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Sororities Surviving COVID-19: A Phenomenological Study of Panhellenic Virtual Sorority Recruitment

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Sororities Surviving COVID-19: A Phenomenological Study of Panhellenic Virtual Sorority

Recruitment

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

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In partial fulfillment

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by

Margaret Anne Darden

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Keywords: panhellenic sororities, virtual recruitment, COVID-19, organization recruitment

ABSTRACT

Sororities Surviving COVID-19: A Phenomenological Study of Panhellenic Virtual Sorority

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by

Margaret Anne Darden

This phenomenological study addressed perceptions of virtual sorority recruitment and was

conducted at a large, public university in the Midwestern United States. Data was gathered

through interviews using a criterion sampling method in place for this study. Study participants

fell into one of the following categories: new members, general members, chapter recruitment

chairs, chapter presidents, chapter advisors, chapter recruitment advisors, or the

fraternity/sorority advisor. Emerging themes and categories were identified by coding and

analyzing the interview data. The themes that were identified were: the convenience of online

meetings, reduced emphasis on appearance reduced emotional, financial and time strain,

increased accessibility and safety, meaningful conversations, improved communication, the

continuation of services, skill development, disruption in building relationships, imperfect

implementation, and the grieving process. The findings may be useful for reflecting on virtual

sorority recruitment or organization recruitment. The findings may help determine what

recruitment functions can be helpful while recruiting in a fully virtual capacity.

DEDICATION

For Matt

A wizard is never late, nor is he early.

He arrives precisely when he means to.

- J.R.R. TOLKIEN

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I must thank my entire family for their support during this pursuit. Particularly to Matt, thank you for all your sacrifice and support. And my grandmother, Helen Darden, and my parents Stan and Mary Anne Darden, for without their commitment to my education, I would not be here today. I share my appreciation to Dr. Leah Adinolfi, Dr. Ashley Christman, Dr. Erin Messmer, Dr. Sarah Owens, and Dr. Christina Witkowicki; you forged the path and showed me how to do this. I want to thank and acknowledge my dissertation chair, Dr. Jill Channing, alongside my dissertation committee members, Dr. Bill Flora, Dr. Amy Johnson, and Dr. Pamela Scott.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter 1. Introduction

Introduction

The concept of sorority recruitment has not changed since the first days of organized sororities. As competition for members grew, the rules around recruitment evolved in stages as chapters faced new challenges. Each new stage marked a change to accommodate current campus trends or opportunities to expand the sorority product to a broader community. Due to the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the voting members of the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC), the governance body for most sororities participating in a formalized primary recruitment process, decided to make some changes to the century-old recruitment process (National Panhellenic Conference Recruitment Contingencies Task Force, 2020). NPC leadership felt the responsibility of safety for public health, this included the hundreds of thousands of collegiate women who participated in the primary recruitment process at the start of the fall 2020 semester. The NPC decided to create and support a virtual sorority recruitment process. Instead of gathering in-person, a virtual process allowed all participants to participate in a new recruiting and engagement method from behind a web-camera device to participate in the experience live (Recruitment Contingencies Task Force, 2020). The leadership of sororities have found ways to continue to serve their founding purpose to provide a support network for bachelor's degree-seeking women.

At the time of the founding of the first sorority, fewer than one-third of American schools allowed women to enroll, and those that did treated their female students as second-class citizens (Turk, 2004). Women were often ignored in the classroom and ridiculed outside of it. The pioneering women who attended college in the early years of coeducation faced fierce opposition from students, faculty, and townspeople, many of whom argued that higher education would

unsex women and thus upset the natural order of society (Turk, 2004). The fierce opposition toward women pursuing college degrees created opportunities for the pioneers to determine what was needed to survive and thrive in a college setting. While some women were unable to overcome the pressures set by nay-sayers, the founders of many women fraternities banded together to create a sense of community and mutual support in a world that wanted to isolate them and watch them fail.

The founding of each sorority has humble roots. For many sororities, the founders were women ostracized for seeking higher education. They needed a space to have people to share ideas with, work on their homework, and just chat about the goings-on in their day. This need for social interaction and the goal to demonstrate their values led to the formation of sororities Women built partnerships and advocated for a positive college experience, similar to the men's experiences (Turk, 2004). As sororities grew, sorority leaders continued to push for change on their campuses to better their experiences and others' experiences. "Even before they joined forces, they were forces to be reckoned with. The first women's fraternities had been defying expectations for decades, just by being what they were: fraternities for women" (National Panhellenic Conference, 2017, p. 3). The systems created by the founding women grew and developed. The leaders of sororities, faced with many challenges and threats over decades, could reflect, change, and continue to grow.

There have been many times in the history of sorority where the exclusionary nature of sorority membership requirements was proved morally wrong. In 2020, Delta Gamma and Alpha Delta Pi directly faced and showed their racist, exclusive past through archival photos and shared an accurate history of their organizations (Hogg, 2020). Delta Gamma displayed images from its past and revealed the use of Confederate iconography and the constitutional exclusion of

13

members who were not White or Christian (Hogg, 2020). As sororities faced another significant threat, the leadership decided it was time to take matters into their own hands. Instead of threatening the lives of every woman participating in sorority recruitment by denying a fully virtual option, the leaders were proactive (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020c). They came up with a process that would allow women to safely isolate themselves from a highly contagious disease spread mostly through respiratory droplets (CDC, 2020, October 28). If the NPC leadership had not provided women with an option to reduce the risk of spreading, they would cause a cluster outbreak and all repercussions associated with the virus. Researchers have studied sorority recruitment over the decades, but virtual sorority recruitment is a landmark. Virtual sorority recruitment may be the only option for continued membership intake if COVID-19 continues to threaten the general United States Public's health and safety. Virtual sorority recruitment is the hope to sustain sororities through this major disruption to threat (National Panhellenic Conference Recruitment Contingencies Task Force, 2020). NPC shifted their guidance on August 17, 2020, to "formally recommend that all campuses enact their fully virtual recruitment experience contingency plan" (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020a). This guidance included recruitment rounds and bid day. The August 17, 2020 letter from the NPC Chairman, Carole J. Jones, and Chief Executive Officer, Dani Weatherford, stated, "this approach is no required to ensure the health and wellness of all campus communities, but particularly those regions and states where outbreaks are particularly acute" (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020a).

Statement of the Problem

Sorority recruitment has shifted and changed in small ways throughout the long history of sororities in higher education. The major shift of moving to a fully virtual sorority recruitment

delivery is unprecedented. A change of this magnitude to Panhellenic recruitment has not

occurred in the long history of Panhellenic organizations. The researcher attempted to explore

the perceptions of virtual sorority recruitment at a public university in the Midwest region of the

United States to understand the experience of virtual sorority recruitment. Virtual sorority

recruitment was a new delivery method for sorority membership intake. The development of this

delivery method of sorority recruitment was a direct response to safety protocols in place by the

Center for Disease Control (CDC) to reduce the spread of COVID-19 (National Panhellenic

Conference, 2020c). COVID-19 was a highly contagious disease spread by airborne pathogens.

The respiratory droplets may float through the air as an infected individual speaks, sneezes, or

coughs and lands in the mouths or noses of other people nearby. The disease can spread when

microscopic droplets of the virus are inhaled into the lungs (CDC, 2020b). Before COVID-19,

the Panhellenic primary recruitment experience was crowded and loud (Sandage et al., 2020).

Many campuses hosted primary recruitment at the start of the fall semester in late summer.

Participants were crammed to capacity in classrooms, houses, or meeting rooms on many

campuses. Participants spoke with a handful of chapter women at each sorority they visited

(Scheibel et al., 2002). This type of gathering was dangerous during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The leaders of these organizations determined that it was in the best interest of the

public's health to reconfigure a process that is fundamental to the continued existence of

sororities (Recruitment Contingencies Task Force, 2020). Sororities were not the only groups

with public health in mind. Policy authors at colleges, universities, local and state governments

created policies and restrictions to preserve public health and safety. Restrictions placed on the

public included limiting the number of people at gatherings, the physical distance between

people, and the maximum occupancy of rooms (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,

2020, May 13). Additional safety measures in public spaces included requiring people to wear face masks and increasing the frequency of sanitation services. Due to the responsibility to the safety of all who participate in recruitment activities and these significant logistical hurdles, the National Panhellenic Conference created and provided support for a brand-new endorsed method of recruitment delivery, virtual sorority recruitment (National Panhellenic Conference Recruitment Contingencies Task Force, 2020).

This dissertation reviewed and explored the feedback from participants in virtual sorority recruitment. The researcher studied the participant's responses to learn more about the challenges and benefits of a fully virtual primary recruitment process. A global health pandemic threatened colleges and universities' fundamental operations provided a wealth of data. This data could be used for reflection for future pandemics. Virtual sorority recruitment could be a viable delivery method for campuses that do not have the space to host primary recruitment functions. Campuses that have a high number of students who take courses online could use this information. Gathering information about this phenomenon will help those in leadership decisions determine what recruitment functions need to change to increase accessibility to the Panhellenic sorority experience.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the perceptions of sorority members and affiliated personnel regarding College Panhellenic Council virtual sorority recruitment at a large public university in the Midwestern United States. I used a qualitative design to form a detailed description aligned with the philosophy of descriptive phenomenology to capture and describe the virtual sorority recruitment phenomenon. Virtual sorority recruitment was created because of the COVID-19 global pandemic. I focused on

16

describing participant's perceptions of virtual sorority recruitment. I described the perceived challenges and benefits of the virtual delivery method of sorority recruitment. I analyzed themes from the participants to understand how they emotionally processed the disruption to the traditional recruitment process from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

The research questions guided the study toward a better understanding of the phenomenon of virtual sorority recruitment by capturing its participants' perceptions. The following questions guided this study.

Research Question 1

What are the perceptions of the benefits of the virtual sorority recruitment model?

Research Question 2

What are the perceptions of the challenges in the virtual sorority recruitment model?

Research Question 3

How did participants emotionally process the disruption to the traditional recruitment process during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Significance of the Study

This research will contribute to a larger body of research regarding Panhellenic sorority recruitment. Research is needed to understand recruitment in the changing environment in higher education because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtual sorority recruitment was not an approved method of delivery for the membership intake process. Virtual sorority recruitment was a phenomenon that began in the fall of 2020. This emerging area has little formal research. It was a

novel event in the sorority paradigm that journalists for campus-affiliated and non-campus affiliated newspapers wrote articles covering the transition to a virtual delivery method. The authors of these papers frequently included the details for how the recruitment process works with the general public, as reported by Flanagan (2020) covering the University of Alabama and Auburn University recruitment events, Kekauoha (2020) at Stanford University, Parsons (2020) at Kansas State University, and Sasser (2020) at Dartmouth University just to highlight a few.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the perceptions of sorority members and affiliated personnel regarding College Panhellenic Council virtual sorority recruitment at a large public university in the Midwestern United States. The researcher addressed the need for scholarly research on perceptions of virtual sorority recruitment. These findings may help higher education professionals and personnel evaluate virtual sorority recruitment by placing the most recent sorority recruitment trends into the emerging higher education climate. In addition to sorority recruitment plans, sororities were positioned to develop contingency plans to support the student's experience outside the classroom and support students while they are engaged in non-classroom learning activities on campus (Koenig, 2020). By better understanding the perceptions of virtual sorority recruitment, considerations for the sustainability, adaptability, and longevity of this new delivery style potentially expanding into new markets for sororities, including community colleges and fully online degree programs (National Panhellenic Conference Recruitment Contingencies Task Force, 2020).

Delimitations and Limitations

Research studies have limitations that are out of the control of the researcher and delimitations that the researcher can control (Patton, 2015). This study was conducted using a phenomenological approach, so qualitative data was derived through interviews and observations

to provide the audience with a fair representation of the samples' perspectives of a particular lived experience. Some applications of this study will benefit similar institutions and institutions with similar sorority settings. Findings may also benefit general organizations who seek a better understanding of recruiting new members during a global pandemic. A delimitation of this study is my efforts to mitigate researcher bias. I selected a campus where my sorority does not have a chapter to mitigate this bias. I am recognized as a national volunteer and work year-round in sorority recruitment. Besides my role as a sorority member, I also serve professionally as a Fraternity and Sorority Advisor and have experience implementing virtual sorority recruitment policies and practices. These identities may have factors that create researcher bias, which will be addressed in a reflexive statement. This dissertation was limited to only one institution, a large public university in the Midwest United States, which may make findings not generalizable beyond this institution.

According to Turk (2004), a limitation or major impediment to the scholarly understanding of women's fraternities lies, of course, in the secrecy in which these organizations did and do shroud themselves. Researcher bias may be identified as I am a Panhellenic sorority member and may have unknown biases toward the recruitment process or general sorority experience. Participation in this research was voluntary and dependent on the willingness of participants. While there was a large sample size to pull from, a small pool of individuals volunteered for the study. Due to random sampling, there may have been some limitations in diversity of experience.

During the research process, I supported trustworthiness through descriptions derived from face-to-face interviews. To minimize researcher influence, I took steps to ensure participants were in a setting conducive to information gathering. I prepared the participant for

19

the interview length and encouraged them to find a setting with minimal distractions and disruptions. Participation in the study was voluntary. Participants were presented with an informed consent agreement. I employed several methods to protect participants at the highest level of confidentiality to support the data's trustworthiness and protect their confidentiality and safety. I engaged in reflexivity by maintaining a reflexive journal to record my decisions and reflect on my process while interviewing participants.

Definition of Terms

The definitions provided are intended to clarify both clarify meaning and standardize usage for this dissertation's purpose.

Alumna, singular. Alumnae/alumni, plural – Describes a member of a sorority who is no longer an active member of an undergraduate chapter (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a).

Bid for membership – A formal offer of membership made to potential new members during the Panhellenic recruitment process (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a).

Bump Group – See rotation group

Campus Total – The total number of women that can be in a chapter on a campus (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a).

Continuous Open Bidding (COB) – The process of extending invitations to membership on an individual basis outside of primary recruitment; can be called informal recruitment (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a).

Engagement – The more students study a subject, the more they know about it, and the more

students practice and get feedback from faculty and staff members on their related

projects, the deeper they come to understand what they are learning (Kuh, 2009).

Fraternity – A society of men or women bound together by friendship and dedicated to its

members' development (Turk, 2004).

Greek – A member of a fraternity or sorority. It can be used to describe a community of

fraternities and sororities (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a).

Greek-letter organization – An organization represented by Greek-letter insignia (National

Panhellenic Conference, 2021a).

Initiated member – A person who has completed the instating process to become a full member.

Maximize Options – The act of listing all chapters that invite a woman to participate during the

preference round (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a).

Membership Recruitment Acceptance Binding Agreement (MRABA) – A binding agreement

signed by Potential New Members following attending Preference round events (National

Panhellenic Conference, 2021a).

National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) – The national governing council that supports 26

women's sororities.

New member – A term used to describe a person who has accepted an invitation to membership

in a sorority (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a).

NPC Unanimous Agreements (NPC UA's) – The agreements made unanimously by the 26

      Panhellenic sorority organizations that foster cooperation among women's fraternities

      (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a).

Online Learning – A fully online course or experience that has been designed to be offered over

      the Internet and uses web-based materials and activities made possible by various course

      management systems or software packages (Meyer, 2014).

Potential New Member (PNM) – A student who is seeking membership within a sorority who has

      not received a bid nor committed to a chapter (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a).

Preference – The final process by which potential new members establish a preferred list of

      chapters in rank order (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a).

Primary Recruitment – NPC defines primary recruitment as the period of time during the

      academic year when events are held by each NPC sorority on a campus for the purpose of

      selecting new members (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a).

Mutual Selection Process – The rank-ordering process that potential new members and sororities

      use to match potential new members to chapters (Roof, 2012).

Quota – Determined at the end of recruitment. The number of potential new members each

      chapter is allowed to pledge regardless of the chapter's total membership number. Each

      chapter is entitled to bid to quota (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a).

Recruitment Guide (Rho Gamma or Rho Gam) – A temporary leadership position filled by an

      unaffiliated undergraduate member who both guides and counsels potential new members

through the formal Panhellenic sorority recruitment process (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a).

Release Figure Methodology (RFM) – Methodology by which formal sorority recruitment numbers are figured (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a).

Rotation Group – Also known as bump group. During primary recruitment rounds, a chapter may have small teams of women who rotate talking to a series of potential new members.

Sorority – An organized society of women bound together by friendship and dedicated to the development of its members (Turk, 2004).

Sorority recruitment – The formal process describing the mechanism by which Panhellenic sororities attract and gain new members for their organizations (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a).

Work week – It is also known as polish week, series of days before recruitments when chapters prepare their chapter members for primary recruitment (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021).

Zoom – An online video conferencing platform (Zoom, n.d.).

Overview of the Study

This phenomenological research qualitative study has five chapters included in the study. Chapter 1 includes the introduction, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, delimitations and limitations, definitions, and an overview of the study. The focus in chapter 1 is to demonstrate the importance of the study. Chapter 2 reviews literature related to the study of the history of women's fraternities, the

23

National Panhellenic Conference, sense of belonging on a college campus, a history of

Panhellenic recruitment, online student engagement, leadership, and the grieving process.

Chapter 3 describes the study's methodology, including the instruments, participants, collection

of data, and data analysis. Chapter 4 has the presentation of data, including findings from

interviews and coding of data. Chapter 5 includes the summary of the research, conclusions,

identified interventions, and recommendations for additional research.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Introduction

There have been studies of membership engagement in fraternities and sororities and a few studies that have taken glances at sorority recruitment and the effects of sorority recruitment on its participants like Armstrong's (2014) *Looking back, an alumnae perspective: A phenomenological study of the lived experiences of sorority life.* Much of the research on the sorority recruitment experience lives in the higher education field, rather than social sciences, studying the relationship between attitudes or specific behaviors and membership in fraternities and sororities. Others focus on fraternity or sorority affiliation as the cause of an attitude or behavior (Nelson, 2011). Little attention has been paid to the sorority recruitment process structure, examining the logistics and networks develop while creating and implementing the process.

Virtual sorority recruitment has never occurred before due to regulations from the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC). Before the COVID-19 global pandemic, the sororities' preferences were to have membership recruitment activities occur in-person. Due to the impacts of COVID-19 on the higher education landscape, sororities were forced to develop new ways to run their primary membership intake drives. Colleges and universities, local, state, and federal governments and entities developed many rules and regulations about gathering in-person and, in many cases, prohibited gathering in-person in groups of 50 or more (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020, May 13). Sorority recruitment on many campuses involved more than 50 individuals in the sorority recruitment process. COVID-19 spreads through airborne droplets, due to the high-touch nature of sorority recruitment encouraging women to gather and talk in groups, the National Panhellenic Conference deemed that it was unsafe to gather in groups and

moved all in-person sorority recruitment experiences to the fully virtual setting (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020a). Since this is an emerging process, there is no peer-reviewed literature currently that discusses virtual sorority recruitment.

This literature review aims to provide a broad overview of the scholarly literature that is relevant to the topics of sorority recruitment, virtual engagement, and leadership. By reviewing the literature on sororities and sorority recruitment, the researcher hopes to provide the foundational context for the new research area, virtual sorority recruitment. Furthermore, to provide a foundation for the leadership demanded through the recruitment process, the researcher will explore the literature that exists about leadership and group leadership. To ground the virtual component of sorority recruitment, the researcher will explore the sense of belonging that colleges and sororities strive to achieve to retain their members. The literature review will conclude by reviewing the literature for online student engagement to understand better the current best practices that exist to retain and engage interest while sharing content in an online platform.

History of Women's Fraternities

Accessing higher education in the early days of United States history was impossible for women. Institution administrators limited their enrollment to white men of affluence. Reviewing the roots of women's fraternities start with historians looking at the founding of men's fraternities. The first fraternity to assume a Greek Letter name was Phi Beta Kappa in 1776 at the College of William and Mary (Baird et al., 1991). Around 1840, over sixty years after the founding of Phi Beta Kappa, several schools throughout the nation began to admit female students allowing women the opportunity to pursue a college degree. Most of these students faced barriers, like attending college preparatory classes before pursuing the same degree as their

male counterparts. Another thirty years would pass before the first women's Greek-letter fraternity was founded at DePauw University in 1870. At first, women's groups were called fraternities until the invention of the word sorority to define women's-only organizations (Turk, 2004). Nearly a hundred years after Phi Beta Kappa's founding for social and literary purposes, women could adapt the same concept to meet their needs. The purpose of women's fraternities in the founding years was to supplement life outside of the classroom, allowed women to have enriched lives, and created a support network to endure the challenges that came with, at times, a hostile academic setting (Turk, 2004). The first classes of women were determined to make a place for themselves both academically and socially on campuses where their classmates and instructors often doubted their ability (Turk, 2004). In a place where women felt isolated because of their small numbers, groups of women gathered together under the philosophy that collective rather than individual action would help them earn their degree (Turk, 2004). Groups of women at these founding schools came together and formed support networks of organizations to help worthy female students combat male opposition to their presence on campus (Turk, 2004).

Becque (2020) and Turk (2004) cite that Kappa Alpha Theta was the first women's fraternity founded; however, Alpha Delta Pi and Phi Mu contend for this title as well. Alpha Delta Pi and Phi Mu were initially founded as a society called Adelphean at Wesleyan Female College in Macon, Georgia, in 1851. Becque, a sorority historian states that historians recognize Phi Mu or Alpha Delta Pi as the first sororities since they did not expand outside Wesleyan Female College until 1904 and 1905, respectively (Becque, 2020b; Becque, 2020a). In 1870, when Kappa Alpha Theta was founded, only 11,000 women were enrolled in higher education institutions across the United States. This number paled compared to the more than 52,000 men who filled the classrooms of the nation's colleges and universities (Turk, 2004).

An argument against women earning a post-secondary education was the concern that the learning environment would have adverse effects on their health and wellbeing (Turk, 2004). When the concerns about the health of women proved groundless, more colleges and universities administrators opened their doors for female enrollment with exponential growth in the following decades. As the number of women attending college grew exponentially, leaders of Kappa Alpha Theta recognized that the sorority could expand its benefit to more women, it multiplied by adding three chapters in 1870. Kappa Alpha Theta, along with I.C. Sororis (Pi Beta Phi), Kappa Kappa Gamma, and Delta Gamma, expanded throughout the Midwest in the 1870s and early 1880s, setting the stage for the Panhellenic system we know today (Becque, 2020c).

Chapter growth was regulated by structured and unstructured racist practices and policies that allowed for broader access to higher education for White students (Hughey, 2007). An example of a structured racist practice was incorporating specific racially exclusionary policies into the organization's constitution to retain both tradition and restrictive systems of social relations (Hughey, 2007). During their earliest years, membership for most organizations was restricted to White protestants (Gillon et al., 2019). Due to the classist nature of pursuing a degree, those with money who could afford an extra set of membership dues to a sorority were the individuals joining.

With more comrades available, the organizations' purpose shifted from proving oneself in the setting to allow more social experiences, deemphasizing the intellectual aspect of their fraternities' missions while accentuating the social side of Greek-letter life (Turk, 2004). Women attending institutions with coeducational learning were separated from the men in their day-to-day living. This separation even extended to the extracurricular activities that supplemented their in-class education. For some women, this aided a sense of isolation and was

uncomfortable. For other women, this seemed a challenge for them to develop their sense of belonging at an institution that did not appear to want them there. As women developed sororities and welcomed the following classes and generations that followed them into these groups, women began to find their footing pursuing degrees in higher education. At the turn of the century, in 1900, more women could attend institutions of higher education. The increasing number of women afforded more straightforward access to higher education. Due to the ease of college access, the next generation of women expanded sorority networks into nationwide networks.

Each sorority created a sense of unity and shared ideals, but by 1900, enough women pledged themselves to a secret society that members of a national sorority no longer came from similar social, geographic, and cultural backgrounds (Turk, 2004). In this new time for sororities, some women came in with a different background that created varied perspectives and outlooks on issues they were facing. The sense of unity that was the core of the new women's organizations broadened, and for some members, the widening scope forced them to face new challenges. Following the excitement and success of expanding organizations, the leaders of sororities had to continue to find their sense of identity and purpose.

While these ideas were emerging, Students of Color were prohibited from entering the same colleges or segregated into specific colleges and universities (Gillon et al., 2019). Many Black students found their educational patch at private and public historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Restrictive policies that prevented Students of Color from joining in the opportunities afforded to White students provided an impetus to create social organizations for Students of Color. The first sorority for non-White women was Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated on January 15, 1908, at Howard University in Washington D.C. (Alpha Kappa

Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, n.d.). The women who founded this chapter had to contend with an inherently racist society (Gillon et al., 2019, p. 13). They also had to overcome the patriarchy that dominated their lives. "By 1910, Howard had only graduated twenty-three women. Women's lives were heavily controlled by the university" (Gillon et al., 2019, p. 13). Two more organizations followed Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. at Howard University, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated on January 13, 1913, and Zeta Phi Beta on January 16, 1920. During this time, the Black women's world had minimal similarity to that of the privileged white women who attended colleges and universities and pledged historically white sororities, National Panhellenic Conference sororities (Gillon et al., 2019, p. 13).

 1918 marked the start of a series of significant events that brought decades of global change, including the Spanish flu, World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II (Turk, 2004). At this time of American college history, colleges and universities struggled to find housing for their students, they relied on private housing (Baird et al., 1991). Fraternity and sorority housing corporations began to develop and own properties near campus. Campus administrators welcomed the houses to alleviate the pressure on universities. Fraternities frequently set the social tone (Baird et al., 1991). They dominated campus politics and extracurricular activities. Fraternities defined a well-rounded campus experience. Those arguing against fraternities asked if young men could govern and educate each other and if it was reasonable to entrust the authority and responsibility with these men. The symptoms of this doubt were rooted in excessive drinking and reckless partying (Baird et al., 1991).

 During the great wars, Americans focused their energy and resources on supporting and aiding war efforts. Many men were actively serving in the military efforts. Women were focusing on every way to support these efforts. While men were enlisting in military efforts

taking them off campus, female college enrollment continued, and the women ran campus activities. When World War II ended, fraternity involvement went from low to high numbers. According to Baird et al. (1991), service men brought a serious attitude toward their courses, an impatience with juvenile hazing tactics, and an appreciation of the real values of fraternity life. Another generation ended, and with it began additional changes to the landscape of higher education.

Due to the increase in enrollment, a period of aggressive expansion for fraternities and sororities started in the 1950s (Baird et al., 1991). The large size of the volunteer-run organizations created a push to have consistent staff support in a central office. By the 1950s, nearly every organization had a central office or headquarters (Baird et al., 1991). As organizations continued to grow and develop, they also took in the social issues of the day. In the 1960s and 1970s came a change in the attitude of the students (Baird et al., 1991). According to Baird et al. (1991), students on college campuses rebelled against the establishment. One of the demands at this point was the end to the tradition of in loco parentis, which is a Latin phrase meaning in place of parents, was also a legal term that established the relationship between college students and school administrators (Forrest, 2013). Students felt that they were subject to school rules that denied them fundamental constitutional rights like the freedom of speech, freedom to live and entertain members of the opposite sex where they pleased, and the right to vote (Forrest, 2013). During this time of political activism and upheaval at colleges and universities, there was little interest from the community and low numbers pledging Greek organizations. In 1973 statistics showed the lowest percentage of growth since the national conferences began keeping records, and for the first time, the national conferences had fewer chapters at the end of the year than they did at the beginning (Baird et al., 1991).

The upheaval and attention called to these organizations in the 1970s were wrapped in the civil unrest that marked that decade. Fraternities and sororities fought to survive on college campuses to provide the same experience the founders fought for, grounded in social connection and student enrichment. The 1980s brought growth in members and numbers of chapters. With the rise in popularity and membership came a rise in problems. According to Baird et al. (1991), some colleges and universities brought charges against fraternities and sororities, and a few schools abolished the Greek system from their campuses. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, college enrollment numbers began to drop off, and sororities were over-extended (Baird et al., 1991). For some, low membership numbers and expensive housing commitments combined create an unsustainable future, which meant that national organizations closed chapters (Baird et al., 1991). Other campuses experienced rapid growth in past decades without reciprocating support from universities. Chapters struggled to recover without consistent organizational accountability for conduct standards and poorly managed structured recruitment processes (Baird et al., 1991). Sorority chapters that were found responsible for perpetuating significant hazing environments were also closed and ceased to operate (Baird, 1991). Due to combinations of these factors and some colleges this occurring over a very long and battered history, some campuses chose no longer to pour resources into their fraternity and sorority communities and shut down and closed their fraternity sorority communities. One example is Colby College, which in 1874 was the founding location of Sigma Kappa sorority. The college chose to eliminate fraternity and sorority life, citing below-average grades and chronic failure to meet behavioral guidelines (*Fraternities Banned at Colby - Members "Disappointed,"* 1984).

