabama conducting my Dissertation Study, *Great Expectations and Post-Feminist Accountability: Negotiating Femininity in a Modern Day Sorority*, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership, Policy, and Technology Studies. This initial interview will take about 45-60 minutes and will include questions regarding your experiences as a sorority leader. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used to develop a better understanding of how femininity is produced within sororities and how sorority girls challenge, negotiate, reproduce, and understand femininity.

At this time, I would like to introduce and review the Informed Consent form, which is required to participate in this study. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation in the study is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you choose to do so, and (3) little to no risk is expected from your involvement in this study. I would also like your permission to audio record the interview to be sure that all your words are captured accurately. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know. Take a moment to read through the Informed Consent form, which I have already signed and dated. Feel free to ask questions as necessary. If you agree to participate in this study, provide your signature, certifying that you agree to continue this interview. You will receive one copy of the form and I will keep the other under lock and key, separate from your reported responses. Thank you.

As a reminder, before we begin, your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop, take a break, or reschedule, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the interview.

##### Interview Questions

1. Background and Personal Information
  - a. Race/Ethnicity?
  - a. Age?
  - b. Gender?
  - c. Classification at UA?
  - d. Program of Study? Why did you choose this career path?

- f. Expected graduation date?
  - g. Leadership positions in sorority?
  - h. Pseudonym would you like to use for the study?
2. Members of sororities are sometimes referred to as “sorority girls” and sometimes “sorority women” – is there a difference to you between girl and woman? What do those terms mean to you? Which do you prefer? Are they used differently in different contexts within sorority life?
  3. In what ways do sororities teach or socialize their members about what it means to be feminine?
  4. Are there any feminine practices within your sorority that are particularly meaningful to you? Are there any feminine practices that you don't care too much for?
  5. What does it mean to you to be a girl?
  6. What are some of the things you like most about being a "girl"?
  7. What are some of the things you like least about being a "girl"?
  8. In what particular way girls are expected to act...
  9. In what particular way girls are expected to dress...
  10. Tell me about a typical day...
  11. Tell me about your personal style and how you developed your style of dress...
  12. Tell me about your participation in chapter events...
  13. Tell me about a time you went out with sorority sisters...
  14. Tell me about a time you went to a fraternity party...
  15. Tell me about how you see yourself in relation to other sorority women...
  16. Tell me about how you see yourself in relation to other fraternity men...
  17. Tell me about activities in which you like to participate...
  18. Tell me about relationships you have developed while in college...
  19. Tell me about a time, you felt pressured to act, talk, dress or dress a certain way...

20. Tell me about any times and/or places, where as a leader, you have thought more about being a girl...
21. Tell me how do you deal with other people's expectations of you...
22. How do people's expectations influence the way that you dress, the way you talk, or the things that you choose to say?
23. Tell me about a time when you had to make a challenging decision...
24. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Interview Wrap-up

Do you have any questions about the study?

Thank you for your participation. You will receive a copy of your interview in the next few weeks. Prior to the second interview, you are encouraged to look over your interview transcript for correctness and truthfulness.

APPENDIX D:  
FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview # \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Follow-up Interview Protocol

What do the following terms mean to you? Success? Leadership? Femininity?

Is it ok for successful girls to be vulnerable?

Leadership:

- As a leader, what tensions have you experienced between the culture of your upbringing and the culture of USouthern's fraternity/ sorority community?
- What were some of your most challenging experiences as a sorority leader at USouthern?
- What were some of your most gratifying experiences as a sorority leader at USouthern?
- Is being a sorority leader what you expected? If not, how is it different?
- What relationships have changed as a result of your leadership position?
- What changes in life have you experienced as a result of your leadership accomplishments?
- What does it mean to be a good sorority leader? How well do you feel that "fit" this description?
- Are there any parts of yourself that you purposely conceal in your leadership role? Personal relationships?

Femininity:

- It's often suggested that young women today are the benefactors of feminism but they often resist calling themselves feminists. Would you agree? Why?
- Are there differences between femininity and other regional notions of femininity?

- Think of someone who doesn't fit with traditional notions of femininity as practiced by the majority of girls in this sorority. Why doesn't this person fit into it?
- Young women today were brought up in the Girl Power movement - they were raised to believe they were equal to men, the sky's the limit, and they shouldn't put their needs and dreams secondary to men's. Do you agree with this? How does this play out in the actual lives of young women today?
- Is there any area of young women's lives today that you feel put women still secondary to men? Explain.
- What role - if any - should sorority women play in addressing issues of sexual assault, dating and domestic violence on campus?
- Can you talk about the oversized t-shirts? Some say they embraced as a way to conceal that members have stayed overnight with a guy?

Sorority News Articles:

- Thoughts? How is this related to larger conversations on campus?
- How does this connect to the larger culture and slut shaming and sexual assault?

APPENDIX E:  
RECOMMENDATION EMAIL

Email Subject Line: Participant recommendations for research study on how femininity is produced within sororities

*Great Expectations and Post-Feminist Accountability: Negotiating Femininity in a Modern Day Sorority*

Good Afternoon,

My name is Kathleen Gillan and I am a PhD student in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Education program at The University of Alabama. As part of my doctoral research, I am conducting a study on how femininity is produced in sororities. As a University faculty or staff member with knowledge of and significant interaction with sorority members, I would appreciate your assistance in identifying potential subjects for my study.

In order to get a wide range of participants from the various sororities, leadership positions, and geographic localities, I am asking for your assistance in identify 2-3 girls that meet the study's eligibility requirements: (1) at least 18 to 25 years of age, (2) a member of a National Panhellenic Conference sorority at The University of Alabama, (3) have served or are currently serving in a formal leadership position in her chapter, and (4) perceived to be a successful leader based on conventional notions of leadership.