The 1990s and 2000s brought tremendous change to the way fraternities and sororities were managed due to the advent of the internet. Fraternity and sorority members and leaders

continued to deal with ongoing and systemic hazing issues (Francis, 2014). Chapter leaders struggled to overcome low membership (Antohi, 2019). Once again, chapters had to survive a financial recession happening in 2008, with effects lasting for years after (Friga, 2020). Throughout the twenty-teens, members from within Greek-letter organizations were actively trying to "abolish Greek life" (Marcus, 2020). The organizers of the Abolish Greek Life Movement indicate that the fraternity and sorority communities perpetuated "incidences of racism, misogyny, classism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and sexual assault due to the systemic oppression within historically White fraternities and sororities" (Stewart, 2020). Leaders of the Abolish Greek Life Movement posit that, "The system is broken. We cannot adequately reform Greek life. We must abolish it" (Stewart, 2020). Each of the threats covered in this literature review's brief history currently impacts a campus somewhere in the United States. There is a large range of threats that include low male or female enrollment due to lower birthrates 18 years ago and deciding to delay enrollment in a university experience due to COVID-19 (Kaplan, 2020). A longstanding threat that persists today is ongoing membership behavior concerns with partying and alcohol and drug use. Another threat that cycles is the calling for the abolishment of fraternities and sororities, like what happened to fraternities and sororities in the 1960s. There is a new threat to fraternities and sororities, the mass inability to gather in-person profoundly impacting membership recruitment efforts. The COVID-19 global pandemic will surely change the operations of fraternities and sororities. National organizations look to their leadership and, with sororities, the leaders come together to determine the best path forward, leaning on the structures defined by the National Panhellenic Conference.

National Panhellenic Conference (NPC)

The National Panhellenic Conference is the governing body for historically female Greek-lettered organizations. The conference plays a critical role in regulating and developing the rigid rules, stipulations, and processes that shape and configure the formal Panhellenic sorority recruitment process on college campuses today (Golden, 2014). In May of 1902, eight initial member organizations established the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC). These groups possessed an unshakable belief in the power of women's friendship. They came to understand that the one thing they could not afford was to be at odds with each other. Collectively, each respective organization established an agreement that any proposal binding all NPC member organizations must have the unanimous approval of all members through their councils, conventions, or chapters. The rules that bound all NPC organizations to a common cause are known as the NPC Unanimous Agreements. Fortified and adapted from their initial agreement in 1902, the unanimous agreements "are the principles, procedures and behavioral expectations considered to be so basic to ethical and harmonious intersorority life that they are binding on every NPC member group" (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a). The representatives enacted codes of behavior and drew up policies for positive conduct. These codes aimed to prevent their younger sisters from making hasty choices during recruitment, from engaging in lewd or indecent conduct, and from taking part in extravagant entertainment or the doing of anything for mere show.

NPC's rapid growth in its first decade demonstrated the collective's value as its membership grew from seven to 18. To join the NPC, a sorority was required to have its chapters at exclusively senior colleges and universities that were authorized to confer a bachelor's degree. These membership requirements remain in effect presently. From 1912 to 1947, the makeup of

NPC remained nearly constant. In 1947, NPC granted associate member status to 11

organizations. All 11 of these organizations became full members in 1951 (National Panhellenic

Conference, 2017). Applying historical events to the 1912 to 1947 timeframe, the United States

faced World War I, the Spanish Flu, the Great Depression, and World War II. During these

decades, sororities continued to grow in size and number. In 1957, the NPC grew to its largest at

32 sororities. Since then, a few sororities closed, and some lived on by merging with other

sororities. Throughout the middle of the 20th century, NPC became involved in several political

issues, like lobbying for the continued legality of single-sex status for sororities. They gained

protection in 1974 when the U.S. Congress passed an exemption to Title IX of the Education

Amendment of 1972 (National Panhellenic Conference, 2017). The NPC publication *Adventures*

in Friendship (2017) describes the 1960s and 1970s in more detail:

> The same era brought tremendous cultural change. Social mores shifted, and colleges and
>
> universities, which had enforced curfews and other parental rules, distanced themselves
>
> from acting in loco parentis. As they took a more hands-off approach, fraternities and
>
> sororities found new ways to support students in making responsible choices. In the
>
> ensuing years, NPC has offered initiatives on eating disorders, substance abuse,
>
> relationship safety, and a host of other subjects.

The educational support and enrichment that these organizations began to develop helped them

make the argument for sororities. These groups amped up their resources to work on the whole-

development of a college student. Sorority leaders found it fell under their responsibility to apply

educational initiatives to support the college woman and advocate for their experience.

In 2002, at the start of its second century, the NPC started with a membership of 26

sororities, 2,900 installed chapters on 630 campuses, and a total of 3.5 million initiated women

(National Panhellenic Conference, 2017). These numbers continue to grow as the sorority experience expands. NPC continues to advocate and protect the women's-only sorority experience on a national scale. The Conference is continually adapting to the needs of its member organizations. It remains reflective of its founder's original purpose to come together as a collective to create order amidst the external chaos threatening each organization's operations.

History of Panhellenic Recruitment

In the first years after the founding of women's fraternities, women were carefully vetted and selected for membership. As female enrollment grew, so did the opportunities to join a sorority. The increased numbers created competition. During this era, women would rush to "bid" or "pin" eligible women as soon as possible, which would sometimes occur before the academic term began. By adding women to their roster, they guaranteed the future of their chapter. Pledging entailed promising oneself to the fraternity at an early date, with the understanding that there would be a waiting period before initiation, so that both pledge and chapter might have the opportunity to get to know one another better (Turk, 2004). Pledging is a term that persists today; however, it is considered an outdated term replaced by calling "pledges" new members and "pledging" as the new member period.

As competition grew for new members, founding alumnae felt the new customs and behaviors of their successors shocking and in need of reform. They saw the leaders of their chapters charging increasing amounts of dues to throw parties deemed excessive. At times, women were invited to membership before they were enrolled in college. These overly competitive behaviors were deemed inappropriate by the founders. In 1902 alumnae of Alpha Phi Fraternity invited representatives of Kappa Alpha Theta and seven of the other most prominent women's societies to come together to discuss the question of pledging and rushing.

36

Through collaborative agreements, the older women hoped, policies could be enacted to guide their collegiate sisters to change their ways (Turk, 2004). This action is the earliest roots of the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC). The first meetings of the NPC dealt almost exclusively with selection and pledging rules. The representatives who attended the meetings on behalf of the fraternities struggled to overhaul a rushing system that they as alumnae women considered both "hasty" and "extravagant." They crafted recommendations for better cooperation among the members of the different fraternities and sororities and curbed the extravagant expenditure and excess of social function that the rush period invariably provoked. They argued out the parameters and intricacies that would define rush (Turk, 2004).

The founders who spent years painstakingly crafting their organizations' culture and ritual were equally careful about the women they selected to join their membership. After a few decades, that detailed attention and care seemed to be gone to the founders. The chapters' leaders focused on frivolous things, like the decorations at recruitment events and the social aspects of parties and functions. While this was hard to accept, the speed and willingness to distribute bids was going too far. The founders felt they needed to confirm the potential woman had the right character for the sorority. The founders and more senior leaders of the sororities decided that it would be best to make decisions as a shared group, ensuring that each sorority would identify the same issues and concerns and jointly create solutions about the recruitment of new members, the management of collegiate chapters, and the expectations of alumnae members. Much of what the sorority leaders were encountering in 1902 was new and emerging. The care they took as a community to create solutions is demonstrated in many of the traditions and rules that carry forward today. One example of a longstanding rule occurred in 1904; the representatives denounced double membership and established matriculation as a prerequisite to pledging.

Moreover, in a foreshadowing of the no-frills initiative of the 1990s, sorority representatives went on record against the "rush evils" of undue expense and "elaborate parties" (National Panhellenic Conference, 2017). Following the first meeting in 1902, the discussions about behavior and expectations regarding Panhellenic recruitment continued with regular frequency from that point forward.

In 1918, a great disturbance with a concurrent theme to COVID-19 occurred, the Spanish Flu pandemic. In 1918, the Spanish Flu pandemic crossed the globe and affected nearly every college campus. Approximately 675,000 Americans died from the Spanish Flu. Alpha Sigma Alpha's Beta Beta chapter's acting historian, Irene Spalding, at State Teacher's College in Greeley, Colorado (now the University of Northern Colorado) wrote:

> Of all the inconvenient times for the epidemic to descent upon is, this was certainly the greatest! We were quarantined on Tuesday of Rush Week, but Beta Beta was so fortunate as to draw the day before as the date for its most important party … As the quarantine went into effect the very next day, our rivals had no opportunity to show hospitality to any of the new girls. It, therefore, became a matter of personal rushing. The results have been a revelation to us, for the sororities heretofore have had the feeling that it was brilliant affairs that attracted the new girls. Beta Beta now knows that more can be accomplished by a quiet, confidential talk with the girls about sororities in general and about the national standing of Alpha Sigma Alpha than can be done by all the parties, however delightful they may be (Becque, 2018).

Irene Spalding concluded her thoughts after the chapter pledged eight women by saying:

If the quarantine continues, we may not be able to have our formal pledging until after

Christmas, but, although, we know that the ceremony will mean more to the new girls,

we felt sure that they can scarcely be more a part of us than they are right now. If you

want to feel at home with your new girls from the very start, try 'personal' rushing!

(Becque, 2018)

The Spanish Flu pandemic swept through the nation while the sororities were conducting their recruitment rounds and immediately shut them down. While not the same, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many colleges had to suspend all planning until closer to the date of recruitment. For many colleges, the College Panhellenic Council, the local governing body of the Panhellenic sororities at that school, planning primary recruitment takes ten to eleven months. Suspending planning until weeks before recruitment seemed like an impossible feat with the short timeframe. What stands out as a revelation that continues today is the concept that it is more important to get to know potential new members before offering them a bid invitation. While this slower recruitment method can take place for some chapters year-round, it can be seen as an exhausting activity instead of an excellent opportunity to learn about potential members. These themes are pervasive in the culture of sororities and continue to this day.

Also described by Irene Spalding at the University of Northern Colorado was a detailed account of the bid distribution process. This process, introduced so early in the history of sororities, has evolved ever so slightly and is currently in use by many College Panhellenic Councils. The process describes the foundation of the release figures methodology process currently used by nearly all Panhellenic recruiting chapters. The system in this 1904 account was called a "lawyer system." The lawyer system meant the sororities handed in their bids to a college administrator. The potential new members listed the sororities in order of their preference

and handed their lists to the college administrator. The administrator would match these lists together and give the potential new member the bid she prefers or the bid nearest to her preference (Becque, 2018). This practice is still in use on campuses with smaller College Panhellenic Councils and is called hand bid matching.

As recruitment rules evolved, the NPC began to document these in a handbook called *The Manual of Information*, colloquially called "The Green Book" because it was distributed in a green three-ring binder before PDF versions were readily available to download from the internet. This book is still in use today and is updated several times a year. Among the recommendations and rules developed by the NPC, they recommend that campuses only hold primary recruitment once per year, which should be held in the early fall as close as possible to the start of the academic year. A fully-structured design is comprised of invitational rounds. PNMs attend up to a certain number of rounds each day, with the number allotted decreasing to allow PNMs to narrow their choices gradually. Panhellenic strongly urges each sorority to re-invite … only those rushees they are seriously considering for membership. This will enable both the rushee and the sororities to know 'how they stand' early in the formal rush period (National Panhellenic Conference, 1979). Table 1 demonstrates the schedule for a campus with ten National Panhellenic Conference chapters.

Table 1

Fully Structured Recruitment Sample Schedule for a Campus with 10 NPC Chapters

First Weekend			Second Weekend	
Friday, Event 1	**Saturday, Event 1**	**Sunday, Event 2**	**Friday, Event 3**	**Saturday, Event 4**
Orientation meeting	PNM attends 10 open house events	PNM attends up to eight invitational events	PNM attends up to five invitational events	PNM attends up to two preference rounds
	20 minutes each	30 minutes each	30 minutes each	60 minutes each

The National Panhellenic Conference provided a sample schedule for a campus with 10 NPC chapters. They state, "This schedule can be used when membership recruitment is held after the beginning of classes and is conducted on two consecutive weekends" (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a). In the last round of invitational parties, the "preference parties," a PNM, attends up to two events. Chapters are encouraged only to invite PNMs to whom they would offer a bid. Immediately after the last preference party, PNMs list or decline their preferred chapters on a binding document called the "Membership Acceptance Recruitment Binding Agreement (MRABA)." The MRABA is a binding contract with a series of stipulations, mainly meant to prevent a PNM from accepting multiple bids the same semester from different chapters. While this is going on, sororities similarly submit a preference ordering of PNMs. Before the Release Figures Methodology (RFM) development, bid matching occurred using an algorithm called Preferential Bidding System (PBS). The PBS system used the law of averages to determine how many potential new members were matched to a chapter. RFM uses more complex and varied algorithms to match PNMs to chapters. RFM uses various statistical measures to maximize the number of women during the primary recruitment process, so

ultimately, the highest number of potential new members can be matched to chapters and receive a bid (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a).

Recruitment is the cornerstone of growth and retention in the sorority experience. The process has been perfected over the years to allow for the maximum number of women to register. One tool that has aided in the expansion and growth of NPC sororities is release figures methodology. Before 2003, a formula known as the law of averages was commonly used to determine the number of invitations issued by each Panhellenic member chapter on campus. Some NPC women came together to develop Release Figures Methodology. Over time, the LOA premise proved to be flawed for the use of release figures. Under this approach, many Panhellenics lost chapters because the formula made it impossible for the chapter with the lowest recruitment returns to achieve comparable size. Many potential new members were statistically eliminated from recruitment as chapters with the highest recruitment returns carried many more women than necessary to attain quota, often leaving a high number of potential new members unmatched after the bid matching process (Golden, 2014; National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a).

Release Figures Methodology (RFM) is described as "a ground-breaking methodology for determining release figures" (National Panhellenic Conference, 2017). Serving as both an innovative and helpful tool, RFM maximizes the opportunity for a potential new member to join a sorority through the primary recruitment process. The procedure is grounded on a mathematical model to decide the number of invitations issued by each participating chapter in the recruitment process. The purpose of RFM has three basic premises: to maximize the number of PNMs who affiliate with a sorority through recruitment; to allow each PNM to investigate realistic options and match with a chapter; and to enable each chapter to invite a sufficient number of PNMs to

match to quota at the end of recruitment (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a). The use of

RFM has posed multiple benefits to chapters, campuses, and the PNMs who participate in the

formal recruitment process. Overall the process benefits PNMs significantly. Since the

establishment of RFM, between 85% and 95% of PNMs who preference are matched with their

first preference, and an overall increase in the number of new members has been realized. The

benefit of this is by using RFM and the preferential bidding system, PNMs can be assured that if

they maximize their options, they will be guaranteed a bid (National Panhellenic Conference,

2021a). Since the RFM process is reactive to each chapter's daily performance in real-time, the

methodology allows for chapters that are not performing and others to retain a larger pool of

potential new members. By making these adjustments, chapters have a greater chance to meet the

quota number by the end of the recruitment process.

Thrown into a harsh examination, it may appear as though these processes are developed

for the sake of complexity. However, they have been developed over time to preserve the

purpose of recruitment. The NPC state that there is no substitute for the enrichment sororities

offer young women as part of the college/university experience (National Panhellenic

Conference, 2021a). The NPC believes that recruitment should be structured to occur in a

specific way as outlined by the policies and procedures in their Manual of Information. These

were revised annually until 2017 when the governance model changed from a council of

delegates to an elected board of directors. Today, the Manual of Information is reviewed as

changes are necessary, more than once per year.

Researcher Gary Pike conducted a study in 2000 at the University of Missouri, Columbia.

Pike compared to non-Greek students to better understand the differences in cognitive gains

between the two groups. According to Pike's results, Greek students reported higher levels of

social involvement and gains. Greek students did not report lower academic involvement levels, integration of college experiences, or gains in math and science reasoning. Membership in a Greek organization was directly related to students' social involvement and integration of college experiences and indirectly related to gains in those general abilities associated with cognitive development. Pike stated that since this study occurred at one institution, these findings cannot be generalized globally. He also found that the conclusions applied more strongly to sorority membership than fraternity membership (Pike, 2000). Another study completed by Armstrong in 2004 found that the esoteric bonds and rituals were meant to provide opportunities for its members' growth. However, public displays of adverse behavior have dampened the organizations' original intent (Armstrong, 2014). One example of adverse bonding is using hazing as a rite of passage to initiation. Many instances of hazing have made national news, with too many cases resulting in death. Examples of frequently seen hazing activities are forced drinking, intimidation, calisthenics, embarrassment, sexual acts, forced consumption of food, and more. At the hands of initiated members, new members are put in pressurized situations to feel they must complete these tasks to earn their membership. Trying to create a culture of brotherhood or sisterhood with mentally or physically damaging adverse scenarios ultimately results in a toxic culture within an organization that, sometimes, cannot be repaired.

Over the years, as the culture shifts from different groups of people experiencing different types of adversity or lack thereof, the group's original mentality dissipates. This shift in mentality was seen with the struggle between the founders who fought hard to have a place to receive an education and were ostracized and the next generation of sorority leaders who followed them. College administrators saw that women were capable of the work and another revenue stream for tuition. This shift meant that the college atmosphere shifted from a hostile

environment trying to push women out to a welcoming environment to increase female

enrollment. Because the founders faced so much adversity, they formed deep and meaningful

connections bonding them for life. The founders viewed the next generation as a group of

socialites who had it easy. Even in the early days of sorority, cultural changes were quick and

unexpected. These cultural changes occur in general operations, and they also impact recruitment

trends. Panhellenic sorority recruitment could be deemed an adverse bonding activity since it

takes a great deal of physical and psychological energy (Astin, 1999), resulting in a highly

emotional experience (Armstrong, 2014). Because this is frequently the first activity in the fall

semester for new students at their colleges, there are many cases where sorority members begin

to bond in a particular way because they are all experiencing recruitment.

Members feel the pressure to meet their organization's needs through recruitment by

bringing in a large new member class to replace the sisters they have lost through graduation or

attrition. According to Scheibel et al. (2002), fraternity and sorority organizations lose

approximately a quarter of their membership annually. Whether they lose those members due to

attrition, graduation, or other factors, Handler (1995) suggested that recruiting new members is

an important process for sororities' longevity and existence. Due to the long history of the

primary recruitment process, this mentality is deeply ingrained in NPC sororities' function.

Although the importance of recruitment to the existence of these organizations, Scheibel et al.

(2002) suggested in their findings that the sorority recruitment process was a "mockery" that

utilized rehearsed interaction with potential new members and phony conversation styles to

portray a false image of the organizations to interested members.

As if in rebuttal to the argument that the recruitment process is a mockery, the National

Panhellenic Conference created and implemented education that encourages values-based

conversations and recruitment tactics. They encouraged the removal of "frills" from recruitment, including excessive decorations, matching outfits, and other additions that were extraneous to the purpose of having conversations during recruitment events. College Panhellenic Councils implemented the values-based recruitment tactics on a case-by-case basis, and some campuses still undertake these extra frills each year. NPC states that "recruitment events should accurately portray the values, benefits, and obligations of sorority membership" (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a). While the National Panhellenic Conference provides specific guidance and training to its College Panhellenic Councils, each campus develops its own culture around recruitment. As new technology emerges, trends change with social media, and the interactions between the most recent generations of women, recruitment will continue to change.

Theoretical Framework

This study's theoretical framework begins with the early research on college student outcomes from Astin's theory of involvement (1999), which proposes that students learn more when involved in various academic, social aspects of the college experience. Sororities support both the academic and social aspects of college. The social nature of sororities is straightforward to observe, groups of women interacting and supporting one another. The academic nature comes with the support layered within the structure of the organizations. Sororities will do educational programming about achieving good grades and have good performance and disincentives for poor performance. Furthermore, frequently, social support as other sorority members pursue the same degree. The more students engage in academic activities, participate in campus activities, and/or interact with faculty, the more they develop the skills and confidence to complete their education (Meyer, 2014). Early research studies also led to the development of Chickering and Gamson's (1987) Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education that include:

46

(a) student-faculty contact, (b) cooperation among students, (c) active learning, (d) prompt feedback, (e) time-on-task, (f) high expectations, and (g) respect for diverse talents and ways of learning. These principles have been widely applied to online learning, perhaps suggesting that the principles of engagement for online learning are not so different from the face-to-face classroom. Again, sororities check all these boxes by providing a developmental atmosphere for members to learn and grow in leadership positions. One position, in particular, the chapter president, immerses the women holding this position in each of Chickering and Gamson's Seven Principles. Another Student/Institution Engagement Model emphasizes the various interactions between student and institution that create a commitment to the institution because the student comes to see that they belong there and recognizes the benefit that will accrue when the degree is completed at the institution. The model was applied to students in web-based classes, and consistent results were found in those enrolled in more traditional formats (Sutton & Nora, 2008). While sororities have not had much experience in engaging fully online membership, there are instances where women who participate in the sorority from abroad, an internship, or other various reasons cannot physically attend sorority functions. In a national study, Biddix (2014) found that 93% of sorority members were retained from freshman to sophomore year at a higher rate than nonmembers at 82%. Biddix also found in the 2014 study that 84% of sorority members graduated within six years at a higher rate than nonmembers at 71%. According to a study done at one university, the data shows that students listed the benefits of joining a fraternity or sorority as gaining lifelong friends and study partners and a greater sense of connection to the campus (Gathercole, 2019).

The theoretical basis for active learning was provided by Kolb (1984), who proposed that learning happened in four stages: from concrete experience to reflective observation, to abstract

47

conceptualization, and active experimentation. The cycle repeats as new concrete experience is gained, reflected upon, generalized into an abstract concept, and then actively tested or experimented within a new setting. Active and experiential learning uses case studies, simulations, role-playing, and debates, all of which can be accommodated within the online course. These instructional methods depend upon the student becoming involved in their own learning, either through physical activity, joint assignment with others, researching information, or engaging in multiple points of view. Virtual sorority recruitment planning has the potential of allowing these four stages. Those planning recruitment frequently have the experience to draw upon the purpose of recruitment and reflect on what can be used and what cannot be used in a new model. Then, leaders came up with a plan to implement recruitment by pulling the concepts of frequently used online education and engagement tools to apply the concepts of recruitment into a virtual landscape. Lastly comes practice. Many chapters are practicing what recruitment events will look like with their chapters and others to gain experience in the active experimentation stage before going live with the virtual sorority experience.

Experiential learning can include authentic learning situations because authentic learning stresses the use of real situations. Authentic learning activities have several characteristics, making the assignments ill-defined, complex, requiring multiple perspectives, collaboration, making choices, and reflection on learning. Authentic learning requires student engagement in understanding and solving the problem and encourages students to analyze and reflect upon the learning task (Meyer, 2014). Again, virtual sorority recruitment can be applied to authentic learning. Even in a year not marred by a global pandemic, developing the plans for sorority recruitment can be ill-defined and complicated due to changing rules and the desire to innovate plans from the year before. It is a tremendously complex process with many perspectives

48

handled by a team of leaders and an entire chapter of a sorority with the support of advisors to interest an audience of potential new members. After recruitment closes, sororities naturally debrief by talking about the highlights and low spots of their recruitment. Once again, this same sequence of events and process for managing recruitment can be applied to planning for virtual sorority recruitment.

A basic definition of leadership finds that leaders are people placed in positions of authority by their credentials (i.e., elected student leaders) amid a group of followers. Another perspective on leadership is that leadership is largely determined by a correlation between personality characteristics and achieving prominence in leadership within organizations (Harms et al., 2006). Defining leadership is a challenge because there are many theories and definitions of leadership. The relational leadership theory framework is an excellent model to apply to sorority leadership. The framework focuses on the relational processes by which leadership is produced and enabled (Cory, 2011). Because leadership is about the relationships one builds and not by the position one held, leaders can be evaluated not only by their leadership position but also the way they function in the socially constructed environment of relational leadership.

Relational Leadership Theory focuses on a better understanding of the relational dynamics, the social processes that comprise leadership and organizing (Uhl-Bien, 2006). The Relational Leadership Model has five components: Empowering – encouraging members to actively engage and get involved; 2. Purposeful – committing to a common goal or activity; 3. Process-oriented – being aware of the way a group interacts and the impact it has on the group's work; 4. Inclusive – understanding, valuing, and engaging all aspects of diversity; 5. Ethical – being guided by a system of moral principles (Komives et al. 1998). Many collegiate women are in their first leadership role when leading their chapter through sorority recruitment.

49

Expanding on the Relational Leadership Model, Komives et al. (2006) developed a six-stage leadership identity development model. This model explores the process a person goes through to realize that they can make a difference and work effectively with others to accomplish change. The stages are awareness, exploration/engagement, leader identified, leadership differentiated, generativity, and integration/synthesis. Alongside these stages are five influences: the broadening view of leadership, developing self, group influences, developmental influences, and a changing view of oneself with others. In the first stage, awareness, the student has an external concept of leadership. Students in this stage perceive others as leaders, particularly those in official leadership positions. The second stage is exploration/engagement and is characterized by involvement in increasing organizations and activities; however, leadership is still something others are or possess. The third stage is leader identified. In this stage, the student recognizes there are 'leaders' and 'followers.' The student has an increased desire to make changes and be a part of the organization's inner workings (s) in which they are members. This stage branches into two aspects: emerging and immersion. Students in the emerging aspect are trying new roles and identifying skills and abilities they need to be influential leaders or members. Students in the immersion aspect see that they can experience the organization as a member and a leader. However, the perception that leaders are responsible for doing the work dominates the students' perspective in this stage (Komives et al., 2006).

Between stages three and four, there is a crucial transition marked by the understanding that leadership is a complex process that cannot be accomplished only by one person. In the fourth stage, leadership differentiated, students become aware that leadership is a relational process and understand that the role requires facilitation and community building. The aspects of emerging and immersion are also present in this stage. Emerging students will develop new

50

capacities such as trusting others by listening and building community. In the immersion aspect

in stage four, students understand and become more comfortable with shared leadership,

realizing that there are times they will lead and times they will follow. The fifth stage is

generativity and is marked by the student's realization that they must cultivate other organization

leaders. They also realize the ways their organization relates with other groups and entities

within the larger system/community. Students in the fifth stage hold established views on

leadership and a style or approach consistent with their values (Komives et al., 2006). In the

sixth and final stage, integration/synthesis, students' awareness of their leadership and

confidence in their ability to take on leadership roles is evident. They have an awareness of the

complexities of organizations and their values. They are comfortable in leadership roles and

understand that leadership is a relational process (Cory, 2011). Komives et al. (2006) discussed

the importance of mentors throughout the process as adults and peers play an important role in

helping the student progress through each stage.

The Relational Leadership Model and the Leadership Identity Development Theory

provide a robust framework for determining the level at which a sorority leader functions during

a stressful event like sorority recruitment. Sororities and fraternity and sorority life offices tout

that sororities provide countless relational leadership opportunities to occur (Cory, 2011).

Research has shown that participation in fraternity and sorority organizations helps students

develop and cultivates students' self-awareness to become leaders and professionals within their

communities (Barber et al., 2015; Cory, 2011; Salinas et al., 2019).

Online Student Engagement

Online students are no longer an amorphous and unclear group that institutions may not

know about or understand (Meyer, 2014). For many higher education institutions suffering the

impacts of COVID-19, all of their student body became online students at the close of the spring 2020 academic semester. Many continued primarily online for the start of the fall 2020 academic semester. Online student engagement is not a new concept in the field of higher education, although it may still be considered an emerging field since the dawn of virtual universities. Institutions are compelled toward online learning as a means to tap broader audiences of students and to recruit beyond geographically bounded markets (Meyer, 2014). Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, nearly, if not every traditional university in the United States had to determine methods to move in-person coursework to a fully online delivery method (Startz, 2020). Colleges and universities have faced pressures to increase access to higher education. To do so, they have focused on increasing the number of online courses and programs offered (Meyer, 2014). Approximately 35 percent of students in higher education were taking at least one online course (Lederman, 2019). By April 2020, nearly every higher education institution was required to transition all students into online learning, leaving many schools scrambling to determine if their structures were strong enough to support online teaching and learning. A continuation of long-term online delivery methods may create cracks in the flow of institutions that cannot overcome a loss in students returning to campus or graduating with their degree.

Higher education has been criticized for its retention and graduation rates, and pressure is building to find solutions (Meyer, 2014). During the COVID-19 global pandemic, online education became the only solution for higher education. Campuses were required to purchase or upgrade e-learning software and management systems to manage the diverse demands of higher education in an online platform. Before the COVID-19 global pandemic, online learning became one of the many tactics that higher education institutions have adopted to address the many challenges of static budgets, increasing access, and improving productivity (Meyer, 2014).

Before the highly fluctuating and unpredictable economic climate, Meyer (2014) determined that with more students and fewer resources, higher education institutions' productivity has become of greater interest to state governments, national foundations, and other assorted groups. Online learning for many campuses has meant an increase in the diversity of students and a means to stay financially solvent. During the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States, universities had restrictions preventing gathering in-person, even student organizations and athletic events. Sororities were focused on coming up with strategies to overcome the barrier of the restrictions safely. Like their academic courses, sororities conceptualized their curriculum in a fully online format by creating bridges for engagement through digital methods. For example, Sigma Kappa's programs have been adapting. This includes bid day, which is the day potential new members receive and accept their bid invitation to the sorority. The sorority has supported chapters that have to do their program entirely online. Following bid day, new members participate in a new member education program that is delivered entirely online. Another cornerstone is initiation, which by petition to Sigma Kappa's National Council, may occur virtually. These essential programs, fundamental to the operations of undergraduate chapters, have changed to allow members to participate in an online-only format.

The focus of student engagement has primarily been on traditional campus environments (Meyer, 2014). For many, the most memorable and developmental time at their college/university is outside the classroom in extracurricular activities. In an online-only atmosphere, engagement may be one essential technique to make online learning productive for the institution but, more importantly, to ensure students are successful as they pursue a college degree (Meyer, 2014). However, students' lives tend to present serious limits to what can be achieved with engagement strategies. They have employment or family demands that force them

to attend part-time, or they may be inexperienced students and need to "learn how to learn" or

understand the basics of online learning. They may need to develop self-regulatory behaviors,

motivation to succeed, and the ability to defer gratification. They may also have to develop an

understanding of and skills for active learning and find time and willingness to put effort into

their learning (Meyer, 2014). According to Hara and Kling (2001) and Palloff and Pratt (1999,

2005), the reasons online students drop out are because they feely physically separated from

individual students, and that creates feelings of isolation, which is a major cause of student

confusion and anxiety. Motteram and Forrester (2005) and Abel (2005) found that technology

failure and lack of instructor feedback are also reasons for online student dropout. "In the online

environment, students tend to become frustrated when technology does not function well and

lose confidence in their work when they do not receive instructor feedback" (Lehman &

Conceição, 2013). Research regarding persistence and dropout in the online learning

environment has been ongoing for decades. Studies have found that proactive contact with the

instructor is rated higher than contact with other students (Motteram & Forrester, 2005) and that

proactive and reactive contact is important (Simpson, 2004). Lehman and Conceição (2013)

found that students listed physical separation, a lack of academic skill, technical skill, intrinsic

motivation, extrinsic motivation, faculty contact with students, clarity in direction, expectation,

technology failure, administrative, financial, technical support, and instructor feedback all

contribute to reasons why students drop out.

Informal studies found that students were generally dissatisfied with their online learning

in the spring 2020 semester; however, most of these were constructed informally or completed in

the early stages of the pandemic (Lederman, 2020). For-profit consulting groups like EAB and

Ellucian have published articles reiterating the importance for universities to focus on student

engagement, urging universities to "utilize their technology to their fullest extent at this time" (Latino, n.d.) or "identify popular events that can translate to a physically distant format" (Frenzel, 2020). Research about the effects of COVID-19 on student engagement outside of the classroom is emerging. However, this dissertation seeks to add to this body of research. There is much data to gather while, in some cases, 100 percent of the student population was engaged in online learning. When evaluating the successes and shortcomings of online learning, students continue to indicate anxiety in the online space, a lack of intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, and technology failures as challenges that they must overcome to persist. It is easy to compare these applications from the online academic world into the online student engagement world to see that many factors may reduce a students' want to participate in online student engagement. Those who participate are working hard to engage and exercise many practical skills to make this type of participation happen in their lives.

Grieving Process

The COVID-19 pandemic created significant disruptions in the fabric of everyday life. Fun events like concerts and sporting matches were canceled. Casually spending time lounging with friends became dangerous. Students missed internships, clinical practicums, and even regular in-person classes to avoid spreading the virus. At first, there was not much information about the virus. As the virus spread and policies changed, numbers increased throughout the United States. This forced colleges to go into risk-reduction procedures for the fall 2020 semester. Individuals were grieving their former way of life. Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross introduced the five stages of grief in her 1973 book *On Death and Dying.* Kübler-Ross listed the five stages of grief as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. These stages are tools to help us frame and identify what we may be feeling.

However, they are not stops on some linear timeline in grief. Not everyone goes through all of them or goes in a prescribed order (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005).

The first stage of grief is denial. In this stage, the world becomes meaningless and overwhelming. Life makes no sense. It is characterized by a state of shock and denial or going numb. An individual in this stage may wonder how and if they can go on and why they should go on. Individuals in this stage try to find a way to simply get through each day. Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) state: "Denial and shock help us to cope and make survival possible. Denial helps us to pace our feelings of grief. There is grace in denial. It is nature's way of letting in only as much as we can handle." Denial can be a necessary component of coping with startling or abrupt news. While some people were prepared for the tribulations of the COVID-19 pandemic and its extended timeline, others were surprised by the preventative measures required to slow the virus's spread.

The second stage of grief is anger. Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) explain that once individuals feel safe enough to know they can survive whatever comes next, they will begin to feel emotions. Anger can be directed at others, the situation, and oneself. Anger is usually at the front of the line as feelings of sadness, panic, hurt, and loneliness also appear (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). The authors encourage individuals to work through their anger and state, "we live in a society that fears anger. People often tell us our anger is misplaced, inappropriate, or disproportionate. Some people may feel your anger is harsh or too much. It is their problem if they do not know how to deal with it" (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). In the higher education world, creating spaces where individuals can process their feelings without being asked to change themselves can help create a healthy coping environment.

Bargaining is the third stage of grief. Individuals use bargaining as a way to escape from the pain of the situation they are facing. Bargaining is often accompanied by guilt and questions of "what if?" Bargaining is the desire to want life returned to what it was. Bargaining can fill gaps that strong emotions generally dominated, which often keep suffering at a distance. The act of bargaining allows individuals to believe that they can restore order to the chaos that has taken over (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Bargaining can present itself as taking actions to restore control in the situation through ultimatums, like "if I don't get my way, then I will quit."

The fourth stage of grief is depression. Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) explain this stage as moving feelings squarely into the present. They add that empty feelings present themselves as grief enters lives on a deeper level. Depression is not a sign of mental illness but the appropriate response to a significant loss. In this stage, individuals withdraw from life and are left in a fog of intense sadness. "Morning comes, but you don't care. A voice in your head says it is time to get out of bed, but you have no desire to do so. You may not even have a reason. Life feels pointless" (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). There have been many terms for this experience of not having energy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students who feel bound to their computers may call it "Zoom fatigue." They may show disinterest in gathering through alternative, not-in-person methods because they do not see the point. However, there is much to be gained from socializing.

The last stage of the Kübler-Ross model is acceptance. This stage is about accepting or recognizing that this is the new, permanent reality. Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) describe acceptance as a healing stage. They say, "Healing looks like remembering, recollecting, and reorganizing." They add that the past has been "forever changed and we must readjust. We must learn to reorganize roles, reassign them to others, or take them on ourselves. The more an

individual's identity connected to the loss, the harder it will be to do this" (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Passing into the stage of acceptance means taking responsibility for the situation around oneself. As this applies to sorority recruitment during the COVID-19 pandemic, it could have meant supporting the experience, coming up with creative ideas or solutions, or contributing to reducing the overall workload. Acceptance is not stagnant, and individuals can cycle through each of these stages.

In 2020, David Kessler was interviewed about his perspective of the grieving process during the COVID-19 pandemic. He walked through each stage:

> There's denial, which we saw a lot of early on: This virus won't affect us. There's anger: You're making me stay home and taking away my activities. There's bargaining: Okay, if I social distance for two weeks everything will be better, right? There's sadness: I don't know when this will end. And finally, there's acceptance. This is happening; I have to figure out how to proceed. Acceptance, as you might imagine, is where the power lies. We find control in acceptance. I can wash my hands. I can keep a safe distance. I can learn how to work virtually. (Berinato, 2020)

From the author's perspective, the model's stages can be applied directly to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020 an interview with a journal, Kessler applied the five stages to responses to the virus, saying his five stages of grief are "not a map, but it provides some scaffolding for this unknown world." The five stages of grief can be applied to many things outside of a loved one's loss, including a significant disruptive event that impacts college students.

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the scholarly literature related to the history of the National Panhellenic Conference sororities to understand better the roots of the organizations' structures

and how they evolved. The literature review covered a history of sorority recruitment to mark the origins and trends that brought sorority recruitment to its current iteration. The literature review included an analysis of student engagement theories and philosophies to ground the sorority recruitment experience with context about the learning that occurs outside of the classroom in the university setting. Online learning literature was evaluated to understand better the paradigm of learning in an online setting to allow parallels between online learning and virtual engagement for student activities. Furthermore, the five stages of grief were explored to ground emotional realities for the study.

This literature review found that the sorority recruitment process's participation and management are steeped in learning opportunities that supplement the academic curriculum. It is a fantastic example of an event that helps college students learn how to hone their leadership and management skills. While no research exists regarding virtual sorority recruitment, this literature review demonstrates a tremendous opportunity for research in this area of study.

Chapter 3. Research Methodology

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the perceptions of sorority members and affiliated personnel regarding College Panhellenic Council virtual sorority recruitment at a large public university in the Midwestern United States. I used a qualitative design to form a detailed description aligned with the philosophy of descriptive phenomenology to capture and describe the virtual sorority recruitment phenomenon. Virtual sorority recruitment was created because of the COVID-19 global pandemic. I focused on describing participant's perceptions of virtual sorority recruitment. I described the perceived challenges and benefits of the virtual delivery method of sorority recruitment. I analyzed themes from the participants to understand how they emotionally processed the disruption to the traditional recruitment process from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

The research questions guided the study toward a better understanding of the phenomenon of virtual sorority recruitment by capturing its participants' perceptions. The following questions guided this study.

Research Question 1

What are the perceptions of the benefits of the virtual sorority recruitment model?

Research Question 2

What are the perceptions of the challenges in the virtual sorority recruitment model?

Research Question 3

How did participants emotionally process the disruption to the traditional recruitment process during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Research Design

Qualitative research methodology is an opportunity to better understand and illustrate the why behind the decisions that individuals make. Qualitative research methodology will bring forth the researcher's ability to perform in-depth exploration for understanding the complexities of conscious social phenomena from a person perspective (Creswell, 2007). This study will seek to understand the phenomenon of virtual sorority recruitment caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic through detailed first-person accounts. The philosophy of phenomenology depends on direct experience. It hopes to arrive at meaning, perspectives on the phenomena of experience which can be communicated (Fraleigh, 1991). This phenomenological study will seek to describe the meaning of virtual sorority recruitment for several participants through their lived experience (Creswell, 2007). The study seeks to describe the phenomenon of virtual sorority recruitment. Conclusions that impact this new style of recruitment may make it a viable option for others. Derived down to a definition, phenomenological research is philosophically founded upon "capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon" (Patton, 2015, p. 115).

By using this approach, the natural, humanistic principles of the qualitative methodology emphasize the complexity of examining the experiences of real people in the real world and challenge the researcher to focus their attention on data that are more personal than procedural (Anfara et al., 2002; Patton, 2015). Qualitative research designs are an appropriate format for this type of study intended to provide a descriptive analysis of the phenomenon of virtual sorority recruitment. Using the scientific evidence process in phenomenological studies, the researcher can carry out a series of methods and procedures to satisfy the requirements of an organized,

disciplined, and systematic study (Moustakas, 1994). Qualitative research allows the human experience to connect and link to other research bodies to identify useful trends and patterns. Using the primary purpose of phenomenology, I seek to describe the experience of virtual sorority recruitment experience. Qualitative research demonstrates a voice that may be the convincing factor for change. I chose qualitative research because of the power of the human story. Virtual sorority recruitment is a phenomenon as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic. However, virtual sorority recruitment may remain a viable option for national organizations to expand into fully online markets, demonstrating a considerable research opportunity.

Qualitative inquiry means that the demand of the collection instrument for data collection is that of the researcher (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). Tipton (2017) described the role of the researcher in the qualitative tradition as personal. To fully understand a phenomenon using qualitative inquiry, one must document the phenomenon that happens among real people in the real world in their own words, from their own perspectives, and within their own contexts (Patton 2015). Qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior, or interviewing participants (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

Reflexive Statement

Joining a sorority in college was a turning point in my journey to a career. I became involved in Sigma Kappa sorority as a second-semester sophomore and was immediately appointed to a leadership role as the Panhellenic Delegate. The following year, I became the Vice President for Philanthropic Service for the chapter while also contributing to the College Panhellenic Council as the Vice President for Programming and Leadership. While pursuing my master's degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, I worked as a graduate assistant

in fraternity and sorority life advising the College Panhellenic Council. Following graduation, I

moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, to work for Sigma Kappa National Headquarters. A year later, I

returned to Johnson City, Tennessee, to work for my alma mater. While doing so, I served as a

local chapter advisor for two years and was appointed in 2017 as a national volunteer serving on

the Panhellenic team for Sigma Kappa. In this role, I work with sorority recruitment year-round.

Starting in 2017, I began serving the East Tennessee State University community professionally

as the fraternity and sorority advisor. In preparation for the fall 2020 primary recruitment process

at ETSU, the Panhellenic Community voted to host it virtually. I planned and implemented

virtual sorority recruitment for the first time and have learned much about the experience

firsthand.

Qualitative researchers need to understand their personal biases. Having bias does not

disqualify a researcher from studying a topic as it is widely understood that researchers cannot

separate themselves from the people or phenomenon they study and that closeness to a

population may even have benefits for the study (Toma, 2000). When researching a

phenomenon, a researcher may become immersed in their topic of study, which may suggest

advantages for those close to their topic (Given, 2007). There are many nuances to a process and

program as extensive as virtual sorority recruitment, so in this case, intimate knowledge of the

topic area may produce in-depth, meaningful feedback by asking detailed questions. The

implementations of safeguards like member checks and a reflexive journal help the researcher

maintain reflexivity. Reflexivity helps reduce researcher bias by ensuring that the researcher's

background and values do not bring the data's trustworthiness into question and ensures that the

study findings emphasize the meaning of the phenomenon for the participants, not the perception

of the researcher (Creswell, 2014).

Ethics

Studies using human subjects must evaluate ethical considerations. Before beginning research with the participants, the researcher received IRB approval to conduct research on virtual sorority recruitment perspectives. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were given an informed consent agreement as a means to ensure confidence and safety for participants (McMillan & Shumacher, 2014).

The personal nature of qualitative inquiry demands the researcher clearly articulates the purpose and intended audience of the study with participants (McMillin & Shumacher, 2014). The study's information was communicated in the informed consent document, which can be found in the study's appendix, and was presented to participants before beginning the research. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I have decided to reduce risk by moving in-person interviews to an online video conferencing software. Participants were able to select the time that best suited their schedule. I communicated that participants needed to find a secure, private location to promote confidentiality during the interviewing collection process. Member checks will be used to increase the accuracy of qualitative data transcription.

Population

The population of this sorority includes individuals who can describe first-hand their experience with virtual sorority recruitment. The population included individuals who participated in the recruitment process as a potential new member, chapter member, chapter leader, chapter president, College Panhellenic Council leader, and fraternity/sorority advisor. The researcher worked with a campus that had fourteen Panhellenic chapters comprised of nearly 1,900 members total.

Data Sources

The information collected answered the research questions to create a pool of information rich in detail. Phenomenological qualitative research does not require many participants. This study gathered 13 responses fitting the criteria outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018). Interview questions were selected to align with the purpose of the research questions. The research question guide asked broad questions that would allow the participant to tell their account of their experiences. I asked ad hoc follow-up questions to gather information about the phenomenon.

Sampling, Access, and Recruitment

I did not have a previously established relationship with 12 participants, so it was essential to ensure that they knew their roles and options for participation. I did have a previously established relationship with the fraternity/sorority advisor as a casual friend and colleague. The researcher found volunteers for the study by sending out a recruitment email to master lists with the campus' fraternity/sorority advisor's help. The criterion sampling method in place for this study included participants for this study who identify with the institution of study and who fall into the category of one of the following: new members, general members, chapter recruitment chairs, chapter presidents, chapter advisors, chapter recruitment advisors, or the fraternity/sorority advisor. Once a participant chose to opt into the study by emailing me, the primary investigator, I introduced myself and helped the participant understand the study's purpose. The participants represented a variety of chapters. The nature of phenomenological research emphasizes the role of the researcher in providing an essence of the experience of participants through their own point of view (Tipton, 2017).

This research used members of a sorority who identified as potential new members, new members, general members, chapter recruitment chairs, chapter presidents, chapter advisors, chapter recruitment advisors, and the fraternity/sorority advisor. The researcher asked the fraternity/sorority advisor to distribute an email to several lists that include the volunteers identified. The flyer provided information for students to determine if they wished to volunteer as participants for the study and the researcher's contact information. There was a large enough number to create a rich pool of information, but not too large to overwhelm the study. Thus, the researcher chose 13 participants to achieve saturation for the study and work within an appropriate set of parameters for this study.

The institution was selected by reaching out to several institutions that met the study criteria of hosting virtual Panhellenic recruitment. Several considerations were made, including the amount of time the Panhellenic Council's primary advisor had served in their role and when the Panhellenic Council decided to participate in virtual recruitment. The researcher engaged in face-to-face interviews with open-ended questions. The researcher followed a guideline for the questions and allowed the conversations to take natural tangents to collect meaningful data from the participant. Participant names and institution names for this study were given pseudonyms. The pseudonyms are held and locked in a file entirely separate from the original data sources. Confidentiality was taken seriously as some participants may not want to have their identities revealed.

Informed Consent

The researcher obtained adhered to the process outlined by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at East Tennessee State University. The researcher completed the proper Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval process. Participation in the study was voluntary, and

all participants were presented with an informed consent agreement. Institutions and participants were granted confidentiality to ensure confidence and safety for participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The researcher granted confidentiality by using pseudonyms and broad identifiers instead of identifying names, sororities, or the institution of study. It was determined that the risks of this study are minimal. The challenges presented in this research were likely related to trauma that students have experienced while participating in a high-pressure and stressful activity like sorority recruitment. The researcher used a disclosure statement at the beginning of the study to describe the participant's rights in the study. If the participant felt that the topic was too challenging, the participants were allowed to opt-out. To avoid bias with the participants, the researcher approached all interactions with the participants with care. The researcher used the Zoom platform to record the interviews. The goal was for the participants to feel comfortable sharing but not to give embellished or exaggerated answers. Because all interviews were recorded, the interviews were transcribed and reviewed.

Data Collection Procedure

Typically in phenomenological research, a long interview is the method through which data is collected on the topic and question (Moustakas, 1994). Using an informal, interactive process and open-ended comments and questions, the researcher collected responses. A series of questions were developed before the interview and aimed at evoking a comprehensive account of the phenomenon's experience. The data gathered for this study was collecting using Zoom web-conferencing interviews with participants. The rich data provided in these interviews created the themes in the study. There were several master schedules to which the sororities and councils had to adhere. These set the course for each day of recruitment. Qualitative documents include, but are not limited to, official documents, newspaper articles, personal journals, letters, and

images (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Other documents such as governing policies, rules, and resources shared by the participants were included as they were relevant to the study.

Interviews

Once participants submitted their interest in volunteering, they were sent the informed consent document. The researcher then requested times from the participant to meet their availability. When corresponding with participants, I disclosed my professional title as the Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life at East Tennessee State University in my email signature. Due to the health concerns from the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted over Zoom web-conferencing technology. Zoom interviews were recorded. The researcher used a reflexive journal during the study, and notes were taken throughout the interview in case of a recording failure as a backup recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018). During the interviews, if the participants requested more information about me or my credentials, including my sorority affiliation, I disclosed.

Data Analysis Procedure

Interviews were initially transcribed by the Zoom web-conferencing software and then verified by hand by the researcher. Following transcription, the transcripts were then checked for errors and corrected wherever found. While reviewing, themes will emerge that lend themselves to coding during the first cycle of a coding process (Saldana, 2008). The interviews were examined, searching for themes of similarities and differences. As these themes were constructed and developed, several broader themes emerged (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

In the review process of data, coding themes emerged. The process of identifying emerging meaning and outlining this meaning is the process of qualitative research analysis.

Patton (2015) states that "looking for patterns, putting together what is said in one place with what is said in another place, and integrating what different people have said" is the process whereby qualitative research is completed. The researcher must use constant comparison methods to extract conceptual categories, themes, and units (Laws, 2014). The researcher used the following steps as outlined in Creswell & Creswell (2018). First, the researcher organized and prepared the data for analysis by transcribing interviews, typing up field notes, and collecting supporting documents. Then the researcher read and looked at all the data. This step allowed the researcher to reflect on general themes and find some broad themes. In the next step, the research coded all the data by segmenting data into categories and labeling those categories with a term. The penultimate step the researcher took was to generate descriptions and themes. This involves a detailed rendering of information about the people, places, and events in the research setting. Lastly, the researcher represented the descriptions and themes in the qualitative narrative. This included visuals, figures, or tables to present the data visually. The final step, presenting the findings, used a mixture of quotes, tables, and descriptive sentences to illustrate each emerging theme's linkages. This allowed the researcher to illustrate the trends and emerging themes from the research thoroughly.

Interpretation

Creswell and Creswell (2018) state the interpretation of qualitative research involves following a set of procedures. These include: summarizing the overall findings, comparing the findings to the literature, discussing a personal view of the findings, and stating limitations and future research. The researcher created a summary after reviewing the data and set this into the context of the literature that applies to the areas of study. The data was searched for similar or different themes from the literature and then evaluated using the researcher's personal view as a

practicing fraternity/sorority advisor and sorority woman to add the researcher's view to the findings. Limitations and recommendations for future research were included to demonstrate where more information can be mined to learn more about the phenomenon.

Measures of Rigor

There are four key criteria for evaluating qualitative and interpretive research work creating the research's measures of rigor (Lincoln & Guba; 1985; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). The key components that comprise trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The following strategies were used to achieve credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable work: triangulation, member checks, thick description, purposive sampling, and reflexivity.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research depends on systematic, in-depth fieldwork to yield high-quality data, systematic and conscientious analysis of data, the credibility of the inquirer, and readers' and users' philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2010). Credibility can be seen when a researcher searches for different ways of organizing data that could lead to different findings. This can be done by analyzing for negative or disconfirming evidence and integrating and triangulating diverse qualitative data sources. Triangulation is the extent to which multiple sources support data. I interviewed participants who fell into different categories and had different experiences of the same activity. I learned their perspective and compared it to the others received, a form of triangulation that allowed me to determine if the data gathered was transferable.

Transferability

Another measure of rigor used to strengthen this study was transferability. Transferability is a qualitative term to describe external validity (Creswell, 2012; Suter, 2012). Transferability is evidence supporting the generalization of findings to other contexts in which detailed descriptions enable judgments about transferability with other contexts (Suter, 2012). The strategies that fall under the term transferability used in this study are thick description and purposive sampling. Thick description includes listing in detail the context in which the interviewee experienced the phenomenon. Purposive sampling strategy is a sampling that does not emphasize generalizing between sample and population but instead focuses on the potential of the sample to generate insightful data from its illuminative information sources (Patton, 2002).

Dependability

Dependability is the systematic process that is followed during the research. This can also be focused on the inquiry process and the researcher's responsibility for ensuring the process was logical, traceable, and documented (Patton, 2010). The primary technique for establishing dependability is using a transparent coding process of verification where the inherent ambiguity of word meaning and category definitions are best handled with consistent coding schema (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). The coding process used the code-recode strategy outlined by Saldana (2008). This meant that the initial or primary cycle codes were efficiently subsumed by other codes, relabeled, or dropped altogether. By exercising patience and flexibility, the researcher can progress toward second and third cycle coding to rearrange and reclassify coded data into new and differing categories for the data analysis portion of the research (Saldana, 2008). Additional support for dependability was provided by triangulation. This was an internal validity procedure where researchers look for convergence among and between multiple and

different sources of information when forming themes or categories in a study (Creswell &

Miller, 2000). This research looked for themes from participants within different sampling

classifications to use the constant-comparative method in the analysis of the data to increase

internal validity (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)

Confirmability

Confirmability is establishing the fact that the data and interpretations of the research are

fact and are not imagined by the researcher. This can be done by allowing readers to examine the

research process. Confirmability is often equated with reliability and objectivity in quantitative

research. For both quantitative and qualitative research, reliability and objectivity are measures

of the accuracy of the truth or meaning is expressed in the study (Given, 2008). The goals of

confirmability with qualitative research are to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of

the research participants and to understanding the meanings people give to their experiences

(Given, 2008). This will be achieved by making the research process as transparent as possible

and clearly describing how data were collected and analyzed. Each of these measures of rigor

combined will work together to create a balanced study to meaningfully add information to the

greater body of work about sororities, leadership, and online student engagement.

Chapter Summary

This study was performed using a sample of individuals who fit specific descriptions and

volunteered to participate in the study. The researcher interviewed 13 participants who had the

title of potential new member, new member, chapter leader, chapter member, vice president of

membership, president, College Panhellenic Council leader, fraternity/sorority advisor, or

equivalent jargon within their organizations. Common themes were identified and recorded for

this study. Chapter 3 described the research design and methodology for this study. Chapter 4

includes a description of the findings from the analysis of the data. Chapter 5 provides a

summary of the findings and final conclusions.

Chapter 4. Analysis of the Data

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the perceptions of sorority members and affiliated personnel regarding College Panhellenic Council virtual sorority recruitment at a large public university in the Midwestern United States. I used a qualitative design to form a detailed description aligned with the philosophy of descriptive phenomenology to capture and describe the virtual sorority recruitment phenomenon. Virtual sorority recruitment was created because of the COVID-19 global pandemic. I focused on describing participant's perceptions of virtual sorority recruitment. I described the perceived challenges and benefits of the virtual delivery method of sorority recruitment. I analyzed themes from the participants to understand how they emotionally processed the disruption to the traditional recruitment process from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction

Using phenomenological methodology, I gathered personal narratives to construct and explore the experiences of individuals who participated in virtual sorority recruitment at a large public university in the Midwestern United States. I identified and explored perceptions of the virtual sorority recruitment model. The following research questions guided this study.

Research Question 1

What are the perceptions of the benefits of the virtual sorority recruitment model?

Research Question 2

What are the perceptions of the challenges in the virtual sorority recruitment model?

Research Question 3

How did participants emotionally process the disruption to the traditional recruitment process from the COVID-19 pandemic?

The qualitative data I collected was sorted by questionnaire protocol. This created four groups, potential new member, general member, sorority leader, and fraternity/sorority advisor. The design of the interview question protocol directly aligned with the research questions for this study. Participants answered the interview questions based on their perceptions of virtual sorority recruitment through their experience and previous knowledge. Objects, experiences, and events can have different meanings to different people, such as one person viewing the same event differently based on a variety of factors (Christensen & Johnson, 2014). To better understand the phenomenon of virtual sorority recruitment, it was important to consider several perspectives of involvement in virtual sorority recruitment to demonstrate how the experiences present similar and differing themes as a form of triangulation.

The different data sources to support emerging themes create structural corroboration to strengthen research study credibility. Data saturation was reached when interview transcripts were analyzed twice, and categories and themes began to emerge in similar patterns. Charmaz (2006), as cited in Creswell and Creswell (2018), states that one stops collecting data when the categories (or themes) are saturated: when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties. The research findings of these semi-structured interviews and the presentation of the analysis are in this chapter.