If you agree to provide participant recommendations, I kindly ask that you respond to this email and provide the following information for each of the 2-3 girls you are recommending:

- Full name and email address
- Rational for why you are recommending the subject
- How the subject exhibits conventional notions of leadership and success

After identifying a stratified sample of ten subjects, an email will be sent to each of the girls notifying them that they have been recommended as a potential participant for the study by a University faculty or staff member. The recruitment email will include a description of the study's purpose, procedures, expectations and any time commitments required for participation in the study. Details of your recommendations will not be shared with potential participants.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you would like additional information about this research study, please feel free to contact me at [kgillan@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:kgillan@crimson.ua.edu) or [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

Kathleen Gillan  
Doctoral Student, Social and Cultural Foundations of Education  
The University of Alabama

## APPENDIX F:

### PARTICIPANT INVITATION EMAIL

Email Subject Line: Invitation to participate in research study on how femininity is produced within sororities

*Great Expectations and Post-Feminist Accountability: Negotiating Femininity in a Modern Day Sorority*

Good Afternoon,

My name is Kathleen Gillan and I am a PhD student in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Education program at The University of Alabama. As part of my doctoral research, I am conducting a study on how femininity is produced in sororities. A University faculty or staff member identified you as a potential research participant based on your leadership involvement within your sorority.

Eligibility requirements for this study include the following:

- You are at least 18 to 25 years of age.
- You are a member of a sorority at The University of Alabama.
- You have served or are currently serving in a formal leadership position in your chapter.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. If you decide to participate in this research study, and you change your mind later, you may withdraw from the study at any time, with no questions asked. Furthermore, if you decide not to participate in this study or if you chose to withdraw during the study, you will not be penalized.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do these things: (1) Identify a pseudonym to be used as a personal identifier (name) in the study, (2) Meet face-to-face with the investigator for a minimum of two audio-recorded interviews to discuss your experiences as a member of a sorority in a leadership positions at The University of Alabama, (3) Review transcripts of the two interviews and evaluate for correctness and truthfulness.

Each interview should last about 45-60 minutes, depending on how much information about your experiences you choose to share. The combined time for the two interviews should be no more than 120 minutes. If you choose to participate in an optional final fact check, an additional 60 minutes could be possible. The entire study and review of information will take at minimum two hours and at maximum three hours of your time over eight weeks.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please respond to this email by [Date]. If you have questions, concerns, or would like more information about this research study, please feel free to contact me at [kgillan@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:kgillan@crimson.ua.edu) or [REDACTED].

## APPENDIX G:

### FOLLOW-UP PARTICIPANT INVITATION EMAIL

Email Subject Line: Reminder: Invitation to participate in research study on how femininity is produced within sororities

*Great Expectations and Post-Feminist Accountability: Negotiating Femininity in a Modern Day Sorority*

Good Afternoon,

My name is Kathleen Gillan and I am a PhD student in the Social and Cultural Foundations of Education program at The University of Alabama. As part of my doctoral research, I am conducting a study on how femininity is produced in sororities. A University faculty or staff member identified you as a potential research participant based on your leadership involvement within your sorority.

Eligibility requirements for this study include the following:

- You are at least 18 to 25 years of age.
- You are a member of a sorority at The University of Alabama.
- You have served or are currently serving in a formal leadership position in your chapter.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. If you decide to participate in this research study, and you change your mind later, you may withdraw from the study at any time, with no questions asked. Furthermore, if you decide not to participate in this study or if you chose to withdraw during the study, you will not be penalized.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do these things: (1) Identify a pseudonym to be used as a personal identifier (name) in the study, (2) Meet face-to-face with the investigator for a minimum of two audio-recorded interviews to discuss your experiences as a member of a sorority in a leadership positions at The University of Alabama, (3) Review transcripts of the two interviews and evaluate for correctness and truthfulness.

Each interview should last about 45-60 minutes, depending on how much information about your experiences you choose to share. The combined time for the two interviews should be no more than 120 minutes. If you choose to participate in an optional final fact check, an additional 60 minutes could be possible. The entire study and review of information will take at minimum two hours and at maximum three hours of your time over eight weeks.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please respond to this email by [Date]. If you have questions, concerns, or would like more information about this research study, please feel free to contact me at [kgillan@crimson.ua.edu](mailto:kgillan@crimson.ua.edu) or [REDACTED].

Please note that your support of this study is very much appreciated, as it is impossible to do this kind of research without participation from students like yourself.

APPENDIX H:  
INSTITUTIONAL DATA

---

*USouthern Fall 2005 - Spring 2016 Mean GPA Data*

---

Semester/Year	Campus Undergraduate	All-Sorority	All-Fraternity
Fall 2005	2.89	3.19	2.8
Spring 2006	2.91	3.19	2.85
Fall 2006	2.91	3.15	2.74
Spring 2007	2.93	3.18	2.85
Fall 2007	2.92	3.19	2.78
Spring 2008	2.94	3.19	2.83
Fall 2008	2.95	3.17	2.75
Spring 2009	2.93	3.23	2.86
Fall 2009	2.98	3.21	2.78
Spring 2010	2.97	3.23	2.81
Fall 2010	3.01	3.26	2.82
Spring 2011	3.09	3.36	2.95
Fall 2011	3.01	3.25	2.80
Spring 2012	2.98	3.27	2.85
Fall 2012	3.06	3.32	2.92
Spring 2013	3.04	3.33	2.96
Fall 2013	3.07	3.30	2.92
Spring 2014	3.09	3.32	3.00
Fall 2014	3.07	3.26	2.97
Spring 2015	3.11	3.36	3.06
Fall 2015	3.13	3.33	3.00
Spring 2016	3.17	3.40	3.04
Mean GPA	3.01	3.26	2.88

---