Participant Profiles

Thirteen participants were identified through purposive and random criterion sampling methods. The fraternity and sorority advisor was purposive sampling as there is only one Panhellenic advisor on this campus. The remaining criteria areas were recruited by sending out an email to the entire Panhellenic sorority population and collected as each participant volunteered for an interview. There were four interview protocols that a participant could fall into: the fraternity and sorority advisor, recruitment leader, general member, and potential new member. Other than the fraternity and sorority advisor, Cecilia, I had no previous knowledge of the participants. Each participant was a full-time enrolled student at the large public Midwestern University in the United States of America where the study was conducted. An overview of participant background information can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Participants' Demographic Information

Name	Age	Year	Protocol
Aly	18	Freshman	Potential New Member
Baylor	19	Sophomore	General Member
Cameron	21	Junior	General Member
Carly	21	Senior	General Member
Caroline	21	Senior	General Member
Cecilia	26	Staff	Fraternity and Sorority Advisor
Ella	21	Senior	General Member
Grace	18	Freshman	Potential New Member
Kelly	20	Junior	Recruitment Leader
Lisa	21	Senior	General Member
Miranda	21	Junior	Recruitment Leader
Nicole	22	Senior	Recruitment Leader
Savannah	18	Freshman	Potential New Member

Potential New Member (PNM) Participants

Aly is an 18-year-old attending large public Midwestern University immediately after graduating with her high school diploma from her hometown, which is out of state. This recruitment was Aly's first experience with sorority recruitment. She registered for the recruitment process because she thought being involved in a sorority would be an excellent way to meet older people. Aly participated in virtual recruitment this year because the benefit of joining this year outweighed the inconveniences of adapting to online virtual sorority recruitment.

Grace is an 18-year-old freshman attending large public Midwestern University immediately after graduating. Grace's high school is located in the same city as large public Midwestern University. This is Grace's first experience with sorority recruitment. Grace chose to go through recruitment because she thought it looked fascinating because of the benefits of joining a sorority, particularly the opportunity for leadership positions. She also joined because it looked like a really good opportunity to make friends and join a good group of people. Grace did not feel the online method for virtual sorority recruitment impacted her choice to participate. She guessed that sorority recruitment would move online after that seemed to be the common trend for events during the COVID-19 pandemic. Grace was set on being involved in a sorority all four years.

Savannah is an 18-year-old attending large public Midwestern University immediately after graduating with her high school diploma. Savannah's mom joined a sorority at a different university and shared her experience in the sorority with Savannah, which left Savannah undecided about whether she should join a sorority. Savannah decided to join because many opportunities were virtual, and she wanted to be involved in a group that was guaranteeing

regular meetings. She also wanted to get to know girls her age better and have a group of friends to rely on throughout college. Savannah felt indifferent that sorority recruitment was moved to a virtual mode of delivery. Savannah felt as though she would have been more anxious and nervous if recruitment were in-person. Savannah stated that she felt like there was not as much stress on physical appearance for a virtual sorority recruitment model. Savannah would have participated in sorority recruitment this year if it were virtual or online.

General Member Participants

Baylor is a 19-year-old sophomore at large public Midwestern University with a major in engineering. Baylor's past participation in recruitment was as a potential new member her freshman year. She decided to join a sorority because her family had been involved in Greek life. She was an out-of-state student who wanted to use the opportunity to meet many girls. When Baylor learned that sorority recruitment was virtual, she felt disappointed because of the loss of personal connection; however, she said that online recruiting turned out to be a little better than she expected.

Cameron is a 21-year-old junior at large public Midwestern University. Fall 2020 marked Cameron's third recruitment process. For Cameron's first primary recruitment in 2018, she began the process but withdrew midway through. She joined through continuous open bidding shortly after primary recruitment concluded in fall 2018. Cameron did not plan on joining a sorority, but when she arrived on campus her freshman year, her roommate was passionate about the recruitment process. At that point, the recruitment registration process was closed, but Panhellenic re-opened to allow for late registrations, and Cameron went for it. In her first primary recruitment, Cameron became a little overwhelmed and was not wholly sure if joining a sorority was right for her, so she withdrew. Shortly after she withdrew, Cameron realized that

78

she regretted her decision and joined a sorority participating in continuous open bidding within two weeks. Cameron joined a group of women who made her feel empowered to be herself. She recognized the potential for leadership opportunities and self-development in the sorority she joined. Cameron indicated that virtual sorority recruitment was frustrating. Cameron serves as the chapter's new member educator.

Carly is a 21-year-old senior at large public Midwestern University. She joined a sorority her freshman year, making recruitment in fall 2020 her fourth time experiencing primary recruitment. Carly's mom shared her experience as a member of a sorority. Her mom enjoyed her sorority experience, so Carly was interested in finding an organization like her mom's to join. Carly also carried high school club involvement with her to her university experience and felt that joining a sorority was a natural choice. When Carly heard that sorority recruitment would be virtual, she was less interested in being a part of it because it would be very different from her past experiences. Carly was initially concerned about the authenticity of the conversations and the experience in general. She had many questions about the logistics of recruitment would work; for example, she desired to see detailed information about the schedules and requirements that she would need to meet for work week and during recruitment. Carly has experience as a leader of her chapter, having served on her chapter's executive board as their Vice President of Finance.

Caroline is a 22-year-old senior at large public Midwestern University. She joined her freshman year, making this her fourth primary recruitment experience. Cameron chose to join a sorority because of her experiences in high school. During high school, Cameron battled some significant health issues. Cameron had a horrible group of friends in high school that would leave her out of everything. Cameron went to a college where none of her high school friends were

attending. In this new chapter in her life, she decided she wanted to try something new. Cameron had cousins involved in sororities who talked to her about their experience and encouraged her to explore sorority life at her new school. Cameron was unsure if she was the right type of person to join a sorority, thinking that sororities were something for pretty girls with lots of friends. Cameron registered for recruitment during her first week on campus to get out of her shell and meet new friends. When Cameron heard that sorority recruitment would be virtual in the fall, she began to think about how this would shape her senior experience. Cameron wanted to come back to the sorority and finish her time in the sorority. Cameron felt as though it was her responsibility to soldier through all the sacrifices because it was something that they just had to do.

Ella is a 21-year-old junior at large public Midwestern University. She is in her fourth year in the sorority. Ella joined a sorority her freshman year because many acquaintances from high school were participating in sorority recruitment. Ella initially did not want to participate in recruitment because she does not like to go with the flow of things. Ella decided to sign up for recruitment with her roommate if registration opened again, and it did. When Ella learned that recruitment was switching to virtual, she looked at the foundation of why she joined her chapter. Ella pointed to the impactful relationships at the core of her experience, which she felt she could talk about differently from in-person recruitment during virtual sorority recruitment.

Lisa is a 21-year-old junior at large public Midwestern University. Lisa joined a sorority her sophomore year, making virtual sorority recruitment her second primary recruitment experience. Lisa did not go through the recruitment process her freshman year because she thought it was very daunting and scary, but she regretted not trying by the end of her freshman year. After Lisa's best friend decided to go through sorority recruitment her sophomore year, Lisa signed up and went for it too. Lisa felt as though virtual recruitment was a weird experience.

Recruitment Leader Participants

Kelly is a 21-year-old junior at large public Midwestern University. As a freshman, Kelly joined her sorority at another university before transferring to large public Midwestern University. Kelly joined a sorority to have access to leadership and meet people on campus with similar values. Virtual sorority recruitment did not impact Kelly's choice to return to her sorority in fall 2020. Kelly indicated that she had her position on her chapter's executive board and her aspirations to hold a leadership position on the Panhellenic executive boards as key reasons she wanted to stay connected. Kelly served as a critical member of her chapter's recruitment team by managing the technology aspects and logistics for her organization.

Miranda is a 21-year-old junior at Midwestern University. During the fall 2020 recruitment, she served her chapter as their president. Miranda described her role as having a hand in one million different places while recruiting and working with the analysis and assessment team. Miranda joined a sorority after hearing about her biological older sister's experience in a Greek organization. Miranda considers herself the last person ever to join a sorority because of her independent personality. She shaped that opinion from the portrayals of sorority life in the media. Miranda's older sister helped Miranda redefine what a sorority meant, and Miranda found similarities between her Girl Scouts experience and her sorority experience. Miranda knew that virtual sorority recruitment was going to be challenging. She decided that, as president, she needed to be a positive force in the chapter. She also recognized that she needed to acknowledge the circumstances of COVID-19 and virtual sorority recruitment with the chapter. Miranda saw opportunities in virtual sorority recruitment to focus on values-based recruiting methods.

Nicole is a 22-year-old senior at large public Midwestern University. This was her fourth year participating in sorority recruitment. In 2019, she served as her chapter's vice president of recruitment, and in 2020, she was the Panhellenic Council Vice President of Recruitment. Nicole joined a sorority because she attended college in her hometown, and she wanted to branch out and meet new people. She thought the sorority experience would provide her with new friends. It looked fun and fulfilling. Nicole was excited to return to school with the switch to virtual sorority recruitment in the fall semester. She felt like her brain was always functioning in August and September of 2020, playing through how recruitment would go. Alongside her excitement, Nicole felt apprehensive and frustrated about recruitment because she knew the scale of decisions that she faced leading all the Panhellenic chapters through this significant change.

Fraternity and Sorority Advisor Participant

Cecilia is a 26-year-old administrator at large public Midwestern University. Cecilia earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in student affairs and higher education. Cecilia has been the administrator for five primary Panhellenic recruitments. Fall 2020 is not the first time a campus she worked with experienced a significant disruption around or during recruitment. In past years, she managed a significant date change moving recruitment activities back several weeks suddenly before the activities were scheduled to occur, influenza outbreak concerns, and blizzard conditions during recruitment activities. However, even those major events did not compare to the disruptions caused by COVID-19. Cecilia works with several other dedicated fraternity and sorority life professionals in her office and gains support from her colleagues. She also has a vast network of peers in the field who have created many opportunities for sharing resources through shared drives, regular conversations, and

collaboration. Cecilia is a confident and capable Panhellenic advisor who understands the intricacies and nuances of managing a sizeable Panhellenic recruitment process.

Researcher's Notes and Memos

I began journaling field notes through a reflexive journal during the semi-structured interviews starting in September of 2020 through November of 2020. I used a third-party service to do the initial transcription of interviews. For a final review, I refined the transcriptions by listening and editing when needed. During this process, I began to compile notes, memos, and thoughts. This started my process of organizing, coding, and searching for themes.

Throughout the interviews and the coding process, I found that I related with the participants' experience of having planned and implemented virtual sorority recruitment. At times this was helpful because participants did not have to decode their language. They could use full-on sorority jargon. There were times when it was not as helpful. I was concerned that I could not get the full picture when participants started using "you know" language. For example, when I interviewed Cecilia, I asked her to give an example of chapters using intentionality to develop their recruitment plans. She said:

> Yeah, we talked about that a lot in regards to like their preference ceremonies. Because there was a lot of concern around like all the things that they couldn't do for preference anymore, right? Like, we can't have our candle lighting ceremony, and we can't sing, and we can't pass out roses and we can't, you know, whatever their thing is that had to happen in order to make preference.

I knew precisely what Cecilia was referring to, but I was wrapped up in the conversation, and I missed the opportunity to have her elaborate in her own words.

83

I found that all of the participants acknowledged the circumstances of COVID-19 as challenging and frustrating and an overwhelming sense of determination to make the best of the circumstances. Another example of this familiarity was the experience of working with college-aged students because I do that every day. I noted in my journal:

> When reviewing this participant's responses, she came off as very entitled to me when talking about getting asked back to her top choices. However, I recognize that's my own bias. I was not asked back to my top choices during recruitment and was jealous of my friends, especially my roommate, who was. I do think this participant expressed mature empathy in a really healthy way. 'I had this opportunity. I am sorry that my friends had a stressful time.' Not blaming them or herself for either experience and not bragging that she was able to return. Maybe with 11 chapters, it is easier for a larger spread of people who will experience the loss of not being invited back to your top choice. I do get the sense that people value the same chapters, but I didn't ask that question specifically.

By processing these feelings, it led me to think of a potential area of future research "from a social psychology perspective: measuring a woman's confidence before and after recruitment and matching that to their priority preferences."

Some unique anomalies were very engaging. Nicole was the only participant who talked about the impact of advisors. She said:

> We have a handful of very involved advisors, which is awesome, but sometimes that means that they don't trust when student leaders tell them information they want to hear it from someone who's an actual professional.

This was extremely engaging material. I wanted to talk more about her experience feeling

devalued. In my journal, I wrote, "I was interested in the response from a participant who was

frustrated that chapter advisors would go to the fraternity and sorority advisor and would devalue

their leadership." However, this felt like a complaint about the general recruitment experience.

Setting boundaries with advisors can be extremely challenging, especially with recruitment

advisors. In my experience, a recruitment advisor's role can draw a certain type of personality.

They can be somewhat harshly critical as they seek perfection, creating a toxic environment

within a chapter or council instead of teaching young adults who may be learning a lesson for the

first time. They can also push boundaries that make the experience uncomfortable. Cecilia

referenced this topic when she related:

> I will say like the feedback we got so we had our recruitment follow-up meeting the week
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> after recruitment. And like, usually I go into those and I have to, like, kind of brace
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> myself because they can be a little vicious. And so usually I'm like prepared for them to
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> like point out every single thing we did wrong and like poke fingers at all those things
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> and not to say they still didn't have a little bit of that this year but we actually spent more
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> time talking about like the positives and things that went right, um, than things that went
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> wrong, which I kept like waiting for the other shoe to drop like the whole meeting and it
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> didn't. And I was like, don't know what happened but I like it. Like I'm not mad about
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> this. They were more mad about the chapters that got suspended than they were about
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> recruitment, and I was like, well, that's fine.

The "they" she mentions in her comment are recruitment advisors by proxy of their recruitment

chairs. I understand Cecilia's perspective because I believe anyone who has not managed

sorority recruitment from the fraternity and sorority advisor chair does not have the entire picture

of how each decision influences another so that critics can be harsh and more detrimental to relationships than actually constructive and solution-minded.

One theme that emerged in every question by every participant was building relationships and making connections from behind a computer screen. I wrote, "Gretchen Rubin talks a lot about how human connections are the key to happiness and that intangible concept is hard for the participants to articulate." Gretchen Rubin is a podcaster and author who I closely follow. She seeks to educate her followers and readers on making their lives "happier, healthier, and more productive." One of her core principles for happiness is connections with others. While no participant indicated they found much happiness in this process, several participants indicated that this was the best they could do. Lisa made me laugh when she summed it up with, "it's a different vibe." It is particularly challenging to explain what the difference is in building relationships in-person versus online. There are tactile cues, the warmth of being near somebody with the option of touch, easily reading body language, hearing an unfiltered voice, even having access to the sense of smell and determining what perfume they are wearing. A concrete picture did not come together to articulate this point, but participants took a whack at it. Caroline said, "If [the interaction] is virtual, there isn't that level of like personal, oh we're in the same room, we're looking right at each other, we just shook hands." Miranda said the familiarity of being in the same room with people made her lose connections "with friends that I used to just always see in class." Fragments of what people were missing from the in-person experience came together to form a rich story of virtual sorority recruitment experience.

The desire to form meaningful relationships during the virtual sorority recruitment process came through in all 13 participant interviews. Each participant approached the topic from a different perspective, giving me a fuller picture. The collection of qualitative data from 13

participant interviews allowed me to analyze the virtual sorority recruitment experience's perceptions. These interviews gave me insight into the virtual sorority recruitment phenomenon and how each participant created meaning. The following selection includes the analysis of interview data.

Interview Results

This section uses the research questions to organize and present the findings of the phenomenological study. They are presented in congruence with the categories and themes that emerged through the semi-structured interview process. The following themes emerged from the three research questions.

- Convenience of online meetings

- Reduced emphasis on appearance

- Reduced strain: emotional, financial, and time

- Increased accessibility and safety

- Meaningful conversations

- Improved communication

- Continuation of services

- Skill development

- Disruption in building relationships

    o Differences between in-person and virtual recruitment

    o Zoom body language

    o Making connections

- Imperfect implementation

- o Process

- o Technology

- o Communication

- Grieving process

  - o Denial

  - o Anger

  - o Bargaining

  - o Depression

  - o Acceptance

These results were informed by the theoretical research guiding this study, including Astin's theory of involvement (1999), which proposes that students learn more when involved in various academic and social aspects of the college experience. Meyer (2014) added, the more students engage in academic activities, participate in campus activities, and/or interact with faculty, the more they develop the skills and confidence to complete their education. Chickering and Gamson's (1987) Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education include (a) student-faculty contact, (b) cooperation among students, (c) active learning, (d) prompt feedback, (e) time-on-task, (f) high expectations, and (g) respect for diverse talents and ways of learning. Kolb (1984) proposed that learning happened in four stages: from concrete experience to reflective observation, to abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The cycle repeats as new concrete experience is gained, reflected upon, generalized into an abstract concept, and then actively tested or experimented within a new setting. Active and experiential learning uses case studies, simulations, role-playing, and debates, all of which can be accommodated within the online course. These instructional methods depend upon the student

becoming involved in their own learning, either through physical activity, joint assignment with others, researching information, or engaging in multiple points of view. Authentic learning requires student engagement in understanding and solving the problem and encourages students to analyze and reflect upon the learning task (Meyer, 2014). These theories were discussed regarding their broad relationship to sorority recruitment in chapter two to contextualize sorority as a student organization and its benefit to college student development.

Relational Leadership Theory was applied to results in chapter four. Relational Leadership Theory focuses on a better understanding of the relational dynamics, the social processes that comprise leadership and organizing (Uhl-Bien, 2006). The Relational Leadership Model has five components: Empowering – encouraging members to actively engage and get involved; 2. Purposeful – committing to a common goal or activity; 3. Process-oriented – being aware of the way a group interacts and the impact it has on the group's work; 4. Inclusive – understanding, valuing, and engaging all aspects of diversity; 5. Ethical – being guided by a system of moral principles (Komives et al. 1998).

The interview results section of this chapter includes direct quotes from the interviews and rich descriptions to support the evidence for emerging themes and categories for each research question of the study. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the study, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of benefits in the virtual sorority recruitment model?

The Convenience of Online Meetings. The decision to transition from a historically in-person experience to an unchartered virtual experience was challenging. Cecilia, the fraternity

and sorority advisor, described how the fraternity and sorority life office decided to treat their upcoming fall events. Cecilia said that in mid-May of 2020, fraternity and sorority staff were weighing what options existed for major in events in the fall 2020 semester. Rather than waiting for the university's final decision due in August, fraternity and sorority life staff moved forward and decided to implement all significant events in a virtual setting. Cecilia said, "We … made the decision to say we're not going to wait until August, we're not going to play with, like, what may or may not happen." However, this early decision came with consequences from the students, "we got a lot of pushback from that, from the students because [of] things like Dance Marathon … Homecoming … family weekend, like a lot of those programs had not made any major decisions yet." Cecilia recognized that students did not see the pattern emerge in the general public when they decided on virtual events. "We were pretty much the first large-scale organization to make a decision of that magnitude," Cecilia described. The National Panhellenic Conference guided College Panhellenics in the selection of their video conferencing platform. They shared that selecting the video conferencing platform "is the most critical, yet untested function in the virtual sorority recruiting context" (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020b). Midwestern University's Panhellenic Council started their planning and chose to host recruitment events with the Zoom video conferencing platform. NPC stated that a supermajority of responses indicated that College Panhellenics decided to use Zoom (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020b).

The Zoom platform provided a new perspective on the recruitment experience. Many participants mentioned the convenience of choosing from where they were participating in recruitment. Savannah, a potential new member, had a scheduling conflict during recruitment. She was obligated to attend a family wedding, which interrupted her schedule the first weekend

of sorority recruitment. "What was beneficial was that I could [participate in recruitment], wherever … I was in a nearby city, so that was really nice." Lisa, who participated in recruitment as a chapter recruiter, reaffirmed Savannah's perspective. Lisa said, "I think it was good because I think some people … who couldn't have done in-person [recruitment] could be doing virtual recruitment." Another perspective included the relevance of the implications from the coronavirus pandemic. An individual may test positive for COVID-19 but be asymptomatic, which meant that they had the energy and capacity to continue the virtual sorority recruitment process. Baylor indicated, "It worked for a lot of girls, especially those who are at home and have like health difficulties." The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention state that "COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly through close contact from person to person, including people who are physically near each other" (CDC, 2020 October 28). Virtual options accommodated the need to maintain separate spaces, so participants did not spread COVID-19.

Other participants recognized the time it took to get ready and travel to prepare for recruitment activities. Grace, a potential new member, described this convenience:

Our state has the worst weather, and so I didn't have to like worry about like my hair, makeup getting messed up. Like, it was really nice. Being able to just get up, get ready, and then sit back down to do stuff. Also, I didn't have to wear pants if I didn't want to, that was nice. I think most of the benefits were just like, not having to go places.

During in-person recruitment, potential new members may not know their start time due to the process it takes to schedule recruitment. They will have a call time, typically an hour or more before the first recruitment event begins, so a potential new member must plan their meal, makeup, hair, and dressing routine and travel to be at a specified location before the start of the earliest event. Potential new members will typically gather with their Rho Gamma groups and

receive their schedules after arriving at their gathering location. A variety of logistics keep the

first round recruitment schedules very long days, which means potential new members may have

to wait hours before their first event takes place, and they could have hours between each event.

Roof (2012) noted that individuals who critique the primary sorority recruitment experience

often point to excessively long days. Virtual recruitment allowed potential new members the

opportunity to receive their schedule in the morning and plan their day according to their

recruitment schedule.

On the other side of the experience as a chapter recruiter, Carly described that Zoom was

a more convenient platform when she needed resources during virtual recruiting rounds. She said

that virtual recruitment "allowed a lot more flexibility, and it almost took off stress." Carly

indicated that being at the house and recruitment in-person "was a lot more stressful" because

"people were literally running around and like things were changing last minute." She elaborated

on the difference by explaining that the virtual process "went kind of smoother." She said

communicating with the chapter during virtual recruitment rounds "was a lot easier because you

could reach out to people at any point while you were like doing recruitment … you could like

text somebody a question really quick and like an get an answer like immediately." During in-

person recruitment, chapter recruiters spend their time in-between rounds gathered in small

groups completing their membership selection process steps. Leaders oversaw the process and

solved other issues, which created a tense environment with so much activity happening in a

short period, usually 10 – 30 minutes. Virtual recruitment eliminated the din of the background

noise and distractions because the chapter members could go into breakout rooms and complete

their process without the voices of over a hundred other women around them. Sandage et al.

(2020) stated, "Sorority recruitment is a socially intense, physically tiring, emotional, and

vocally exhausting endeavor." Sandage et al. studied the extent to which voice function and laryngeal appearance may be altered by participation in sorority recruitment. They found that 78% of participants experienced loss of voice and hoarseness at some point during the two-week recruitment process, and 100% of their participants experienced pain with phonation following sorority recruitment (Sandage et al., 2020). Virtual sorority recruitment allowed participants to preserve their voice as they did not attempt to speak over the other women in the room.

Virtual sorority recruitment significantly modified the structure of the first round of recruitment. During in-person recruitment, potential new members went to every chapter. For some campuses, round one had to occur over two days. The National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) shared the recommended changes to accommodate round one virtual recruitment in their document, *College Panhellenic Plan Recruitment Scenario: A fully structured recruitment (FSR) hosted virtually* (2020d) as:

> Campuses may consider a recorded open house versus a virtual operational ("live") day. This would require each chapter to film a short video about the chapter. The PNM would make selections after watching all the videos over a 48-hour period. Chapters would do their selections based upon information the PNM provided in their registration. Additional registration questions will need to be added to recruitment registration to help chapters in decision-making. (p. 4)

Midwestern University requested PNMs submit a short video that answered questions about themselves. In Miranda's words, she described round one as "Kind of get to know you videos." She explained, "We did a video about our chapter" for the potential new members, and "the PNMs sent in like a little video about them[selves]." Miranda explained that the chapter's executive committee and an assessment committee reviewed the videos. She said, "I think that is

easier for chapters to do and for Panhellenic to do." Miranda compared the time invested in round one rotations in-person to the virtual experience. She indicated that she felt the round one process was more comfortable to manage and better use of time in the virtual structure. Researchers investigated the use of informational videos during a global public health emergency and found around 70% of the videos were informative while 24% and 6% of the videos were misleadingly related to personal experiences. They found that a considerable amount of the videos were misleading, and they were more popular than the informative videos and could potentially spread misinformation (Bora et al., 2018). This research was conducted on videos shared regarding information about a global health crisis. In the context of sorority recruitment videos, not all of the video's information was factual and may be curated to promote a specific image.

Another component of recruitment is the aid provided to chapters by the College Panhellenic Council throughout. One of the purposes of a CPH is to "coordinate activities, establish orderly procedures and provide for programming in addition to recruitment" (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a). CPH executive board members and the Panhellenic advisor provided emergency support to PNMs and chapters during the process. According to the NPC Manual of Information (2021a), the role of an advisor to the College Panhellenic Council is to provide guidance, counsel, and support, helping the College Panhellenic function effectively following NPC and college/university policy. During the in-person experience, a variety of things could go awry. Examples of these problems included technical issues, participants falling ill, and violations of Panhellenic policies, to name a few. NPC lists another core purpose of the CPH as "adjudicate all matters related to the NPC Unanimous Agreements, College Panhellenic bylaws and/or other governing documents, College Panhellenic membership recruitment rules,

College Panhellenic code of ethics and College Panhellenic standing rules" (National

Panhellenic Conference, 2021a). Ella, the CPH Judicial Chair during virtual recruitment, stated

her perspective of the convenience of Zoom:

> I think it a lot of the times is very convenient. I know during recruitment, we had a Zoom
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> that was called Recruitment Headquarters, we called it. So normally, if it was in-person,
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> we would all be in the same room. But being able to be on Zoom was so nice because I
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> could have a violation with the chapter and just have them call it and log onto the Zoom
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> call and we could put them in a breakout room and handle it within 30 seconds. When
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> before, they would have to come down to recruitment headquarters, which, in total,
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> would probably take an hour when Zoom was just so convenient.

Ella was able to quickly work through resolving issues that can snowball into major problems

quickly. In the fast-paced process, the Zoom Recruitment Headquarters allowed the Panhellenic

to be dynamic to chapter leaders' needs, potential new members, advisors, and chapters in

general. According to the NPC Manual of Information (2021a), College Panhellenic

Associations are expected to effectively and efficiently adjudicate matters over which they have

jurisdiction, including all provisions of the NPC Unanimous Agreements the College Panhellenic

governing documents.

Cecilia, the Panhellenic advisor, recognized that another improvement in Zoom's

convenience was advisors supporting the chapters. Advisors are a vital asset to a chapter's

success. They provide guidance and support to the chapter and chapter officers in several areas

of operation. Advisors should foster the development of the chapter as a whole as well as

individual officers and members. (Aliyu, 2013). Cecilia said the chapters were able to have "a lot

more advisor support on the chapter side of things than we usually do. Advisors were able to pop

in and out a lot more easily than they did when they had to physically come to the [chapter]

structures …" Cecilia was careful to recognize that some advisors gave a significant amount of

time when they supported their chapter in-person. She explained, "we still had some advisors,

who when we were in-person would, you know, sit at the chapter house for 20 hours and be there

and help [their chapter] …" Cecilia noted that some chapters did not receive as much support

when in-person, however virtual sorority recruitment allowed advisors to "come in and out [of

the chapter Zoom rooms]." The access to advisors was an improvement because the advisors

"[helped chapters] to do some troubleshooting on their own; that usually they would have to

come to [CPH] to help them troubleshoot, which I think made a really, really big difference."

Cecilia, as a higher education practitioner, recognizes the role in development that advisors play.

As referenced in the Relational Leadership Theory Framework model, Komives et al. (2006)

discussed the importance of mentors throughout the process as adults and peers play an

important role in helping students progress through each stage. Cecilia recognized the

compounding impact advisory support had when chapters worked through the challenges that

came when the chapters implemented an entirely new process. Advisors support the health and

function of all chapter operations, not only during membership recruitment.

Several participants cited general reasons Zoom was helpful to chapter operations. Baylor

said, "I think it's helpful … it was nice doing chapter [meetings] and getting ready for

recruitment that we could all just meet on Zoom and not have to go to like one specific building

for it." Miranda indicated that she benefitted from Zoom "quick meetings … let's just hop on

Zoom and do it because at that point it's taking me longer to walk to you than it is to actually sit

in this meeting." Grace specifically identified that chapter operations fitted to the Zoom platform

helped her experience as a new member in her chapter. She said:

My sorority does study hours, and that can earn us points to get certain rooms in the

house when we live in next year, and they've been allowing us to do study hours through

Zoom. I don't think there's usually an online option, but I think that's nice because, like,

for me, like, I wouldn't necessarily be able to go to the house for study hours when I have

like work coming up in like less than half an hour because I don't take a car to campus

since I live so close I use the bus systems. So having study hours as a virtual option is

really nice.

Grace explained that the process of traveling to a location to study could potentially be more of a

barrier than having the flexibility of choosing your study location. Grace also touched on how

intertwined certain expectations of sorority membership are with the experience. Grace wants to

live in the house in the future, and she wants a good room, so that incentive motivated her to

participate in the programs the chapter offered. According to Hara and Kling (2001) and Palloff

and Pratt (1999, 2005), online students drop out because they feel physically separated from

individual students, which creates feelings of isolation, which is a major cause of student

confusion and anxiety. Researchers studying the effects of teaching in the COVID-19 methods

found that virtual lectures provide numerous benefits during the pandemic, and many

respondents believed that this method of education could substitute traditional classrooms

beyond the COVID-19 pandemic (Cho & Hong, 2021). Participants in this study listed virtual

lectures' features as easy access, convenience, usability, and increased interaction with lecturers.

The students agreed that virtual lectures allowed many advantages over traditional classrooms,

including the ability to join or leave lectures freely; the opportunity to listen from international

experts whom they can only meet at international or national conferences; the ability to ask

questions without feeling shy; the chance to listen to answers to all questions without

interruptions; and access of world-class experts from their smartphones. The presenter's benefits were: no traveling, convenience of giving lectures from home, wider audience, and increased interaction with attendees (Cho & Hong, 2021). Sorority members attended webinars hosted by their national leadership and headquarters staff that was otherwise difficult to schedule due to traveling and time restraints.

A program like virtual study hours connects students helping them maintain progress toward their degree. Academic success should be the central purpose for college students enrolled in sororities; therefore, determining ways to continue programs like study hours is vital. According to the National Panhellenic Conference (n.d. b), scholarship is one of six advocacy building blocks to maintain a climate in which there is a constant presence and appreciation of academic excellence. While Grace reflected on her experience of a significant change for her sorority plans, Nicole provided her assumptions on forthcoming activities when she answered the question, "What is your opinion of the future of online activities?" Nicole stated that she thinks online events are "going to be a lot more utilized in the future." She thinks this is because "a lot of people actually prefer online options for a lot of things." Nicole cites that for some of her introverted friends, it is "more appealing to hop on a Zoom call or do a meeting or even a fun activity because they don't feel like they could be trapped at that event or have to present themselves as much in a specific light." Nicole may have underestimated how many people have hesitations on their appearance and behavior in social settings, as discussed in the next section.

Reduced Emphasis on Appearance.

Many in-person sorority recruitment experiences had guides that recommended the attire for potential new members to wear for each recruitment day. The College Panhellenic Councils frequently created and shared these guides. Chapter leaders applied the expectation for a

cohesive appearance to chapter members. Some chapter recruitment leaders would gather the entire chapter's clothing sizes and bulk-order the same outfit. Another method was to give a style guide with a few outfits, typically one per day of recruitment. Chapter members could shop for these outfits independently, but they needed to match the style guide. They frequently included expectations for nails, hairstyles, and makeup. This practice aimed to ensure the chapter looked cohesive and put-together. In some cases, it was to provide guidelines for members of the chapters who were less-fashion inclined. In addition to personal physical appearance, chapters with housing structures decorated the interiors and exteriors to celebrate recruitment with various decorations, some changing every day. Examples of these decorations are fresh floral arrangements, balloon arches, rented chairs, chair covers, table cloths, and food at chapter events. These examples are otherwise known as "frills" during recruitment. Midwestern University did frequently see these traditions during in-person recruitment. The addition of these unnecessary frills to the recruitment experience frequently makes recruitment budgets balloon.

Even though the potential new members have not participated in primary recruitment before, some were able to. Savannah, a potential new member, said she preferred the online recruitment process because "it wasn't as much stress on your appearance and how you look." Savannah says that "I would have put that stress on myself if it was in-person, not that other people were putting that on me, but I think either way if it was online or in-person, I would have still done it." From Aly's perspective, the information about attire on the CPH website helped her feel prepared for recruitment. She said, "I was like, pretty ready on like before each round like knowing what I was gonna happen like when I was going into it. So like it helped to be like to have that and like be ready." Aly felt confident in her appearance and ultimately was happy with her recruitment experience. Nelson (2011) found that as PNMs prepared for sorority

recruitment, they carefully considered their clothing choices for each recruitment round and often focused more on makeup choices and hairstyles the week of recruitment than they would during non-recruitment weeks. Research indicates that potential new members spend a considerable amount of time focusing on their appearance and attire in preparation for in-person recruitment experiences. Kiray (2018) wrote that many women saw their outfits as a direct reflection of themselves and critical as to how others would view them. Some women felt they had to fit into a particular aesthetic mold to be accepted in certain sororities.

Chapter members have more experience with recruitment and different expectations for their appearance. Carly felt as though the decreased pressure on attired made the experience more informal. She said, "I knew everyone was wearing sweatpants the entire time that I was like on the call." Carly joked, "I'm not going to pretend that I'm, you know, in the like full-length gown and like talking to you in the chapter house … I'm still wearing my sweatpants, and I'm sitting on my bed." She explained that this change created a different atmosphere for recruitment. Carly explained the recruitment experience "could have like more of a comforting feel to like a Zoom call, which I think was very helpful in a lot of cases." Lisa echoed Carly's point. She added, "You didn't have to wear pants …" making the experience of preparing for the recruitment events easier. Lisa said, you don't have to "[wake] up at like five in the morning, you don't even have to go somewhere, you actually could just stay in your apartment." Caroline added that she would not have to do some of the "really time-consuming things that go into recruitment." Her example was, "when you have to get up and get your hair ready … pick out all your outfits ahead of time, nails are super matchy with each other, down to your shoes." Kiray (2018) found that a great deal of emphasis was placed upon how recruitment participants appeared to others. The focus on appearance led to increased self-questioning and criticism,

making the recruitment experience not a fond memory. Caroline explores the deeper meaning of the physical experience. She said that her chapter was good at "making people feel wanted and … [accepted] people for … who they are." Caroline added that her sorority considered character above looks. She described it as "even if you're not, you know, the world's most beautiful Barbie doll, we were hoping that that would be something that could come through in, in our, in our virtual recruitment because there isn't that level of physical judgment." Cameron's explained her perspective on what virtual recruitment is, she said:

> [Virtual recruitment] is more conversation-based and relationship-based than you know, look at the chants that we have or all of our matching outfits, or you know how, how straight I can sit up and talk to you and tilt my head, you know, like, it's, it's a lot less superficial. So I did really appreciate that as a chapter member because I felt like the conversations that I was having was a lot more authentic.

Miranda added to Cameron's point by adding that her chapter considers itself a "very caring chapter." Miranda said that because her chapter is not "your picture-perfect sorority, like the stereotype of a chapter," she felt as though virtual recruitment "gave us a little bit more confidence in ourselves." She credits that virtual recruitment put all the chapters on "a level playing field of nobody knows what is going on, nobody knows what they are doing." Miranda was referencing that this was the first year anyone had undertaken virtual sorority recruitment, so the advantages, loopholes, and preconceived notions that participants hold while participating in recruitment are significantly diminished or altered, if not completely gone.

Nelson (2011) found that women sought access to upper-tier sororities because they were perceived as "higher class" due to their exclusivity. Other significant factors in deciding to join a chapter were individual concerns like religion, shared interests, and a sorority's ranking in the

campus' tier system. Women tended to incorporate each chapter's reputation in their decision-making process instead of keeping an open mind and forming opinions about chapters based on their experiences during recruitment (Nelson, 2011). Caroline added her perspective regarding the PNMs' perspective of the physical appearances of chapter structures. She reported:

> My sorority is not necessarily a top [chapter]. We are largely people's last choice when they're going through recruitment. So one of the things that we really thought would maybe benefit us through a virtual change is that we aren't going into each other's houses, so like the physical house, especially if you have this big, beautiful house and you compare it to our house, which is pretty, but it's smaller and older, it's not, you know, new and shiny. Um, if you're not going into people's houses, you don't have that level of like the aesthetic level to sometimes judge on, so maybe if you're having a great conversation with the girl in our chapter, that might be something that you remember, not what the house looks like.

Miranda referenced the change to a no-frills experience. Miranda recognized that the movement to no-frills "focuses on the person that you are and the good that you bring to the chapter." She said that she thought the virtual recruitment process helped emphasize that point because "you didn't have … all the extra frills" was able to indicate the change from frills to a no-frills experience. She noticed that virtual sorority recruitment helped push her community toward no-frills recruitment so the chapters could focus on values-based recruitment, the ultimate end goal. Miranda said, "I'm grateful that we had this opportunity to really show what values-based recruitment is all about." Several participants expressed the desire to have a fair recruitment process. Ella explained how she saw that work out by referencing that "some chapters have more money than other chapters do." She felt that chapters with more money "would try to make their

102

houses look better because they have like material things versus conversation." Ella said that "Being online kind of evened the playing field a lot more… and it made everybody take a step back and really focus on the core values of their chapters." Cecilia was able to confirm these comments from the Panhellenic community. She said that the community credited as a good thing for virtual recruitment the ability to remove some parts of recruitment "like matching outfits and balloon arches, the frills." Cecilia added that "usually, those are the things that, like we have to fight about getting rid of." Cecilia has been advocating for a fewer frills experience. She said lightheartedly, "I try to get rid of like a frill every year, and I don't think they notice, but its working." Research conducted by Roof (2012) found that recruitment style changes to no-frills recruitment could impact women's persistence during formal sorority recruitment. No-frills recruitment retains the long days of recruitment; however, the interactions are less extrovert-centric by focusing on one-on-one values-based conversations.

All of these frills take time to create. Miranda stated, "I think the biggest [difference between in-person and virtual sorority recruitment] was prep work." Miranda, having experienced several recruitments, knew the physical toll that it took to prepare. She said, "there is a lot less physical prep work on our end ... we would clean the house … do decorations … have to make sure that like everything was perfect." She compared it to virtual recruitment and said, "I was wearing sweatpants, and nobody knew … I just had to clean this section of my room [gesturing to the section in view of the webcam]. And so that was really nice." Similarly, Caroline recognized that with virtual sorority recruitment, the chapter would not have to "do some those, like, extra time-consuming things that you spend, like, a work week doing." She explained the things as "where you have to make the decorations and practice the songs." Caroline said she realized that they could spend the time during recruitment "actually talking at

the girls and not having to scream over each other" due to the volume of noise in the room from dozens of other chapter member and PNM pairs talking at the same time in a small room. She added to that thought, "not screaming at each other trying to ask, you know, what's your favorite movie? ... We can actually spend some time talking to the person without that superficial level of, like, oh, what are they wearing? What are we wearing?" Miranda explained how she felt about virtual recruitment, reported,

> I think at the very core, virtual recruitment focuses on the values and the people of the chapter. Not what their house looks like, not what the colors of the dresses are, not what type of flowers they chose, or what they fed you. It's about the women that are in the chapter, and that's, that's what it should be about.

Miranda observed an efficient use of her time and the higher purpose of the experience. By off-loading the extra baggage, the community was able to engage in the recruitment experience more deeply.

Reduced Strain: Emotional, Financial, and Time. The traditions of planning and implementing recruitment requires a significant amount of energy. This energy is bound to the many different facets of the process by each person participating. Every stakeholder in the recruitment experience has an opinion on their favorite or least favorite part of the experience is. This process's reverence has built anticipation, frustration, excitement, and every other emotion one could bring to mind. Due to the depth and breadth of the emotional investment, chapters felt pressure to perform and meet recruitment goals. They put significant human and financial resources toward these goals. The recruitment experience at Midwestern University lasts over two consecutive weekends, Friday through Sunday. It is a significant commitment any year.

Kiray (2018) wrote that body image plays a role in how women view themselves and their perceptions of how others view them in the world. Body image is the mental image we hold of our bodies, including both perceptions and attitudes. Perception refers to how we see our size, shape, weight, features, movement, and performance. The attitudinal component refers to how we feel about these attributes and how our feelings direct our behaviors. Miranda described her perspective of the benefit of recruiting in a virtual landscape. She said, "There was no pressure to act a certain way around people." She continued to add, "I was able just to sit here and … have it be causal." In Miranda's sophomore year, she recruited her person. Miranda said she "was so fixated on how I looked … how professional I was supposed to be … what I was wearing, was my posture good, was I making eye contact … all this stuff. That I barely remember the conversations that I had." She explained that focus was due in part to the supervision of her chapter's recruitment leaders that occurred during recruitment rounds. She said she was able to "not freak out that my recruitment person was standing right behind me being like, you need to do this." Miranda added that as a result of her "[fixation] on making sure I looked right," that "a PNM would come to me afterward, after they joined the chapter, and be like I talked to you about this, and I was like, I honestly do not remember that conversation." By not remembering the connections made during the recruitment process, participants may sense that the process was not as authentic as hoped and more manufactured.

Aly, a potential new member, mentioned that her Zoom experience "took a lot of the pressure off because we were not meeting [chapter members] in-person." Aly referenced the power differential between chapter members and PNMs. Even though chapter members desire to make PNMs feel comfortable, it is achieved rarely due to the setting of one person having the credentials and years of experience, and the other, the PNM, not having those things but desiring

them. Carly, an experienced sorority recruiter, said that as virtual sorority recruitment solidified during the rounds, it "transformed into more of like a set … process. I feel like it allowed a lot more flexibility and almost took off stress because being actually at the house and actually recruiting like in-person was a lot more stressful." Carly indicated that by self-managing her recruitment responsibilities, she could control her environment and reduce her stress during the recruitment experience. Kiray (2018) found that women participating in the recruitment process emphasized their outward appearance, including their clothing, to present themselves in a positive light. Kiray (2018) also found that in addition to physical appearance, some women spoke to the need of appearing positive and excited throughout the recruitment process, despite feeling tired and worn out as a result of the physically and mentally draining process and that overall, the majority of women interviewed in Kiray's 2018 study placed a great stake in how other women viewed them, both potential new members and sorority members.

Kase et al. (2016) found that unsuccessful participants in sorority recruitment experienced a temporary decrease in feelings of belonging during the recruitment process but recovered to baseline two months later. Kase et al. (2016) also found a significant anxiety penalty for successful and unsuccessful recruitment participants. Both groups reported increases in state anxiety during the recruitment process. In other words, merely participating in recruitment, regardless of the outcome, led to significant increases in anxiety. Other participants noted the anxiety and nerves that they felt during the process. Savannah, a potential new member, stated that if virtual sorority recruitment were in-person, she would "feel like I would be a lot more anxious and nervous." Lisa, a chapter recruiter, acknowledged, "I have, like, anxiety, a lot of people do." Lisa said that it was "easier for my anxiety to be online, um, without, you know, talking face to face." She explained that she still felt anxiety while virtually

106

recruiting. The difference is that in-person was "more like social anxiety." She said virtual recruitment was "obviously less social anxiety." Lisa attributed this to "talking to one PNM … in a breakout room … so it was like nobody else." She added that virtual recruitment allowed those conversations to be "more focused, more like, took the time to breathe and not be so rushed." She described in-person recruitment as "a million girls talking at once, and you cannot really hear [the PNM]." Lisa demonstrated that the point of recruitment was to have conversations and get to know another person better. Lisa described how difficult it was to hear during in-person recruitment when chapter members and PNMs could not hear each other over the background noise.

Cecilia, the Panhellenic Advisor and administrator for virtual sorority recruitment, reflected on her experience. After managing virtual sorority recruitment, she realized, "we do not have to be up all night. We do not have to be … running ourselves ragged in order to make Panhellenic recruitment happen …" Cecilia added that a benefit she experiences was that she has never "gotten as much sleep as I did this year, ever." She said that "is the opposite of what I thought was going to be happening." The administrators for sorority recruitment are responsible for running the experience behind-the-scenes. They are typically up until the final list is submitted and awake to create all participants' schedules the next day. These demands are extraordinarily time-consuming and taxing. There is no research in the field about the experience of administering and managing a sorority recruitment experience, just anecdotes or war stories of the experience shared around drinks at annual conferences and gatherings.

Nicole, who administered virtual sorority recruitment as the elected Vice President of Recruitment for the College Panhellenic said, "from a leadership perspective, it was actually quite a bit more manageable for me because I was able to just sit myself down with my, you

know, computer and phone and tablet and orchestrate the entire thing." Nicole's perspective of her responsibilities during this time would have sent her to "chapter structures, plus our home base at our student center and be, you know, driving vans for people or coordinating buses and just like the physical atmosphere of it would have been a lot more stress on me." For Nicole the ability to toss aside "rules that we previously had in place" made it a more enjoyable experience for her. As a result, she was able to "focus on our potential new members" to make sure they were "having a good experience." Nicole said she "felt like that became my role was to protect their experience and make sure that potential new members were … having a good time with recruitment." Nicole felt like she could eliminate all of the extra things that did not add value to the recruitment experience and focus on the program's core purpose. Nicole defined the generative stage of relational leadership theory. "In stage five, students showed an ability to look beyond themselves and express a passion for their commitments and care for the welfare of others" (Komives et al., 2006).

Cecilia reflected on virtual sorority recruitment when she said, "[virtual sorority recruitment] showed that [frills] are not essential to make recruitment happen." As a result of this realization, she hoped that it would make the Panhellenic community at Midwestern University "have the 'why' conversation … why do we do these things, and like, why is all of this necessary ... why does recruitment need to be our biggest budget line three or four times over?" Cecilia's questions were also in the generativity stage of relational leadership theory as she was concerned for the sustainability of sororities. Cecilia said that chapters indicated that they were "able to save a significant amount of money not doing in-person recruitment." Cecilia knew that was an essential realization from her perspective; she said this year they "bought a Zoom license, and that was it." The impacts of the COVID-19 crisis pushed sororities to increase access. The

National Panhellenic Conference, and most, if not all, of its member organizations, had

conversations and formed committees about the expenses related to sorority operations. These

conversations resulted in changes within the structures of each member organization and within

the NPC itself. "NPC announced a year-long initiative to examine the cost of sorority

membership and identify ways to reduce or eliminate cost-related barriers to membership. These

barriers create a systemic hurdle to membership based on socioeconomic status" (National

Panhellenic Conference, 2021b). Cameron explained her perspective that, "[in] round one you

are just having like five-minute conversations with PNMs." She adds that chapters "might as

well just have those five minute conversations be online, save some money on their recruitment,

then really invest in… rounds three and four." The financial commitment to join a sorority can

be reduced, and, as Midwestern University learned through virtual sorority recruitment, this

reduced strain improved the experience overall.

As Cho and Hong (2021) found, the reduction in time preparing for and managing

teaching in the classroom will allow professors and teachers to dedicate more time for

mentorship, research, and other matters that can be more valuable than basic teaching.

Ultimately, Cho and Hong (2021) determined that the unexpected change in learning and

teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic can be an opportunity to deliver education more

efficiently in the future. This applies to sorority recruitment because of the time commitment

from chapter recruiters and Rho Gammas spent learning how to administer sorority recruitment.

Other significant savings from virtual sorority recruitment resulted in the time saved, eliminating

travel and other non-essential elements of the experience. For many chapter recruiters,

recruitment starts at work week. Carly, an experienced recruiter, said that her experience with an

in-person work week was a "full week and everyone is at the house every day from eight a.m. to

eight p.m." She said in preparation for virtual sorority recruitment, the chapter leadership chose to shorten work week "to about three days, and they set up an itinerary of, like, we are going to do Zoom at his time, and we are gonna watch videos at this time." Carly interpreted that change as less intensive because it was all online. She said, "It was not like we were staring at each other for eight hours a day talking about the same things. Carly also added that the time saved not traveling was beneficial. She said, "it was different, and we did not really have to go anywhere, so I could [participate in virtual sorority recruitment] from anywhere most of the time, which was really nice." Through her positivity and loyalty to her chapter leaders' decisions, Carly demonstrated the relational leadership theory's leadership differentiated state. She saw herself as a positional leader, a senior, and also her role with positional group members, other seniors. Carly was able to influence a positive attitude within her group because she recognized the importance of her role. Savannah, a PNM, said, "I think [virtual sorority recruitment] was really good. I liked it. I thought it was less stressful and less nerve-wracking and more accommodating to people who had like busy schedules." She had family commitments that would have created conflicts limiting or even eliminating her chance to participate had sorority recruitment been in-person. Grace, another PNM, indicated that she felt "most of the benefits were just like, not having to go places." Caroline quickly summed up her thoughts on virtual sorority recruitment "we might save some time on certain things." Baylor was able to be more specific. She mentioned that she felt a benefit was "the fact that we would not have to be at the house at 7 a.m." These perspectives add to the understanding that eliminating a commute and working from home saved much time, effort, and energy in participant's schedules.

Nicole had a deeper understanding of the impacts of virtual recruitment. She reported, "Virtual recruitment allows for a lot more time freedom." Nicole described the schedule changes

by explaining how in-person recruitment worked. She said they had to "build in like an hour and a half meal break each day of recruitment so that potential new members and recruiters would be able to go all the way back to dining halls or have food catered." Whereas with virtual recruitment, she said, "we could just schedule shorter breaks and because everyone was already [in their home]," meaning that individuals were responsible for their meals. She added, "It was a lot easier for [participants] to take breaks or grab a snack or run to the restroom, and there was not that long awkward lunch period." Nicole reminisced on her own experience as a PNM. She said she felt "super awkward having to ask to use the restroom at a chapter structure." This may have been an indication that Nicole may have been trying to control her circumstances to the best of her ability. Kiray (2018) wrote that potential new members had a sense of frustration and apprehension towards the recruitment process's up-to-chance nature, leaving many women feeling that their rejection was out of their control. Nicole demonstrated that virtual sorority recruitment eliminated that level of desire for control because participants could save "that extra 30 minutes that you had to wake up earlier to make sure that you know your tan looked good, and all those things." Nicole felt that these changes made "a big difference" and "overall, it was a lot more freeing for both recruiters and potential new members." With a tremendous amount of experience in managing recruitment from an undergraduate perspective, Nicole quickly identified the importance of saving time, energy, effort, and money. She identified that, by doing these things, the recruitment experience becomes "freeing." Nicole astutely recognized that making an experience less restrictive will gain space to grow and expand. Nicole demonstrated the fifth stage of relational leadership theory, generativity. She was able to identify the embedded beliefs and values embedded in the actions that leaders took to make a positive recruitment experience.

Increased Accessibility and Safety. Participants indicated that they felt virtual sorority recruitment promoted a safe environment that also increased the accessibility to sorority recruitment. In-person recruitment is a high-contact experience in which potential new members rotate through each chapter's spaces with chapter recruiters present, typically pushing the limits of what fire code will allow in common areas. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many universities, local, and state governments had guidelines limiting how many people could gather in a room. Nearly exceeding fire capacity in a room would lead to the virus's spread; it was not an option. By choosing to move to virtual recruitment, some issues that diminished accessibility for recruitment became evident. Women reported that they had hearing issues when gathered in loud spaces or that having conversations in crowded rooms gave them higher anxiety levels. As described by Nelson's 2011 study on a different college campus, PNMs have only a few minutes in their schedules to run between houses during recruitment and may have to travel several blocks away depending on their schedules. The mobility needed to navigate between chapter structures surfaced as an accessibility concern. Depending on the route to chapter structures, an individual could cover a significant distance. The online modality of virtual sorority recruitment resolved this issue altogether.

Accessibility is often used to refer to all individuals' access; however, advocates talk about accessibility specifically regarding individuals with disabilities (Foley, 2007). Accessibility features cover a broad scope of opportunities, particularly in a program as extensive as sorority recruitment. Very little published research is available regarding the issues surrounding accessibility for sorority recruitment. At least one study referenced that "University administrators and fraternity/sorority governing bodies should consider making changes to the recruitment process to make it more accessible to all interested women" (Kase et al., 2016). The

participants in this study did not acknowledge the impact that virtual sorority recruitment may have for access or inclusion initiatives for all who experience marginalization or participation barriers, including: people who identify as non-binary or gender non-conforming, individuals who are neurodiverse or have neurodifferences, and individuals with attention disorders. The experiences of these populations should be considered when reviewing access and inclusion policies. Some of the participants in this study acknowledged the value virtual sorority recruitment added to accessibility but did not elaborate on the points. Cameron said she believes that virtual sorority recruitment is "a lot more accessible." Aly said, "If people can't like, come to events, they can always be online, and like it'll be easier for people to attend." Grace said of online activities: "I think it just opens up a lot more opportunities for people to like spread out what they do with certain activities, it gives people a lot of creativity, too." Carly agreed and added, "Having just kind of that online platform like kind of evens the playing field of like who can participate, to an extent but allows a lot more flexibility." Nicole added, "Yeah, I would say virtual recruitment as a whole was much better than I expected it in my opinion, it was far more accessible to different groups of people." These participants recognized that virtual sorority recruitment was a more manageable process when managed virtually. Nicole said, "Our campus [has] a big issue in lacking accessibility for people with different abilities or … including different communities." She cited that moving to an online platform "was a big plus sign for a lot of people when they heard that recruitment would be virtual."

Caroline provided a specific example of how virtual sorority recruitment helped create a more accessible environment during recruitment rounds. Caroline said:

We actually do have a few girls in the sorority who have hearing aids or have some sort of like hearing loss. And so without having to scream at each other, you could have a

113

conversation at a normal voice level, and people who would maybe have a hard time

going through recruitment would maybe be more willing to do so.

Caroline addressed the volume of noise in the rooms while recruitment was going on. It was

often chaotic. To be heard, participants would have to raise their voices louder. The noise level

poses a challenge for individuals who have hearing loss or hearing impairment. Approximately

15% of American adults (37.5 million) aged 18 and over report some trouble hearing (Blackwell

et al., 2014). Caroline recognized another specific example, "in past years," there were "people

who … couldn't walk very well." She explained that potential new members had to run from one

chapter structure to another to make their events in time. Nicole provided an example of her

friend who was a PNM with cerebral palsy. "It probably would not have been feasible for her to

participate in in-person recruitment, the way we have it structured here at Midwestern University

because only one of our chapters is handicap accessible." Nicole explained, "We typically have

chapters who do house tours that include stairs and a lot of walking." These examples are helpful

but lack the rich detail from the first-person experience. According to the CDC website (2020,

September 16), 26% of adults in the United States have some disability, and 13% have serious

difficulty walking or climbing stairs.

Nicole stated how she felt about being able to accommodate individuals, "from a physical

standpoint, [virtual sorority recruitment] was awesome." Nicole added, "from like a mental

wellness standpoint, [virtual sorority recruitment] was a lot more accessible to people with

different mental diagnoses." She substantiated her opinion, "it's a lot less… nerve-wracking to

hop on a Zoom call in a space that you're comfortable with and that you know you can easily just

click off if something were to get overwhelming or something like that." Nicole said, "I think it

was a huge win in a lot of ways for a lot of different groups." When describing a program the

chapter implemented after recruitment, Baylor explained that the chapter added mental health

programming content. She said that for participants who were attending a Zoom, it was helpful

because the presenter "could record it for those who couldn't attend it at that time… And then if

some girls, like had a hard time listening to that stuff, they can still listen without being in a

room with other people." According to the National Institute of Mental Health, 29.4% of adults

age 18-25 fall under the "any mental illness" (AMI) category. The definition of AMI is "a

mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder. AMI can vary in impact, ranging from no impairment

to mild, moderate, and even severe impairment" (National Institute of Mental Health, 2021).

When she reflected on virtual sorority recruitment broadly, Carly said virtual sorority

recruitment was "really helpful for some students and like just participants in general." She

explained, "the flexibility and like the advantages of it are also like something I wasn't really

expecting." Carly concluded her thought about making the switch to a virtual platform. She said

virtual sorority recruitment allows for "more of like diversity and inclusion because it opens the

door to a lot more people being able to like participate in different [educational] things … [from]

different locations, being able to like participate and be engaged." Caroline added that she

thought it was something that people felt "pretty receptive towards, was that idea of like, hey this

might be a little bit more of an inclusive thing if people who normally would be unable to do a

recruitment like formal recruitment could try this." Cameron also provided a summary statement;

she said, "I am really interested in the potential of virtual recruitment moving forward for like

accessibility and inclusivity." Many participants recognize how hosting sorority recruitment

virtually eliminated some of the physical barriers that may prevent or challenge people while

they participate. In Wlodarczyk et al.'s (2020) study of video conferencing as a tool to preserve

medical resident education, the researchers noted the utility of distance-learning platforms would

likely persist after the world recovers from the educational paradigm shift associated with a communal fight against coronavirus disease spread. They found that attending educational lectures remotely can facilitate higher resident turnout and/or even facilitate recording these sessions for later review. Residents using distance learning platforms positively reflect on the ease of access to education, ability to take the course from any location, and the ability to be taught by anyone in the world, and the ability to eliminate the cost of travel and lodging, amongst other benefits specific to the medical industry (Wlodarczyk et al., 2020).

Baylor added that virtual sorority recruitment "worked for a lot of girls, especially those who are at home and have like health difficulties." The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted that some people were more susceptible to catching the virus than others, particularly individuals with weakened immune systems (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020, December 16). Unfortunately, the spread of COVID-19 continued during recruitment, and some participants were sick with the virus during recruitment events. Participants recognized that virtual sorority recruitment allowed people to participate, including those who were sick with COVID-19. According to Savannah, "I know a few girls in my sorority… had COVID while virtual sorority recruitment was going on. So the virtual recruiting process definitely made things easier for them and accommodated them." Lisa recognized that "it was a safe way to do recruitment." Carly described that some participants were not on campus or were in "different locations because of what's happening." She added that "girls that might even be like affected by like COVID and have it that couldn't be somewhere physically, were able to participate." She also recognized that some chapter members "left the sorority house to go back home for… safety reasons."

Cecilia noted that the purpose of virtual sorority recruitment was "getting to keep people in an environment where they felt safe and where they were able to be as safe as possible."

116

However, not all participants were ready for the change. Carly described that some people were

reluctant, but they realized "you can't really change anything like we're already doing our

classes online." She said the argument with people who wanted to do in-person recruitment was,

"what makes you think you're gonna be able to recruit in-person?" By reframing this question,

Cecilia was encouraging the first stage of relational leadership theory, awareness. She was

prompting individuals to recognize that everyone will have to decide on how recruitment would

be structured, given the reality. Students' sense of self is forming at this stage, and they had little

sense of self or personal identity, meaning they did not understand how their actions contributed

to the overall problem or solution (Komives et al., 2006). Carly noted that they were following

policy. She related, "It was a safety thing like we're just following like the guidelines and the

rules." Miranda phrased the same sentiment, "that virtual meetings are beneficial for health and

safety." Nicole added her perspective of her peers, "I think quite a few students… were very

accepting of the change because they knew that from a public health standpoint, it was the best

option." Nicole added, "They also knew from a PR standpoint, it was the best option because

seeing headlines like sororities get hundred people sick would not be cute for us." Nicole meant

that if sorority women were to become cluster outbreaks, it would gain negative media and press

attention, which occurred on several campuses and several tied cases became a national study

and publication by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

> Within two weeks of the start of the 2020–21 academic year, COVID-19 cases rapidly
>
> increased among persons associated with university A. Transmission was likely
>
> facilitated by on- and off-campus congregate living settings and activities, with a
>
> majority of the gatherings (91%) and links between them (72%) associated with
>
> fraternities or sororities. Most patients reported virtual instruction only, which indicates

transmission likely occurred primarily outside the classroom; this finding is supported by

the very small proportion of cases among faculty and staff members (0.5%). Women

constitute 54% of university A's 2020 student body but accounted for 70% of university

A's COVID-19 cases. Among linked gatherings, women accounted for 86% of cases, a

finding that could reflect involvement in gender-specific activities, including sorority

rush week, which held an in-person outdoor bid day event and occurred before fraternity

rush week, which was both held later and virtually (Vang et al., 2021)

Nicole added that she felt "[virtual sorority recruitment] is the right decision." She was glad that

they reached the decision early because many stakeholders "were super supportive of [virtual

sorority recruitment] and reported, "Yeah, I think this is the best." By switching to virtual

recruitment, the sororities could create a safe environment to protect against the virus. The online

platform added the ability to create a space that was more accessible for individuals who had

hearing loss, impaired mobility, and who needed a safer space for mental health purposes.

Meaningful Conversations. The National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) recommends

that College Panhellenics (CPH) host values-based recruitments. The priority of values-based

recruitment is to "Focus on conversations between chapter members and potential new members

about organizational values and member organizations" (National Panhellenic Conference,

2021a). The modern structure for recruitment in-person was each chapter met with every

potential new member during open house rounds. The mutual selection process began after those

open house events when PNMs submitted their preferred chapters and chapters reciprocated. As

each round advanced, release figures methodology matched the potential new members to their

best fit with chapters. Potential new members decided on their preferred chapters based on the

conversations and impressions they had with each chapter. This concept stayed the same for

virtual sorority recruitment. However, open house rounds were different. Each sorority produced a video that was less than five minutes long. Potential new members reviewed these for information. Potential new members made short videos that chapters reviewed. After open house rounds finished, there were two more rounds. Virtual recruitment concluded with a fourth round, called the "preference round." Rounds two, three, and preference allowed potential new members to meet with chapter members to learn more about the chapters via Zoom conversations.

Handler (1995) wrote that sororities present themselves through a language of sisterhood. Sororities structure and formalize bonds among women, institutionalizing women's friendships and legitimizing close and caring relationships. Carly explained that the relationship building for chapter members began before recruitment. She said that during work week, chapter members "were put in these groups… so they could meet [members] of different ages and different like people you don't usually hang out with." Carly explained that chapter leaders would put the members in a breakout room during work week, and "there was always like an activity or something that you were like told to do." She felt like the "majority of the girls like wanted to get to know people and like meet other girls and I just I don't know form new connections." Carly added that "having those little groups were helpful and like getting to know more people. Um, versus just like throwing, you know, virtual recruitment workshops and not really knowing who you're dealing with." Carly described the chapter leaders who designed the work week planning led the process of building relationships. Carly identified chapter leaders as stage three of the relational leadership theory, leader identified. She illustrated that leadership was a position, and if one was not the positional leader, then one was a follower or group member and looked to the leader for direction (Komives et al., 2006).

Cecilia recognized "the real priority of the recruitment experience is conversations that enable potential new members and chapter members the opportunity to get to know each other and their values. This is how the mutual selection process is intended to work." The National Panhellenic Conference description of values-based recruitment supports Cecilia's statement. The first bullet point NPC uses to describe values-based recruitment is "focus on conversations between chapter members and potential new members about organizational values and member organizations" (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a). Aly, a potential new member, felt as though she was more prepared for the conversations that made up the first few get-to-know-you rounds, she knew "going into the first couple rounds that you'd get asked a lot of questions about yourself." Aly said, "I kind of like prepared answers in my head and I like, I even like wrote things down on a piece of paper." She said she "didn't want to be asked a question I didn't like have a good answer ready for." Aly pointed out that in an online setting, she had more control over her composure. She had notes to look at, the opportunity to prepare between each round, and reset to make her desired impression with chapter members. Kiray (2018) explained how this phase of recruitment could have dire consequences for the potential new member:

Throughout the interviews, a great deal of women spoke to a lack of clarity regarding the recruitment process, especially the uncertainty of why they ultimately did not receive a bid. As one woman expressed, 'It felt like I had good conversations, and then there's no explanation as to why someone else got picked instead of you.' Further, 'I just want to know why I got cut and more just what their process is of narrowing down people.' The uncertainty regarding exclusion oftentimes led to an internalization of the rejection, leading many women to question themselves and their suitability to be a member of a sorority. As one woman noted, 'But it's still you have to be like, 'Oh no, I didn't get back

any houses that I liked.' It's still kind of, you think for a second, maybe is it because I'm not good enough?' The uncertainty was especially pertinent in moments where [potential new members] thought they connected with the sorority woman, only to not receive an invitation to continue recruitment with that chapter.

No research exists about how women used virtual sorority recruitment to their advantage during recruitment rounds. However, Aly's preparation for recruitment rounds shows that knowing oneself and introspection before sorority recruitment may be a critical skill that helped her be successful and match with a chapter in which she found satisfaction. Other studies have highlighted using various tools from something as simple as introspection to paid recruitment consultants who are individuals hired by PNMs to participate in mock interviews and roleplaying before recruitment (Nelson, 2011). Access and use of these resources vary by campus and may not be prevalent in non-competitive recruitment environments than highly competitive recruitment campuses.

Grace thought the conversations would be surface-level. She thought chapter members would be asking questions like, "What's your major? What do you want to do when you grow up? ... Do you have any sisters or brothers at home? Like where's your hometown?" She experienced the opposite. She said, "I got asked a few times like who's your biggest role model, and that got into like deep conversations." Grace said, "I was really worried that it was going to be like basic questions that I wouldn't be able to get a feel for them with those questions." Grace highlighted the need for potential new members to understand chapter personas out of the conversations. The conversations allowed the potential new members to make their selections in an informed manner. Savannah, another potential new member participant, echoed these thoughts. She said she expected that it would be mostly "surface-level conversations." She, too,

121

was surprised by the conversations. She said the conversations that she remembers best were "talking about interests, like weird things, like silly things … I had low expectations for the quality of our conversation, but I was proved wrong. It was a lot higher than I expected." The potential new member perspective of connecting to people on the other screen is the essence of virtual sorority recruitment. Aly, Grace, and Savannah enjoyed their conversations and the recruitment process. They were satisfied with their matches.

Nicole, the Vice President of Recruitment for the CPH, said she heard from chapters and potential new members that "virtual recruitment really opened up the door for better conversation" and "more values-based recruiting." Nicole attributed that to "if you only can see someone from shoulders up, you're not going to have… filler conversations that would typically happen at the first few moments when people are meeting in-person." Nicole demonstrated situational crisis communication by creating a platform for stakeholders to share their views and be heard by a leader. She said she heard "feedback from both chapters and PNMs that they felt … a 30 minute round this year felt a lot more meaningful and a lot more robust and a 30 minute around last year." Miranda added that the new members she talked to who joined her chapter joined "because the conversation we had was casual and it was just like a normal conversation." Nelson (2011) found that participants in their study indicated that "they didn't realize how choreographed recruitment parties could be." In both Nelson's and this study, chapters would match women who had like interests to generate comfortable conversations. Miranda said that she thinks that is what "virtual recruitment really brought out of this… we're just women trying to make it through college … and everybody's different. Every chapter offers you completely different things, and I think that you get a better look at that in terms of virtual recruitment." Miranda thinks, "At the very core, virtual recruitment focuses on the values and the people of the

chapter. Not what their house looks like, not what the colors of the dresses are, not what type of flowers they chose or what they fed you, it's about the women that are in the chapter." The ability to build meaningful relationships is the primary goal of sorority life. Ella explained how she felt about Zoom conversations. She said, "When you're on the Zoom call, you're just kind of talking to each other." She thinks this change to a casual conversation from a structured and formal process "made people realize why they joined and kind of reminded people why they joined after having those conversations."

Nicole talked through the change to virtual sorority recruitment. She said, "I think virtual recruitment feels really scary at first, and it feels really far off base from what … older members or alumni are used to, but I think that honestly it provided so many opportunities." Nicole hoped that the implementation of specific parts of virtual sorority recruitment would continue. She thought, "It should at least always be an option for people who need accommodations." When she reflected on sorority recruitment, she said, "It made me feel more confident in my sorority experience." Nicole explained it was "because I could tell people … our new members who just joined my chapter didn't join because we have the nicest house on campus, because they haven't even seen it yet." She added, "Our new members didn't join because we had the cutest outfits during round three or because we serve the best dessert during preference." Nicole said the reason the members joined was that "they made connections with my sisters already, and that means that they are going to fit in here, and they're going to have a good time here." According to the NPC (2021a), "the purpose of recruitment is for potential new members and chapter members to get to know each other well enough for both to take the first step toward an important lifetime choice." In the ideal sorority recruitment, the two sides meeting each other through this speed dating-like process can match their values and determine where the best fit is.

Participants shared their perspectives regarding the meaningful conversations they could partake in during virtual sorority recruitment, improving the experience in-person. "Recruitment events should accurately portray the values, benefits, and obligations of sorority membership" (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a).

Improved Communication. The COVID-19 pandemic took most people by surprise. Fraternity and sorority advisors did not have contingency plans prepared for sorority recruitment in a global pandemic, an unprecedented event. As a result of the pandemic, fraternity and sorority advisors and College Panhellenic Councils had to develop a method for administering recruitment. An essential component of the planning process is communication. According to the book *Communication in Times of Trouble* (Seeger & Sellnow, 2019), the following steps are best practices for communicating during a crisis. These apply to those controlling the communication. In terms of this research, they apply to the College Panhellenic Council, chapters, and in some regards, the Rho Gammas as they were all places where participants were receiving vital information.

1. Take a process approach: A process approach to crisis communication emphasizes the connections between activities and outcomes and provides an outline of how a crisis evolves over time.

2. Engage in pre-event planning: Planning crisis communication before an event occurs is very important in creating an effective response. Crisis communication plans are most effective when they are integrated with other plans and are connected to core values.

3. Form stakeholder partnerships with publics: Creating authentic dialogs and partnerships with diverse publics enhances cooperation. Strong partnerships with publics can create a reservoir of goodwill that can be critical during a crisis.

4. Listen to and acknowledge concerns of publics: Audience analysis is one of the key methods for improving communication. Listening to and acknowledging the concerns of publics allows messages to be adapted as a crisis evolves.

5. Communicate with honesty, frankness, and openness: Although it is often difficult to be honest, frank, and open during a crisis, these approaches are necessary to improve trust. Responding to a crisis with a public relations spin, withholding information, or refusing to comment is a very risky approach.

6. Collaborate and coordinate with credible sources: Many groups will be involved in a crisis response and collaboration and coordination with credible sources allows for more effective use of resources.

7. Meet the needs of the media: Media will report on most major crises and effective crisis communication must make use of both old and new media to disseminate messages. Providing access to the media can reduce confusion and rumors.

8. Communicate with compassion: Sometimes organizations are reluctant to express concern for fear of admitting responsibility. However, compassion in the form of concern and empathy is an important response whenever people have been harmed from a crisis.

9. Accept uncertainty and ambiguity: Uncertainty and ambiguity are always part of a crisis and being able to communicate under these conditions is critical to success. Not having all the answers does not mean there is no need to communicate.

10. Communicate messages of empowerment: Crisis can strip away our sense of personal

    control and messages that empower publics can help reduce stress and trauma. People

    have a basic need to do something in response to a crisis and it is important to provide

    some direction (Seeger & Sellnow, 2019).

At Midwestern University, over 3,000 people participated in virtual sorority recruitment and many moving parts. With that many individuals participating, communication is essential to make the recruitment experience cohesive. Many individuals indicated that the virtual recruitment process improved their lines of communication. Lisa explained this from the chapter member's perspective. She said, "Communication … increased … [There was] a lot of stuff coming at you; emails, Facebook … during recruitment, there is a ton of stuff coming at you … and you could easily miss something." The National Panhellenic Conference set up a page of resources called "COVID-19 Resources for College Panhellenics" (National Panhellenic Conference, n.d. a). Between March 11, 2020, and September 24, 2020, they sent out 27 email messages related to COVID-19 and sorority recruitment and created 35 unique resources for College Panhellenic officers and fraternity/sorority advisors, a significant increase from their typical quarterly messages and reminders.

Aly, a potential new member, said that her Rho Gamma group was "super open to answer questions." She stated, "We always had someone that we could reach out to." Aly noted that it was "helpful" and "beneficial" to have that support. The Rho Gammas were demonstrating Seeger and Sellnow's (2019) 10th point. The sorority recruitment counselor is responsible for guiding and leading potential new members through the sorority recruitment process. She provides objective and impartial advice to potential new members supporting each PNM joining a sorority (Carnell, 2017). Another place where the community received support was the

recruitment Zoom headquarters. Aly described it as a place "where you could just hop in with like questions or concerns, or if you needed like help with your Zoom, or if you missed a meeting, or if something went wrong." Ella described the Zoom headquarters as, "if there were any problems, [participants] just typed in the Zoom code and they were like magically where they needed to be and could talk about exactly what they needed to at that time." Demonstrating Seeger and Sellnow's (2019) ninth point, accepting uncertainty and ambiguity, Zoom headquarters provided information from the CPH to whoever needed assistance with questions or problems that came up unexpectedly.

Chapters had their own methods for communicating. Baylor explained her chapter, "set goals for what we wanted to see in recruitment." She said the chapter decided they "wanted our directors and our [vice president of recruitment] to be more transparent with the chapter, especially since everything was so separated this year." This illustrates Seeger and Sellnow's (2019) fifth point, communicating with honesty, frankness, and openness. They used "one main GroupMe, but we also all had to download an app, or they would text us, like get back in the main room, do this, do that, which was really helpful." Cameron's chapter sent "a lot more emails." She said they switched to a comprehensive sorority operations management platform called "OmegaOne." She said, "OmegaOne allows us to send mass emails to our chapter…the President [centralized] the mass emails and communication of … her official updates." Having an official location for receiving updates demonstrated Seeger and Sellnow's (2019) sixth point, collaborate and coordinate with credible sources. Cameron added, "The chapter more started utilizing our Facebook page where we could you know, post encouragement or memes or things like that." Carly said that social media involvement and "personally reaching out to other girls in the chapter … who maybe you wouldn't have usually like talked to if you were with them"

became an expectation for the chapter. She said that she would reach out to talk to them, and as a result, she said, "I feel like I got to know almost more girls than I would have if I was in-person and kind of stayed with my own friend group." Carly's comments demonstrate the leadership differentiated stage of relational leadership theory; leadership could come from anywhere in the group (Komives et al., 2006).

Ella added that communication "happened a lot more often, in even a virtual setting." She said this year, "[CPH] created a GroupMe, a ton of GroupMe's with like Rho Gammas, chapter leadership, council exec, advisors, chapter advisors, Panhellenic advisors." Ella said that it simplified communication "because you could just send a message to like there was one with all of the Panhellenic Council, all the advisors and then all the like chapter leadership that they wanted in there." Ella said that "someone could ask a question … It'd be so easy for me to get an answer right away." This aligns with Seeger and Sellnow's (2019) seventh point, to meet the media's needs. In this setting, they are not precisely the media, but their role is similar. Chapter leaders were responsible for reporting significant updates to their chapter and were responsible for disseminating messages. Rapid and precise communication during a significant event like sorority recruitment is necessary.

Cecilia's overview of the entire community included that "people are more, I think, willing to pay attention to the communication they do get, so they're more willing to read email, they're more willing to look at social media." Peer-reviewed research substantiating these claims is not available. However, an article published in 2021 by an international marketing agency found that email open rates dropped from 24% in 2018 to 21.3% in 2020 globally (MacDonald, 2021). Cecilia attributed that to being "on our computers more, so it's easier to do those things." According to MacDonald (2021), in 2018, 39% of emails were opened on desktop computers

compared to 19% in 2020, which provides contradictory information to Cecilia's experience. Cecilia said that the fraternity and sorority life office had to "guard our real estate in [community-wide] emails and make sure that the stuff that's going in there is like truly stuff that needs to go out like right now … to this community." She added that they didn't "want [community members] to, to start to tune out from it and like to stop paying attention to it." She added, "I think there was more of a need to communicate the why." Communicating the why provides the depth of thought behind making a decision, which demonstrates Seeger and Sellnow's (2019) 10th point, communicate messages of empowerment. Cecilia said, "I think [chapters] also had to be more intentional with our communication because there wasn't like there, there wasn't the ability to change things on a dime quite as easily as there would have maybe been during normal recruitment." Cecilia acknowledged that there might be email fatigue, but the messages going out to the community were high-priority. She added that they had to be intentional with their communication.

Communication changed within the chapter. Cameron explained, "I saw people supporting people in ways that I haven't before." This begins an excellent demonstration of Seeger and Sellnow's (2019) eighth point, communicating with compassion. She shared an experience, "my friend brought me noodles randomly one time and just left it outside my door, which it just meant a lot" She added another example her "roommate would know when I was really busy, and they would surprise me with things to … pick up my day, or just like a text message, like hey I know things are hard." Carly also saw communication change to support the recruitment chair. She said she thought the chapter recruitment chair "handled herself very well." Carly added, "I do think most of the chapter was in support, and any time she needed anything, I think more girls than usual were willing to help and kind of support her through the process."

Carly saw others step up into the fourth category of relational leadership theory by acknowledging that they did not have to be *the* leader to be acknowledged but that they could be *a* leader (Komives et al., 2006). Kelly noticed that the expectations for leadership changed as well. She explained, "after recruitment, I think that the sophomores have done such a good job of making new members feel really welcome and involving them in things." Some examples she gave were "doing Zoom calls or if they have a class together, studying for that, or going and just getting coffee on like a one on one person basis." Kelly observed the importance of transitioning from a potential new member to welcoming them as new members to the chapter.

The CPH implemented new programming to improve communication. Cecilia explained they added, "educational programming around implicit bias to talk about how implicit bias might show up in [the virtual] recruitment process even more than it would show up in a traditional recruitment process." Cecilia added that the campus added NPC's financial transparency process to their recruitment experience. She said, "We've never used that before in our chapters actually loved it." Cecilia explained they had to modify the process to accommodate the financial changes from COVID. She related, "We added our own section at the bottom of it, of like how dues and fees and things might look different during COVID than they have in years past or in years to come for members in the organization." These examples show that even in a crisis, the Midwestern University sorority planning team was still focused on forming strong stakeholder partnerships with their community, Seeger and Sellnow's (2019) second point.

Continuation of Services. The purpose of recruitment remained the same, but significant elements of the recruitment structure were changed. These changes included experiences influencing potential new members to register for recruitment, the experience during recruitment events, the feel of relationships during recruitment, and virtual sorority recruitment

expectations. Membership recruitment is the lifeblood of sororities, so much so that the National Panhellenic Council (2021) states that College Panhellenic Judicial proceeding sanctions shall not "forbid primary recruitment or continuous open bidding activities."

Aly, a potential new member, explained that she was "a little hesitant because [recruitment] was online." She said she felt "things might be different if she waited a year." However, she said, "[joining a sorority] was something that I really wanted to do … I really wanted to do it this year." Aly said her reason for joining was because she came to Midwestern University from out-of-state. She reported, "I really didn't know anyone, and I thought it'd be a good way to meet people older than me." Grace, a potential new member, said that she went to high school in the same city as Midwestern University, "so I had a lot of friends go to this school and go through recruitment, and I thought it looked really interesting." Grace felt like "I just needed more organizations to join, and it looked like a really good opportunity to make friends and join like a good group of people." Savannah reasoned, "I decided since a lot of stuff is going to be virtual, I wanted to be involved in a group where we would actually be meeting online."

Haines (2019) found that peers, both current friends and upper-level students, influenced student decisions to join a student organization. Many students saw involvement with student organizations as an opportunity to make friends, sharing that their friends in a student organization served as their family while attending college, which also aligned with developing a sense of belonging and engagement. Savannah, reinforcing these findings, added, "I really like the idea of getting to know girls my age better and having people to rely on throughout college." Savannah joined because she knew that sororities were guaranteed to meet during the COVID-19 pandemic. Aly felt like she had "a pretty good [recruitment] process [because] I like got asked back to almost all the [chapters] that I like wanted to." She said her experience "really helped me

because it like made me more confident and like because it's like, oh, these girls actually want to talk to me." She said something that did not "work out like I wanted to," was that she was "dropped by like one [chapter] like the whole time. And it was like the one [chapter] that I really wanted, so like that one kind of hurt a little bit." Aly added that she trusted the process, "You obviously get over it, and you find where you're supposed to be and like it all works out for the best."

There is no research indicating why students chose to join or not join a sorority in fall 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, recent pre-pandemic research by Haines (2019) indicated that students who were engaged with student organizations felt connected to campus. Involvement with a student organization provided students with both something and someone to relate to, which deepened their sense of community and connection to the college or university. Students remarked that if they had not gotten involved with at least one student organization, then they would not have persisted at the university (Haines, 2019). Carly said it was helpful the CPH did not leave the choice to recruit in-person or virtually up to the individual chapters. She said it was important for "everybody to go through the same experience and not really give anyone an advantage or disadvantage." She said that chapters recognized "we're just doing it virtually, [because] this is like for the better of everybody." Carly observed that it was essential to keep the recruitment experience available to students. She said, "Even like the girls that didn't come to didn't come to college and move in this year because of like everything going on, they still had an opportunity to participate."

Miranda explained the difference between virtual open house videos. She said, "our video was completely different than what like sorority A did or what sorority B did, um, you can distinctly tell whose video was whose based on the personality and the values of that chapter."

Miranda added that she felt the videos showed the PNMs "exactly who [the chapters] are." She said her chapter's video was "values-based, and that's what our chapter is built on." Cecilia added the chapters still had presentation time during rounds. She said they had "20 minutes of video time to be used over the four days." The chapters could use the video presentation time how they pleased. Some chapters used the video time for "presentations about their philanthropies or about their finances … or make a sisterhood video." Cecilia said that the videos "cut down on the frills, the fluff, the stuff that really doesn't matter. So that was significantly different." Nelson's (2011) study found participants identified the chapters that best matched their personalities based on conversations at chapters during rounds, presentations made by the sorority, and their understanding of the reputations of a given chapter.

In fall 2020, Midwestern University's CPH implemented a financial education requirement for all the chapters. The National Panhellenic Conference Manual of Information directs all chapters to use the financial transparency process. Their instructions for the financial transparency process are:

> All chapters will share detailed financial information (member dues, chapter fees, and assessments, etc.) with potential new members prior to extending a bid. The College Panhellenic will specify the round of recruitment in which the financial information will be shared if fully structured recruitment is utilized (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a, p. 52).

Nicole explained, "NPC said that all chapters had to present financial information during a designated round of recruitment." Nicole said they "had all of our chapters do a presentation during round two of recruitment on Zoom." In the presentation, the chapters had to explain the cost of the sorority experience. Nicole listed, "They had to cover like live-in dues, live-out dues,

what dues mean, other fees that can be associated with the chapter that aren't necessarily included, how they pay, how often, things like that." Nicole said the CPH had "a lot of feedback from potential new members that it was super helpful." She said the financial transparency process was a change that "we're really happy with and plan to continue."

During work week, chapter members practice chants, songs, and rituals which are incorporated during the recruitment rounds. Chants are delivered as potential new members enter and leave each recruitment round. Chapter members are usually lined up to welcome potential new members and are singing loudly and clapping in unison. As recruitment rounds become more intimate, chapter members use rituals to indicate their affection for their sisters. During these rituals, chapter members are frequently standing and singing meaningful songs, meant to convey personal connections and strong emotions toward the sisterhood. In the study conducted by Handler (1995), there was a participant who stated:

> I think that [the candlelight ceremony] really was what impressed us because, like, they said things about how much the sorority meant to them, and I think they really meant int. They were crying … And they really, really meant it. And I'm like, gee, I want friends like that. You know?

Handler (1995) stated, "Some sisters were drawn to the sorority, wanting access to the close ties they see or think they see, reflected in the sorority's presentation at [recruitment]." Twenty-five years later, Grace stated of her experience of ritual-type moments during recruitment, "I would definitely keep the use of ritual the same. Um, I liked that they were able to include stuff that we wouldn't expect to happen in virtual recruitment." Kelly also felt the traditions that incorporated the seniors were essential to continue. She said her chapter continued to incorporate some of the recruitment traditions for the chapter. She said that the traditions "looked a little bit different."

Furthermore, the chapter kept "senior speeches and just so that they could have that little moment it looks different than before, but they still got to do it, and it ended up working out." Kelly said she was "glad that it didn't really have to differ too much from previous recruitment." Kelly was developing skills and confidence during the recruitment process by observing the practices and traditions of the recruitment experience. She still focused on her interpersonal peer relationships, demonstrating stage two of relational leadership theory, exploration/engagement (Komives et al., 2006).

Aly's roommate did not match to a chapter, so she went through the Continuous Open Bidding (COB) process. Aly explained that her roommate "had like two options that she was deciding to COB with, and I think she likes the house that she ended up in at least I hope she does." For context, Cecilia added the campus had "more chapters doing COB this year than we normally would have." She said they probably had "an additional three or four chapters that are eligible for COB, that usually aren't eligible for it." This change to the post-primary recruitment experience was due to a change in total-setting policy from the National Panhellenic Conference. They state, "in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 26 member organizations of the National Panhellenic Conference have updated the Options in Determining Total – Policy" (National Panhellenic Conference n.d. c). The policy was "all College Panhellenics must use the fall 2019 total for the fall 2020 total; unless the evaluation of total in fall 2020 results in a higher total than in fall 2019" (National Panhellenic Conference, n.d. c).

As administrators handled the change to virtual activities, planning an engagement opportunity like virtual sorority recruitment required recognition of the outcomes of the program. Rapanta et al. recommend the main components of an online teaching activity include

The context (e.g. the learner's goals), the tools and resources used (e.g. communication channels between the learners and the teachers or among the learners), the concrete tasks (e.g. encouraging peer collaboration), and the relations between the three (e.g. how interactive tools are, how self-paced/individual the tasks or how necessary it is for the teacher to mediate the use of resources) (2020).

Cecilia contextualized her work as a group process. She worked through these learning objectives with chapter members and recruitment advisors. When she received feedback about the recruitment experience after recruitment concluded, Cecilia described her experience as: "usually I go into those, and I have to, like, kind of brace myself because they, they can be a little vicious." Cecilia explained she was "prepared for them to like point out every single thing we did wrong and like poke fingers." Cecilia recognized that still happened "a little bit this year … but we actually spent more time talking about like the positives and things that went right, um, than things that went wrong." Cecilia pointed out that the chapters could use constructive criticism to build their recruitment process so that it was a more substantial experience for their chapters and the potential new members. Perhaps the demands of leadership during COVID-19 required leaders to face circumstances that helped them progress through the relational leadership theory stages and brought more leaders to these group discussions who had progressed to stage four, leadership differentiated. They viewed their groups as complex organizations and began to see that their organizations were part of a larger system (Komives et al., 2006).

Baylor saw the advantage of virtual sorority recruitment from a personal perspective. She said, "It was nice because I already had my freshman year done, so I already had my close group knit friends." She said that "it took longer than usual … to get to know my member class better."

In the end, "it finally worked out where I got to know more people." Ella recognized that "people have that need for personal connection right now, and it's something that especially a lot of people chose to stay home instead of coming on campus." Miranda explained the chapter's intention for recruitment is "to get a group of women [who] can connect with each other and can bring great things to our chapter as a whole." Miranda added, "I think we got that. I think that the women that we have are passionate and connected and, and just want to be involved." Nicole gave her perspective of virtual recruitment overall. She said she thinks virtual recruitment is "a lot more values-based. I think it gets potential new members focusing more on how they're going to talk about themselves and the things that they're passionate about rather than how they're going to dress or things like that." Ella felt the changes overall "forced us to really look at the foundation of why we joined the chapters." This demonstrates the transition out of stage one of relational leadership theory, awareness. Students recognize their potential to think about leadership and what that means (Komives et al., 2006).

Even though the circumstances for sorority recruitment changed, Baylor said she thought recruitment "went better than expected. Just, I think we were able to recruit a class better than usual. From what I heard from some of the upperclassmen just because the girls were more open-minded." From another chapter, Cameron said: "I think um as, you know, new member coordinator. I think that we have recruited a really excellent set of women." Ella said she felt like the number of members placed in each chapter was "an outcome that nobody expected." The chapters were expecting new member class sizes "to be a lot lower. And although they were lower than in years past, it was nothing compared to what we had originally thought." Cecilia was able to provide data to support the positive outcome for virtual sorority recruitment. She said, "our retention rate was better, and we had about the same withdraw rate as we do when we

have 30% more PNMs." There is no published research evaluating the retention rates for virtual sorority recruitment from the fall 2020 semester for comparison. When Midwestern University reviewed their pool of potential new members, they determined their retention on the average retention rate for recruitment. They shared with the chapters to expect smaller than average new member classes. However, they had a higher retention rate during virtual sorority recruitment, resulting in a higher than expected new member class.

Cecilia recognized the recruiting strength of some chapters. She said a couple of her chapters, "who are not traditionally our highest recruiting chapters… had some of the best numbers they've had in like 10 or 15 years." Cecilia reflected, "What about this worked for [those chapters]? And how do we, like, keep that in the future for you? Because obviously, something about this was good and helpful for your recruitment style." There is no comparative research available to analyze this effect compared to other campuses with chapters with similar experiences. Ella pointed out that she did not know the specific numbers of PNMs that matched to chapters overall, but "that number was a lot bigger than we expected." She said she thought the benefit was that sororities were able to "facilitate this kind of recruitment so that people could find their homes… their friend groups and people hang out with, and people to have Zoom calls with, in a time when it's not really common." Participants reported beneficial outcomes of the virtual sorority recruitment experience, indicating recruitment was an essential program needed to remain in operation.

Skill Development. The premise of sororities was to create a space that helped women learn and grow. Women's development continues to be a core principle of sororities. According to the National Panhellenic Conference,

Leadership and empowerment is one of the six advocacy building blocks. The goal of leadership and empowerment advocacy efforts is to build and maintain strong Panhellenic communities to ensure the current and future experience for collegiate and alumnae sorority women is transformational and encourages women to become the best version of themselves in their personal, academic, and professional environments (National Panhellenic Conference, n.d. d).

Skill development exercises in college are in preparation for career readiness. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) (n.d.) has a list of competencies that define career readiness. They are:

- Critical Thinking/Problem Solving: Exercise sound reasoning to analyze issues, make decisions, and overcome problems. The individual is able to obtain, interpret, and use knowledge, facts, and data in this process, and may demonstrate originality and inventiveness.

- Oral/Written Communications: Articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively in written and oral forms to persons inside and outside of the organization. The individual has public speaking skills; is able to express ideas to others; and can write/edit memos, letters, and complex technical reports clearly and effectively.

- Teamwork/Collaboration: Build collaborative relationships with colleagues and customers representing diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, religions, lifestyles, and viewpoints. The individual is able to work within a team structure and can negotiate and manage conflict.

- Digital Technology: Leverage existing digital technologies ethically and efficiently to solve problems, complete tasks, and accomplish goals. The individual demonstrates effective adaptability to new and emerging technologies.

- Leadership: Leverage the strengths of others to achieve common goals, and use interpersonal skills to coach and develop others. The individual is able to assess and manage his/her emotions and those of others; use empathetic skills to guide and motivate; and organize, prioritize, and delegate work.

- Professionalism/Work Ethic: Demonstrate personal accountability and effective work habits, e.g., punctuality, working productively with others, and time workload management, and understand the impact of non-verbal communication on professional work image. The individual demonstrates integrity and ethical behavior, acts responsibly with the interests of the larger community in mind and is able to learn from his/her mistakes.

- Career Management: Identify and articulate one's skills, strengths, knowledge, and experiences relevant to the position desired and career goals, and identify areas necessary for professional growth. The individual is able to navigate and explore job options, understands and can take the steps necessary to pursue opportunities, and understands how to self-advocate for opportunities in the workplace.

- Global/Intercultural Fluency: Value, respect, and learn from diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, sexual orientations, and religions. The individual demonstrates openness, inclusiveness, sensitivity, and the ability to interact respectfully with all people and

understand individuals' differences (National Association of Colleges and Employers, n.d.).

By participating in sorority recruitment, participants have opportunities to learn and apply these competencies in various ways. One theme from the study that emerged from participants was skill development during the recruitment process.

Miranda observed her executive committee lead her chapter. She said the executive committee "figured out how to prioritize and how to cut things that really aren't as critical as we may have thought they were in the beginning." Prioritizing helped the chapter work cohesively during recruitment, building critical thinking/problem solving, teamwork/collaboration, and leadership competencies. Kelly said the chapter gained skills to better understand Zoom etiquette and Zoom use on the technology side of virtual sorority recruitment. She said some chapter recruitment preparation programming reinforced "helpful things to get us prep for doing classes online." Kelly explained the chapter learned how to "[make] sure your Wi-Fi connection is good, you know actually having steps to go in and check that like on your computer." She said they also learned about setting up "a good background good lighting." All of these factors support the NACE career competency of digital technology, using technologies to ethically and efficiently solve problems, complete tasks, and accomplish goals by demonstrating effective adaptability to new and emerging technologies (National Association of Colleges and Employers, n.d.).

Carly stated that she learned about good communication skills, "Being able to kind of like listen and like respond to people." She explained how her experience recruiting this year was different with Zoom. She relayed, "We had like spreadsheets up on our like laptops at the same time [as recruiting rounds]." She reported the spreadsheets were "so you knew where you were going, what you were doing, um, the communication through, like, emails, and the

Facebook… to know like what steps were happening next and where we need to like be at what time." Kelly reiterated Carly's point. Kelly stated one of the most helpful things they did as a chapter was "practicing [virtual] rounds." She reported the recruitment practices, "Never really worked out the right way." Kelly added that the repetitive practice of putting new members in with upper-level students helped prepare the chapter for recruitment rounds. She said, "Continually doing the practice of, you know, what is a recruitment conversation supposed to look like how are rounds supposed to kind of flow … [helped them prepare] to have conversations with potential new members." Carly also agreed that practice was helpful for life after college. She stated, "This is practice for, like, if this is really how it's going to be for a while like practice for your interviews." Carly added, this was "practice for your classes like the best way to learn how to like be engaged now to talk to somebody and still have like an authentic experience." Another NACE career competency is oral/written communications, the ability to articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively in written and oral forms through memos, letters, and complex technical reports (National Association of Colleges and Employers, n.d.). Members continued to point to the essential nature of building relationships during recruitment.

Cecilia expected "Panic, huge IT issues, ... big delays, … and entire rounds that didn't happen because of people like not being prepared or ready to go." Instead, she was impressed by her student leaders. She said, "[the assistant vice president] of recruitment who is in charge of Rho Gammas is probably one of the single like best Panhellenic officers I've ever worked with." Cecilia explained why. She reported, "[the AVP] got our Rho Gammas ready in a way that I just could never have imagined." Cecilia explained that the Rho Gammas were ready to "troubleshoot Zoom… to help folks who were struggling with doing [recruitment] virtually ... [to help] chapters take attendance from the waiting rooms of Zoom. Like they were just ready to go

142

in every capacity." This description demonstrates the evident competency of digital literacy. However, Cecilia highlighted a variety of deeper-rooted competencies the Panhellenic officers and Rho Gammas displayed. They showed nearly every competency by being adaptable to the changing environment through leadership, professionalism toward each other, using their work ethic and critical thinking to continue to overcome challenges, as well as the ability to communicate successfully to their team (National Association of Colleges and Employers, n.d.).

Cameron felt affected by the leadership in her chapter. She explained, "I was very empowered by our executive team." Cameron explained that she saw the women in leadership roles demonstrate they were "going to adapt, and then we started having, you know, recruitment task force meetings. We took the time that we needed to heal, and then we immediately started like moving forward and attacking it." The National Association of Colleges and Employers (n.d.) explains that leadership leverages others' strengths to achieve common goals. A leader uses interpersonal skills to coach and develop others. Cameron explained the cause for this focus. "When your membership is at stake with something as big as recruitment, you don't have time to try and figure things out or to be sad in that moment …" Cameron added, "But you really need to push forward to make sure that you are getting those new members, that's the basis of your organization," Cameron said she learned lessons in leadership from her chapter president. She said the chapter president made a goal to encourage officers. Cameron relayed, "wow, COVID really made that an opportunity … She really was able to reach out to officers and encourage them for literally everything that we were doing." This demonstrates the transition out of stage four of the relational leadership theory, leadership differentiated. Cameron saw the chapter president seek congruence among individuals and organizational values and develop and coach peers in the leadership development process (Komives et al., 2006). Associated with sorority

recruitment is the sense of belonging to a group, increased campus involvement, and increased overall cognitive development and critical thinking skills (Gellin, 2003; Pike, 2000). Virtual sorority recruitment showed tremendous opportunities for leadership and skill development.

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of challenges in the virtual sorority recruitment model?

Disruption in Building Relationships. Online programming created disruptions to relationship building, and students grappled with coping with the sudden change. Aly, a potential new member, said of virtual online events, "I feel like they're going to be used a lot more than we obviously used to, and it's going to be like a new normal. But I kind of hope not because I miss in-person things." Cameron listed some side effects of online events that she is concerned about; she said, "I do worry about becoming a couch potato or our society [or me] becoming more isolated." Cameron shared a general concern she has regarding the overuse of virtual platforms. Cameron said she is "really worried about becoming isolated and the effects [virtual platforms] can have on mental health." Sixty percent of adults and 68% of young people have said their mental health got worse during lockdown (Mind, 2020). For essential programs like sorority recruitment, there was a significant push to create an alternative solution. However, participants noticed some subtle and acceptable differences and some irreplaceable elements of the programs. Research conducted in 1995 found that participants in the recruitment experience sought friendship from their peers and that friendships were created through the experience of joining a chapter (Handler, 1995).

Differences Between In-Person and Virtual Recruitment. Participants reported on some of the specific differences between in-person and virtual recruitment that were detrimental. Lisa

144

said there were more "cons than pros" with virtual recruitment. Lisa added, "Even with [online] classes to you don't get that like connection … You're just really not there mentally or physically in class, and it's a different vibe." Chapters begin their recruitment experience with work week. Caroline stated that work week "was so different." She explained, "It was organized, and we … finished ahead of schedule a lot of times. [The chapter's vice president of recruitment] put a lot of work into making sure that we still felt like we were in the sorority." She added, "It could be really isolating just sitting in your apartment waiting for something to change." Researchers who studied the challenges, experiences, and opinions of e-learners indicated that almost every respondent in their study encountered one or more challenges in their online learning experiences, with time management being the dominant challenge. Although the institution was applying effort to enhance the student support services, these issues were resolved by students utilizing their own resources, many by simply persevering (Beaudoin et al., 2009).

Caroline described the in-between times during recruitment rounds when chapter members would have side conversations. The structure of recruitment on Zoom eliminated the organic conversations between rounds for many participants. Caroline compared the times between rounds virtual and in-person recruitment styles with an observation:

> I saw a lot of girls who maybe didn't necessarily have leadership positions, but in between the rounds during our actual recruitment, they were you know, playing music getting everyone to, like, feel like, okay, we're going through this together like some of those close moments that you have when you're in it in-person, and you're, you know, running around the stairs, trying to get things set up. It was those, those moments that it really felt like we're still in this and that, like our leaders that are sorority still want us to feel welcome and like we're still doing something.

145

Even though the conversations were lost, Caroline observed members of her chapters figuring out ways to keep the chapter's morale uplifted. Ella indicated the most significant difference between virtual and in-person recruitment for her was not "being physically with each other, and I think those like side conversations." Ella's first work week was the year before virtual sorority recruitment was "one of the most fun experiences that I ever had while being part of my chapter, and unfortunately, they didn't get the opportunity to do that this year." Ella said, "I think it just made people appreciate the things that we had more when it was in-person." Social interaction, active involvement, and student engagement are critical factors for promoting college success (Astin et al., 2006).

Kelly said something that made a difference to her was the time to be silly with other chapter members. "We didn't get to do any of the fun, you know songs, chants …, or door stacks." She described the missing pieces as "weird because you know that's the most fun because you just kind of make a fool of yourself and everyone laughs about it, and it's a great time." Kelly elaborated by saying that those missing silly moments felt "very odd, and … it made some of the rounds feel more like serious than they normally do." Kelly explained how the Zoom conversations felt. She said, "You showed up. You had a little conversation. Then you just went to a breakout room or came back for a presentation. And I feel like it felt almost more like a class than it did like a recruitment round." Missing that in-person connection stood out to Kelly as a significant loss in her recruitment experience. She added, "I realized that I make a lot more connections with people in-person." Kelly said the recruitment experience was "very different" from in-person recruitment because virtual recruitment participants were "sitting in your room for eight hours talking to people, but not actually being able to have conversations about what's going on." Kelly indicated that when chapters recruited in-person, in between rounds, they could

146

have conversations with each other to debrief from the last round and prepare for the next one or have aimless conversations with each other. According to Aiello-Coppola (2018), the way fraternities and sororities build meaningful relationships is through internal programming to make members feel wanted and a sense of belonging.

Miranda explained the difference between in-person and virtual events. She said, "doing [chapter meetings] on Zoom is a completely different world than being everybody in the house and all of us being around each other every chapter meeting." She said, "I've lost connections with friends that I used to just always see in class." She explained, "I barely ever see [my non-sorority friends] because I live in my sorority house … [I try] to make sure that I limit the amount of people I'm around [to] eliminate any type of exposures that we could possibly have." Miranda said, "Overall, I think that on a wide scale in terms of human connection, it's not beneficial to have everything be online." Baylor said one difference between in-person and virtual recruitment is the unstructured and organic ways that friends meet each other during the recruitment process. She said that in-person recruitment was "more personal." Baylor explained it was because "you got to actually see [people] and you [were around] more of the girls that you're potentially going to be in a new member class." She gave the example of lining up before recruitment rounds. Baylor explained that the "Rho Gams would say like, look around and like see who you're with and, like, you just got to know everyone on a better level." Other students chimed in and shared these experiences in and out of the classroom. They found that the academic experience was different in-person versus online (Rimer, 2020).

Caroline highlighted some of the adversity she experienced. She thought, "Some of the exhaustion that comes from for the new member like running from houses and like not knowing what's going on. And now you're standing in front of his house." She said that changed

because "now they're just signing in at a time having a conversation, signing out. There isn't that level of screaming at each other." The rooms were so loud with conversations that members had to yell to be heard by the person they talked to, seated about three feet away. Caroline added, "we had this bonding experience of, well, we all did this really tiring thing together and [virtual sorority recruitment PNMs] don't have that." Sandage et al. (2020) wrote that sorority recruitment is a socially intense, physically tiring, emotional, and vocally exhausting endeavor. Caroline elaborated that virtual and in-person recruitment experiences are "different forms, [that] comes with its own challenges." She explained, "There might be a technical difficulty and someone logs off, or you go into a breakout room, and there's no one else there. Whereas, if you're going to a door, you're picking someone up, and you know they're going to be there." Caroline described another experience of adversity during recruitment. She reported, "That experience of like running through the rain because it's always raining." She added, "Having it be something where you can look back on it and laugh with other people like all remember this house when XYZ happened like when my in one of the rounds… a girl in my chapter had a seizure, and she had to be rushed to the emergency room." Caroline stated, "There's like the little moments like that that are just absolutely crazy, but you're really going to get that in a virtual experience because things are a little bit more balanced." Caroline and others described some of the adversity that participants in the recruitment process experience. These experiences become memories that they laugh and bond over later in their sorority experience.

Participation During Zoom Rounds. Miranda explained that the most challenging part of virtual recruitment for her was "figuring out how are we going to make these type of… intimate connections with women and like deep, deep connections that we did [when we were in-person]." Several recruiters noticed that potential new members were distracted from the

conversations, which limited their ability to make meaningful connections. Nelson (2011) explains this phenomenon:

> To a certain degree, [sororities] depend on collective effervescence during important ceremonies and rituals, including the events on preference night. If someone disrupts the sense of energy and belonging created at a [chapter], other women there will not experience that feeling and are more inclined to preference a [chapter] where they did experience that collective effervescence on preference night.

Kelly made a general observation when she explained what she saw during recruiting rounds. She said she was shocked by "how many people you could tell were very disinterested going to certain [chapters]." She said this was evident because the potential new members "would be on their phone like not really paying attention [or] would be turning around talking to their roommate during the meeting with a like meeting with a chapter member." Kelly added that participants could not see their video tile on the screen when the chapter shared their screen with the potential new members. At that point, "people would really not be paying any attention and would just like get up and walk away." Kelly related, "That was something that I don't think we were really expecting to have that much of an issue with."

Round one, which was called "open house round," was a series of videos. The potential new members watched chapter videos. Chapters watched short videos from potential new members. After receiving this information, both sides began their selection process. Savannah, a potential new member, had feedback for round one; she said the videos were "surface-level … so I didn't really get a good understanding of who the girls were in the sorority." Nicole added of round one, "I felt like it was a big miss to have those 24 hours wasted during round one where there was probably only two hours' worth of video [for PNMs] to watch." Nicole explained, "It

just was not good for creating connection. It was not helpful for potential new members to separate [chapter personalities]." Nicole added from the PNM perspective that round one was "really hard for potential new members because they couldn't create differences between chapters after just watching a five-minute introductory video." In Nelson's 2011 study findings, she wrote, "PNMs tended to favor [chapters] where they felt they received individual attention." By making a video round with no interaction, chapter members and potential new members could not create a connection. Round one was particularly challenging for participants. Carly described round one as "the [PNM] sent us … 60-second [videos] of [themselves], and they watched our like sorority chapter video." Carly reported that it was "definitely difficult and very different because I felt like it was kind of unusual to like, kind of, almost judge somebody based off of like a 60-second video." Carly, a chapter recruiter, related, "I felt almost like worse for having to like judge somebody off have not actually been talking to them." Caroline added her perspectives to the challenges of round one. She stated, "They sent in about minute videos of themselves, and we look to see, oh, who will we like?" Caroline added that the potential new members answered questions like "why did you choose [to attend] Midwestern University?" Caroline said of the round one process, "It was kind of it was just weird. It was a little strange because, like, oh, you're judging someone based off a one-minute video they send in."

Zoom Body Language. The video platform created a new set of challenges regarding body language during conversations. Kelly said conversations were "very different" on Zoom calls. "Because you don't really get the full effect of people's body language and tone on Zoom, and so I feel like people present themselves very differently." Kelly felt that it impacted "The authenticity of conversations." She reasoned, "You can tell a lot about how interested someone isn't in a conversation … just by their body language alone." The research was

conducted to evaluate video conferencing on psychotherapy treatments by psychologists with their clients. They found that communication can be impacted by the audio-video quality, the lack of body language information, and the confusion of users in exchanging glances, as it is hard to understand where people are looking (Cataldo et al., 2021).

Caroline's advice for potential new members and chapter members is "knowing how to ask questions." She added, "Knowing what questions can get those values from people you've just met because you know you're just asking questions to someone you've never met before, and it can be a little weird." Caroline added that this was challenging because "there isn't that there isn't that level of like personal oh we're in the same room we're looking right at each other. We've just shook hands." She explained, "It's like, oh, hello, welcome to Zoom, tell me about your deepest secrets." Grace, a potential new member, added to Caroline's perspective. She noticed that "it was still really difficult to get like any perspective on like what certain chapters were like, especially in the first round." She said it was "kind of difficult" in her conversations with chapter members "because it was behind a screen. I couldn't see any of their like physical mannerisms, like what they were doing, like how they were standing, that kind of stuff."

Baylor shared the way she felt like individuals could overcome the challenges presented by Zoom conversations was "you needed to be, I think, a little bit more outgoing because you didn't have like social cues to play off of you had to really just go off of like what you were talking about which I think was hard." According to Roof (2013), women described as an extrovert according to the Myers-Briggs Personality Typology Inventory would be more likely to complete and be placed in a chapter during the formal sorority recruitment process. Baylor confirmed Roof's (2013) outcome by indicating that more extroverted women fared better in Zoom conversations. Baylor added that participants "had to really listen to like [the potential

new members'] tone of voice." She said that it was hard to "tell if they're interested in what you're talking [about]." Baylor added it was hard to tell if "somebody is kind of like started space out, but like on Zoom you couldn't tell if it's just because they didn't know how to stare at their camera or if it was because they were bored."

Another problem that recruiters were when individuals were distracted. Most participants will likely lose focus after the first 10 minutes, and the most significant factor influencing attention span is the person leading the discussion. This indicates that it is not the material but the discussion leader who provides an enriching learning experience (Oliver, 2020). Carly explained the difficulty of potential new members not paying attention during the Zoom presentations. She reported, "It was interesting to see that more often than not, you would find one or two girls out just seemed absolutely disinterested or that were on their phones and like not paying attention." Carly added, "It was very different to see kind of the engagement level like girls that were should be paying attention because if you're in a house, everyone would have to be [paying attention] you had no other option really." Carly explained that being able to observe the potential new members during the Zoom call by "how they kind of like presented themselves… You could almost judge them off of some of their actions from that." Carly's example was, "I feel like the girls that I noticed that were like her head [was turned] and talking to their roommate probably weren't really listening to like what you're saying about our philanthropy." Zoom presented unique challenges for conversations, which are an essential element of the recruitment process.

Making Connections. Cameron said the biggest downside to virtual sorority recruitment for her was "chapter bonding." She explained the chapter talked about, "work week is when you're going to meet your near most friends, or you're really going to connect or find your place

in the chapter or even during recruitment." According to research conducted to understand the psychologist-client relationship over video conferencing better, Cataldo et al. (2021) found a lack of presence might impact the general picture of the client-psychologist relationship and, consequently, the effectiveness of the treatment. Cameron added the reason is that "when you're doing long hours with people [in-person], that really bonds you. When your feet are killing you because you've been in heels like that is, quote-unquote, the sorority experience, right?" Cameron said that missing work week was "hard because it quite frankly, it is harder to find bonding over Zoom. Um, which is contradictory, right? To recruiting members who you feel like you have a more authentic connection but then building those authentic connections are harder somehow."

Carly said building relationships during recruitment was "a lot more difficult." She explained that if the potential new member "you're talking to isn't like good at like being virtually engaged [then] it doesn't really speak to who she is. But it could just be like, well, of course, she was on Zoom like she felt uncomfortable." Carly said the barrier from Zoom made it "very difficult to get to know somebody if they were uncomfortable themselves with being like on a Zoom call." She said she did not want to judge potential new members when they were feeling uncomfortable because of the platform, "but you also don't have much else to go off of, so that made it very difficult and like how to like determine kind of what girls you thought fit in your chapter."

Carly explained how initiating conversations during recruitment was tough. She gave an example, "I was talking to a PNM and like you both get in here, and you have to be like, hi, like, tell me about yourself, but you can't say it like that." She stated, "It's very different when you're not in-person and have other distractions to kind of help you like to bounce off the walls

153

like something to talk about." Carly related that the sororities practiced initiating conversations, and it was "emphasized this year that you really had to be on your game to start a conversation and make it authentic. That was definitely more difficult over this like electronic platform and like only having like a video screen." Kelly listed one of her main takeaways of virtual sorority recruitment was "the disconnect." Kelly added if there is another virtual sorority recruitment, chapters should try to "figure out how to make people more feel a little bit more connected, even though they're not with other people." According to Astin (1999) and Armstrong (2014), Panhellenic sorority recruitment could be deemed an adverse bonding activity because it takes a great deal of physical and psychological energy resulting in a highly emotional experience. Kelly said she hoped "there's a better way … to make everyone feel like they're more connected." Lisa also missed the in-person experience. She explained when doing virtual recruitment, "you are more alone … You don't get to practice or hang out with your whole sorority. You know, I don't know how it is for other colleges, but like I can't go in my sorority house and just hang out there or anything like that." Kelly and Lisa explained that the in-person recruitment experience for chapter members was a significant bonding experience they looked forward to during recruitment.

Carly addressed the challenges she faced in building connections with the new members. She said, "you didn't have the big lead up to [meeting the new members], bid day." Carly attributed that to not being able to see the new members in-person. "I don't really feel like I know who [the new members] are or … why they're in this chapter." Carly said, "I think that connection is a little bit lost through like all the members." Carly thinks the "sophomores and the juniors might feel like they've reached out more to some of the new members. It's like they're doing like big/little and like they have to get to know them and stuff." Carly said, "As an

upperclassman, I feel like I don't really know who they are, where usually … I go to all the

events and … meet the new girls." Carly said, "I don't really know what more I can do to, like,

get to know them rather than seeing them virtually at chapter, which doesn't really add a lot."

Carly recognized how important it was to transition from potential new members to new

members in the chapter. She knew the importance of developing relationships with experienced

members of the chapter for advice and guidance and how that was an essential part of her

sorority experience that these women were not receiving. Carly demonstrated stage five of the

relational leadership theory, generativity. She did this by noting that she was responsible for

coaching, teaching, and counseling others (Komives et al., 2006). Baylor heard from other

members in the chapter that "it's been very hard to meet people … it's just hard to really get to

know girls. And then when you see them in-person, you don't know how to really react."

Cameron shared that she received negative feedback that was challenging to face from

the members. She said, "it's not the experience [the members] are used to." She explained the

negative feedback was a "really hard part…and with online events at times, it feels like you're

just trying to push through and trying to come up with new ideas for your membership, but

they're not always super happy with you." Cameron added she felt the most challenging part of

operating online is "continuing to try to be innovative and trying to give [chapter members] the

opportunity for feedback …" She said she thinks "the hardest part is just facing the judgment

from members and then the members [don't know] what they want out of an online experience.

And then also just we don't know how long it will go on." In stage three of the relational

leadership theory, leader identified, participants believed in leader-centric, positional, and often

hierarchical views of leadership (Komives et al., 2006). Perhaps members of the chapter felt as

though it was Cameron's job to make decisions while Cameron was trying to gain feedback from

155

her chapter. This described sense of loss, lack of direction, and motivation demonstrated how challenging it was to be a sorority leader during virtual sorority recruitment. Sorority leaders desperately wanted to build opportunities for chapter members to build connections, but they faced many challenges, including negative feedback from their peers.

Imperfect Implementation. Recruitment is a massive operation that requires months of planning any year; campuses had weeks to plan virtual recruitment. As Cecilia put it, "[people] don't understand that planning recruitment is like a year-long process and something that you can't do in two months. Not a thing." However, Cecilia and her team had to move forward in their planning process. Typically, recruitment planning started in October the year before, but virtual sorority recruitment planning did not begin until June, about twelve weeks before scheduled activities. Every year, recruitment experiences flaws. This section explores some of the flaws that were unique to virtual sorority recruitment.

Process. The process of implementing virtual sorority recruitment was utterly unknown. The National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) made decisions throughout the late spring and summer that impacted every campus with a College Panhellenic Council, tens of thousands of stakeholders. These affected the thousands of stakeholders at Midwestern University in a relatively short timeframe. The planning process was not as routine and predictable as during repeat in-person years, which resulted in several challenges.

Cecilia explained how she was receiving information during the planning period. She said, "NPC was talking a lot about this hybrid model, but we were being told [by Midwestern University that] hybrid was not an option." Even though it was an acceptable option listed by the NPC, Midwestern University would not allow any in-person activities. Cecilia explained that

NPC's early recommendations were not "going to be something we were going to be able to utilize because we were told if you want to recruitment process at all, this, [fully-virtual option], is what it's going to look like." When Cecilia processed this information, she said, "my immediate thought jumped to the students and telling them and getting them on board and helping to connect with you know their national organizations and with NPC" so Cecilia could help chapter get support "coming from all sides." Cecilia explained this swift and sudden change was emotional for her. She said, "I had to get over my own feelings pretty quickly because there was just no way like I couldn't be the one that was freaked out. I couldn't be the one that was doubtful." Cecilia acknowledged, "There's going to be things we don't get right there's going to be things we mess up, but like, overall, we are going to recruit new members, and there are going to be new members in your organization." Cecilia is showing stage six of the relational leadership theory, integration/synthesis. She was effective at working with others and confident that she could perform the necessary tasks to meet the overall goal (Komives et al., 2006).

Cecilia started to work through her "to-do lists and a lot of questions and … trying to figure out who had answers to those questions." She explained:

> We would come up with a question and then kind of go I don't really know who gets to make this decision. Do I make this decision? Does my VP [of] recruitment make this decision? Do we put this to the chapters and let them make decisions? What needs to be voted on what doesn't need to be voted on? What goes into bylaws? What doesn't go into bylaws? There's a lot of conversations there.

Making decisions with group buy-in requires conversations to discuss points to agree upon a joint action, as demonstrated by Seeger and Sellnow (2019). Cecilia highlighted how hard it was

to do that due to the volume of decisions and the time available to make those decisions. From an undergraduate perspective, Carly explained, "not really being able to find out an answer … made it a little more stressful." She explained that chapter members had basic questions like, "what's [virtual sorority recruitment] gonna look like? What am I able to do? Who do I have to talk to? What if I don't have good internet?" Carly said the questions that were raised early on "couldn't really be answered until later when they were actually figuring out the process." Rapanta et al. (2020) recognize in their research on teaching during and after the COVID-19 crisis that the design of effective learning environments and embedding online technologies can serve as catalysts to experiment new things, explore creative alternatives, and reflect on practices. Rapanta et al. (2020) also indicate that the mandate for quality experiences at universities with adequate teaching evaluation methods is an urgent need to remain competitive in the higher education environment.

In the online learning paradigm, teacher presence, the way teachers actually teach their courses or establish relationships is a major theme (Rapanta et al., 2020). Teacher presence takes into account cognitive presence, how teachers take into consideration students' preparedness to participate in the online learning experience, social presence or the communication channels that teachers must maintain or enhance to maintain interaction, and a facilitatory presence, embracing teacher facilitatory discourse through direct instruction embodying resources and mentoring activities (Rapanta et al., 2020). Ella demonstrated the lack of facilitatory presence during the implementation process. Ella explained the chapter members struggled "hard" because many "decisions were made that didn't include student input." Students were calling for leaders to advance quickly through the stages of the relational leadership theory model. Leaders needed to be in a place where they could facilitate conversations to seek input from their chapter members

and still drive toward a set goal. Ella said she thinks that "in the future that needs to change because although everyone that works in the office like was part of a fraternity or sorority at one point, I think it's a lot different now than when they were in college." Ella, Carly, and Cecilia demonstrated that the general resources and instruction available to inform the process were not widely available. The campus had to figure the answers on their own and repeat other campuses' efforts throughout the nation.

NPC resources were not keeping pace with the rate at which leaders at Midwestern University had to make decisions. One of these resources is an area advisor, an NPC-trained volunteer assigned to assist campus-based fraternity and sorority professionals. NPC explains the area advisor is "well-versed in Panhellenic policies and practices. She provides assistance if needed and advice backed by practical experience" (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a). The National Panhellenic Conference Manual of Information (2021a) explains the role of the Area Advisor is to:

- Interprets and clarifies what is in the NPC Manual of Information, including the Unanimous Agreements, policies, and best practices.
- Serves as a liaison between NPC, NPC's member organizations, the fraternity/sorority advisor, and the College Panhellenic officers.
- Keeps the College Panhellenic advised of the latest NPC policies and procedures.
- Reviews the College Panhellenic's working documents (e.g., bylaws, standing rules, recruitment guidelines, code of ethics) and suggests changes when needed.
- Offers new ideas for membership recruitment schedules, procedures, and workshops and for Panhellenic programming and officer training.

- Provides advice on how to market recruitment and the sorority experience to potential new members and build positive perceptions of sorority life on campus and in the community.

- Is available to assist the College Panhellenic with problem-solving.

- Works closely with the College Panhellenic to help resolve issues/concerns.

- Welcomes the opportunity to observe, learn and work with a College Panhellenic.

The NPC Area Advisor plays an instrumental role in the center of sorority recruitment. Amid recruitment planning, "we got a new area advisor on June first … who's great, but was also trying to learn our community, while we were in the middle of having no idea what was going on and then like eight million questions." The Area Advisor had to learn a new campus, establish new relationships, and keep up with the communication and rules that NPC was pushing out to campuses. This arm of support that Cecilia used to rely on was also dealing with the same learning curve and challenges as every other person who was imagining virtual sorority recruitment for the first time. From the outset, Cecilia worked to figure out what virtual sorority recruitment would look like on her own and by using her network of professionals in the fraternity and sorority advising field who were enduring the same challenges as she.

Cameron explained she was initially "really worried" about her chapter president. Cameron said they had to "redo their recruitment plan [in] the middle of the summer." At that point in the pandemic, Cameron explained it felt like "waves of bad news just keep hitting you, and that was just another thing." From the chapter's perspective, the confusion continued. Cameron explained what it was like building this process when no one knows what the structure would look like in the end. She said, "it was frustrating [to watch] our exec scramble to figure out how to do sorority recruitment on the back end." Cameron added the perspective she heard

from women she lived with in her sorority. She said, "It was interesting to hear their opinions, and they were quite frustrated with how slow the process of figuring everything out was both with our Panhellenic and our university and then within our own sorority." Cameron demonstrated what it means to recognize an untitled leader in the chapter, the third stage of the relational leadership theory. Cecilia said that it took more "probing and prodding to help [chapter members] understand what they were trying to accomplish were still there [in virtual sorority recruitment], even if they had to change the way that they did it." Leading from stage six of the relational leadership theory, Cecilia performed her role with the interdependence of self with others in a system (Komives et al., 2006).

Round one, open house round, presented challenges for participants. Grace, a potential new member, said round one was "really hard" because "we didn't get to talk to any chapters; we just watched intro videos." Graced added, "[watching the videos] was really difficult for me because I felt like I couldn't tell anything about the chapters … any of that could have been staged." Grace explained that she "wanted to get to know the like real people." She added that in the next round, "you get dropped from so many people, and I felt like I didn't really get a chance to [get to know people]." She said she was "left wondering like, what, what would have happened if I actually got to talk to them." Grace her solution for round one is that "everyone should get a shot at talking to all of the chapters because that's how it is in regular recruitment." Her rationale was, "it would probably help a lot of people because I know it definitely made me feel insecure after people dropped me after seeing just a video of me. I would have much rather them actually speak to me." Grace closed her thought by saying, "I felt like it didn't necessarily give people a fair shot. And people might even get different chapters if they had done it that way." Grace was correct that chapters might have made different selections if they had more

information. In a research study conducted during in-person recruitment, unsuccessful participants described the process very negatively, indicating that, for many women, the decision to drop out results from a negative experience or rejection instead of a simple lack of interest (Kase et al., 2016). The recruitment administrators need to design a process that creates a comfortable process for the potential new member experience.

Aly, a potential new member, said she "didn't expect it to be such long days. I feel like I was smiling on Zoom for just straight up hours." She added, "I was expecting it to be like an interview kind of thing in the beginning where they like just want to get to know you ask you a lot of questions about yourself." Aly added that she was "drained" and "totally exhausted by the end of the day." The process of recruitment from planning to implementation had many impacts. Participants from every role indicated they struggled to make the transition and the rollout was not perfect.

Technology. Learning and adapting processes to a new technology took patience and practice. Individuals felt a great deal of concern in the transition; for example, Caroline shared that she worried "about the technical aspect" of virtual sorority recruitment. Aly said Zoom technology issues were "really difficult to deal with." She said the technology issues added to the stress of the recruitment experience. According to Ertmer et al. (2012), the most commonly cited reason for the lack of technology implementation in the classroom is inadequate professional development and training. A challenge that chapters had to figure out was how to play the videos on Zoom. Baylor said that figuring out how to play videos on Zoom was "one of the hardest things" they had to figure out. Ella reflected on virtual sorority recruitment and recommended if it were to occur again that leaders "can work out some of the kinks that like troubleshooting the tech all the technology struggles." She indicated, "Wi-Fi was a huge issue with everybody being

162

on it." Participants in recruitment were problem-solving issues that came up while they were in events. It required leaders to be calm under pressure.

The process of planning virtual sorority recruitment in a short period raised many questions. Miranda explained that many recruitment preparations were scheduled for the spring when COVID restrictions forced everyone to stay home. She said her chapter was "trying to figure out how we're supposed to do what we want to do, but still stay within those [safety] parameters that were given." Miranda listed several questions they had to answer, "How are we going to do breakout rooms? How are we going to still show these things that we need to show them in terms of like house tour videos? ... How are these rounds going to go? What do we need to do now?" Miranda added that Zoom logistics during recruitment were complicated to figure out. She reported:

> How are we going to have a Zoom room of … 150 women [in the chapter] … and …
> 80 women are PNMs? How are we going to do bumps? How are we going to, like, bring
> them back? What are what, what is the easiest process for them, and how are we going to
> do this with one person controlling the entire Zoom?

In a round, chapter members would rotate around the room, allowing each chapter member the opportunity to talk to several potential new members and vice versa. These groupings of chapter women were called "bump groups." The process of handing off the conversation from one chapter member to the next is called a "bump." The bump group worked together when they completed their membership selection process after the recruitment round. Many logistics go into each part of recruitment that is invisible to the potential new member. Chapters reinvented logistics to accommodate the online landscape.

During a recruitment round, Baylor experienced a technology user error. She explained that in the second round, "Me and this other girl were supposed to talk to [a PNM] and somehow the breakout rooms got weird and [a second PNM] got thrown into our room." Baylor explained how this was solved. She said, "So we had to try to handle talking to both of them. And then all sudden [the second PNM] left the [breakout] room." Baylor illustrated that there might be more variables in the virtual recruitment process. Chapter members needed to be prepared and flexible to handle these unknown variables on their own. Carly said, "A huge part of it is just like learning this new platform, [Zoom], that we're going to have to do [virtual sorority recruitment] on." Carly's questions included, "where am I actually going to recruit? ... What do I have to do to make sure that I look the best like that I usually do to recruit?" She said she also needed to "figure out the timeline and like the schedule." She added she needed to figure out the logistics so she could answer, "how do I actually recruit from my own home? And how do I do it virtually, and do I know like how to get myself from one breakout room to the next?" Carly had not grasped her responsibilities. Carly demonstrated that chapter recruiters had many unanswered questions about their expectations during the virtual sorority recruitment process. Cameron said that another problematic element of recruiting through online technology was "sitting in front of a laptop for 12 hours a day." Cameron added another downfall of technology was how easy it was to disengage. She reported, "I know that we had kind of issues… where sometimes we would just zone out,… sometimes we can turn our camera off and focus on our thing." While technology provided the solution that allowed Panhellenic to continue to host recruitment, it also created many issues for stakeholders to solve.

Communication. Communication was essential in a rapidly changing environment.

Many changes added to the implementation process's general confusion, including new guidelines, expectations, policies, and practices. Chapters, Panhellenic, and potential new members had to keep up with a large quantity of information that could change from one day to the next. Seeger and Sellnow's (2019) steps for communication in times of trouble inform some of the missteps with communication.

Nicole, the CPH Vice President of Recruitment, said the biggest challenge for virtual sorority recruitment was communication. She said, "I could say something 10 times in 10 different ways, and there would still be someone who didn't understand or who didn't read the email fully, and so we really just tried to over-communicate." Nicole came up with a thorough communication plan to solve this issue to leave "less room for miscommunication or confusion." Nicole stated that miscommunications happened "when people get frustrated… I just wanted to avoid that." This demonstrates the first tactic from Seeger and Sellnow (2019), taking a process approach. However, Cameron did not feel communication from Panhellenic was as clear as she needed. She said that she hoped to see "clear communication between Panhellenic and the chapters in the future." She said communication was complex during the planning of virtual sorority recruitment because they were "reinventing the recruitment process." This may have not fully fulfilled strong stakeholder partnerships, listening and acknowledging the chapters' concerns, and not communicating with honesty, frankness, and openness, as referenced in Seeger and Sellnow (2019). Baylor said her chapter "did struggle to communicate … the COVID guidelines from the fraternity and sorority life [office]." When communicating with a large group of people that have set structures, there can be communication bottlenecks. The break in a communication chain may happen when or how a leader chooses to pass on their membership

information. Misinformation, misinterpretation, or even not summarizing the relevant information to the stakeholders can create confusion.

Ella observed a setback that happened when chapter leaders did not correctly relay COVID guidelines to their chapter members. Several chapters incurred violations that happened between the first and second week of recruitment. Ella said that experience "was hard because [I was] like, trying to be this positive person and, like, try and set an example, and I think this is how the chapter presidents felt too." She said the violations resulted because "chapter leadership [was] frustrated with the decisions that were made, and they were actually made by the university, not Panhellenic, but Panhellenic was kind of the face of it, as it was going on." Ella said she thought that the leaders of the chapters who received sanctions were "just a little more hurt by what was going on" and chose to operate out of that negative emotional space rather than be "true leaders." Leaders from these struggling chapters may have been accepting information from sources that were not credible. They may also be miscommunicating their process approach, the fundamental communication block from Seeger and Sellnow (2019).

From a general chapter member's perspective, Caroline indicated that she did not receive transparent information about the arising issues during virtual recruitment. She demonstrated the need for honesty, frankness, and openness (Seeger & Sellnow, 2019). Caroline did not get the information she would have in-person because of the experience's isolated nature. She stated, "When something bad happened, people didn't find out about it until much later when arguably, we should have found out about something sooner." She said had they known about the issues earlier, "we might have acted differently. I feel like this that there's a level of transparency that probably inhibited people from being like great leaders." Ella explained that it was difficult to tell "150 to 200 women that they're not allowed to see their best friend when and take a picture

166

of them. This is their senior year, and it's the last time I am able to do it. So I think that was a big challenge."

Adding to communication troubles, chapter members picked up on several rumors that were spreading. Seeger and Sellnow (2019) state that it is crucial to collaborate and coordinate with credible sources. Caroline heard rumors that "sound awful." She explained the chapter was "really nervous … we weren't going to get any members because we had kind of heard some rumors... of other sororities … who had like bottom tier houses… who had recruitment before [us]… that didn't get any new members." She said the chapter was "worried that that would happen" to their chapter. Caroline recognized that the recruitment pool was smaller than in past recruitments. These rumors had the potential to be extremely damaging to the chapter's morale and progress. Overall, communication errors presented significant missteps for all participants in the recruitment process that required corrections to overcome.

Research Question 3: How did participants emotionally process the disruption to traditional recruitment methods during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Grieving Process. Processing this experience was extremely difficult for everyone involved. As themes began to emerge, so did patterns of emotional processing. The patterns followed the "Five Stages of Grief" model created by Kübler-Ross. At the end of May, Nicole went into a Zoom meeting with Cecilia, her advisor, regarding recruitment. At that point, Nicole did not know the fraternity and sorority life office elected to hold all their events virtually. During their meeting, Cecilia informed Nicole that fraternity and sorority life staff "made this decision as an office, to have recruitment be fully virtual for all of our councils." Nicole said, "I started crying, and I just felt really blindsided." She felt as though the statewide restrictions for

167

gathering in public indicated that "other states were stricter code wise … I could have gone to a restaurant, or I think my church was allowed to have services in-person again with masks and social distancing." Nicole added:

> It was really shocking to hear that recruitment would be fully virtual when it felt like things were opening up more … I was crying. I was thinking about all the work I have to do. And I was really just disappointed that in my role, I wouldn't get to do the fun things that I'd envisioned myself doing, like going on chapter visits and meeting potential new members in-person and standing on stage in front of 1,000 people getting to talk about the thing I was so passionate about. I was just really upset.

The process of implementing virtual sorority recruitment was emotional. Members had to let go of traditions and exciting events. Members of sororities and those who wished to join were grieving the loss of an honored and memorable tradition.

Denial. The first stage of Kübler-Ross' five stages of grief is denial. Denial is the belief that the phenomenon is somehow mistaken and cling to a false, preferable reality. In May, when the university announced staff were going back to the office, Cecilia said she thought, "Okay, like we're going back to the office like things are going back to normal, like, we'll be back there before the students get back. We'll be back in our routine." Cecilia did not recognize that the pandemic could extend past a short-term period. From the chapter's perspective, Carly said that there were "rumors going around that it was going to be like from in-person to like online, so everyone kind of had like an inkling, like oh it's probably going to change, but no one knew, like how much of it was going to be virtual or like, what it was going to look like."

Cecilia said her first thought about virtual recruitment was, "no way, it's not possible. It's not going to happen. There's absolutely no way that could happen." She explained the staff at

Midwestern University thought the pandemic would be over in a "couple of weeks, and then a few more things changed. And we thought, well, maybe a couple of months… the farther into [the pandemic], the more we realized how long term we were in for it." Miranda said she thought the pandemic "will be over by the end of the summer, whatever, like, we'll go back and it'll be normal like we'll still see each other. I don't know why everyone's freaking out about this right now."

When more information came available, chapter members began their conjecture on what the experience would be. Miranda said, "We all thought the … first two rounds of recruitment were going to be online because those are the bigger parties." She added, "And then the last two rounds, which are like your smaller sections, would be in-person." She stated, "We all thought [the pandemic] was all going to be over by the summer." Miranda said they heard around "May [that we were changing to virtual recruitment], I was like, this is gonna be over in like three months. Like, why are they making this decision right now?" Miranda said her reaction to that news was "some not great words flew out of my mouth … I think I just kind of sat there, like in shock ... I think that was the first [I realized] that this wasn't gonna be like a normal semester."

According to Nicole, during the summer, the CPH was still planning around a major football game. She said task force attendees spent much of the first meetings "trying to figure out a schedule that would let recruiters and potential new members still attend the game while also recruiting either that morning if it was a late game for that night if it was a morning game." Nicole said, "We completely rearranged our schedule around that game, and then two days after we finalize the schedule and sent it out to everyone, they canceled the game." During the COVID-19 pandemic, many states had executive orders that prevented large gatherings. Rules were changing, and universities negotiated with health officials to see what functions they could

169

keep for their fall 2020 semester. Many people desired to have a large event in fall 2020, demonstrating hope for a preferable reality that was incredibly unlikely. Cecilia said that the most significant resistance in the recruitment planning process was when they decided to switch to virtual recruitment early. She heard from the community, "why aren't we waiting until … we get closer to the school year or until we know more about our numbers?" Members of the community were willing to sacrifice the precious time they had left to cling to the reality that the COVID-19 pandemic would get better by the start of the fall 2020 semester.

Anger. When individuals are in the anger stage, they are frustrated. They ask, why me? It is not fair; how can this happen to me? Or Why would this happen? There was always a high emotional price tag with sorority recruitment. After members accepted that they had no choice but to accept virtual sorority recruitment as their target for planning, some moved into the second stage of grief. Participants shared some textbook examples of processing anger.

When Nicole learned the campus was switching to virtual recruitment, she said, "I cried a lot." She explained that they informed their chapters on June 1, 2020, that recruitment would be fully virtual at a task force meeting. She said, "we'd already set the task force up… and this just happened to be our first meeting." She said the task force was composed of "one representative from each chapter and my advisor." Nicole said she "was just angry at COVID. I just had a lot of resentment." Nicole said she felt like, "why me? Why now? Why when I have this role? You know, of all years. How did it happen to me? Just like I said, I really threw a pity party and was not very happy about it." Ella said that when she heard recruitment was going to be virtual, "I cried. I know other people began to cry." Ella said, "We [were] very much looking forward to the experience that the people [who] had our positions before had the opportunity to have, and just recruitment, in general, is such an exciting time that I think we wanted it to be in-person."

170

When Aly, a potential new member, learned she would not be participating in sorority recruitment she had anticipated, she said, "At first I was pretty upset because I had like had this picture of how my recruitment was going to go." She said she found videos on YouTube from people who advised potential new members. She said she was ready to "do all those things like go to the different houses and like run to like your next meeting. And like so when it was online. It kind of made me like mad I wasn't going to get that experience." Grace, a potential new member, explained, "I was definitely disappointed, for sure, because I was really excited to be like it just feels weird having that kind of thing that I've been researching." She said, "hearing it was online was like really heartbreaking because I was like, oh, like I wanted, I was like I was like really set on this image of what it was going to be like."

Ella explained that the decision was out of their hands. She said, "I think at first everybody was very frustrated because I know we as a council didn't feel heard." Cecilia said that she saw "a lot of emotion around the change [to virtual sorority recruitment]. So a lot of tears, a lot of frustration." Lisa explained that when she first learned of the change to virtual sorority recruitment, she heard from her friends in a group chat. They said they shared "how disappointed we were, sad." Cameron described the reaction as, "everyone [was] shocked, and they were upset." Baylor said, "Everyone was kind of upset." Lisa said, "I was very mad and sad because even like work week, like everything you know you do with your sisters is like friends in-person, and it was just very different being online." Some people stayed in this stage longer than others, who were able to work through it quickly.

Bargaining. The bargaining stage of grief is when individuals do what they can to avoid grief. Cecilia said the chapters tried negotiating about voting on virtual recruitment. She explained, "We didn't vote on going to virtual recruitment, and I got some pushback from that."

171

Her response was, "It wouldn't really have mattered [how they voted]. We were doing virtual recruitment, regardless, if they wanted to have recruitment at all." The chapters could not negotiate for the style of recruitment. The NPC had distributed guidance for a hybrid, fully-virtual, and in-person recruitment. However, Cecilia explained the only way they would be permitted to do recruitment by the university was fully-virtual. Had they planned hybrid recruitment, they would have switched to fully-virtual as the National Panhellenic Conference issued a communication two weeks before Midwestern University's recruitment. "NPC now formally recommends that all campuses enact their fully virtual recruitment experience contingency plan" (National Panhellenic Conference, 2020a).

Cecilia explained the place that she received the most feedback was from the parents of incoming students. She heard from parents of potential new members, "Why are you taking one more thing away? Why aren't you letting them have a normal college experience? They've already had such a hard senior year, and they're never going to get to get to know anybody this way." Cecilia stated, "It felt really crappy it felt very much like I was like it was like a personal choice." Another stakeholder to consider in this process are the parents of the participants. Some advocated through the fraternity and sorority advisor for an in-person experience for their children. Unfortunately, the circumstances were not improving to make in-person events a reality.

Chapter members had strong reactions to the switch to virtual sorority recruitment. Kelly explained that sorority members were threatening to withdraw from their chapter to keep in-person recruitment. She stated, "There were a lot of seniors that were, you know, really hoping to [be] in-person [during] and after recruitment." They reasoned there was not enough of a gain for the amount of money they put in the chapter. Kelly explained, "I think it was just there was a

172

whole lot of fear and unknowns. And so we were just kind of on edge for the rest of the summer, trying to figure out how this was all going to end up playing out." Cameron said she was asking questions like, "is this financially worth it?" She said the chapter had their "dues [reduced] for this semester in order to compensate for COVID, but we still had a lot of our members who, and to this day, who are still like … why am I paying these dues?" They say, "I don't understand, you know, where the money is going towards that we're not having in-person events?" Nicole, the College Panhellenic Vice President of Recruitment, said some people could have benefited from joining a sorority. They gave her their reason for not joining, "I don't want to pay for chapter dues if it's going to be fully virtual this year." Nicole said that she wished they could have brought in the potential new members to "give them that sisterhood, because I do think it's so valuable, but I understand that this year was obviously very different people had to make decisions based on their own personal wellbeing and financial backgrounds."

Ella explained that it was "a week after that until we were able to really see the plans kind of come together and kind of get over the fact that we didn't really have any other option. But it was upsetting." She added that "once the general members and other chapters started to find out, it was more trying to answer their questions and making sure they were okay because we already obviously got that time to be upset about it." Ella focused on moving members through the bargaining stage.

Depression. The fourth stage of grief is depression, which is when individuals despair when they recognize the event. Individuals may be silent, refuse visitors, and be mournful and sullen. As Cecilia processed the transition, she said, "I felt a little paralyzed for probably the first like three or four days of like are so many decisions and so many things happening. And so much unknown, just in general." Carly added, "I think people like including myself like I think

everyone had their like doubts or their worries initially like, oh my gosh, this will be awful."

People were moving quickly through this process because the short timeline for planning

recruitment pushed them to move quickly.

Nicole said the council put out "less information and there was less communication

between council executives and chapter executives because everyone felt this overwhelming

sense of too many Zoom calls too many emails, just kind of sensory overload." She added,

"There are also a lot of things that were being changed or canceled." She said that recruitment

chairs texted her and had more frequent casual communication. However, she knew chapters

were struggling to keep up and adapt to the changes for virtual sorority recruitment. Lisa said the

only response they felt they had as a chapter member was, "there was nothing we could do about

it really [other than] drop." However, once they moved past the initial reaction, Lisa noticed the

most challenging part to figure out for virtual sorority recruitment was "how to have that like

same energy as you would in-person just with everything. Just talking to the PNMs and also

doing the whole thing, honestly." Lisa identified that when they were not excited, it was hard to

generate excitement and positive energy.

The depression stage of grief hit people in a variety of different times and ways. Kelly

explained her view that chapters had much trouble with seniors "not paying attention or not

joining on Zoom calls because they didn't really see the reason for it." She added her chapter

"had this group of upperclassmen that were very, very against doing this all virtually that just

would not really be helpful in the participating type of thing." She said a couple of days before

recruitment, it "hit [the seniors] that they were not really doing a very good job of, you know,

helping us figure out how to work out the logistics." The sullen seniors became aware they "had

not really done a lot to help, and they were kind of putting the morale down of the group." Kelly

174

said, "a couple days of our recruitment, we kind of turned things around. But there was really they were not about it. They were very unhappy." As individuals move through the depression stages, characterized by a lack of passion and excitement, they move towards acceptance. Not all chapter members were able to make it through the five stages of grief, and some stuck in varying stages. Some may not have progressed out of the depression stage.

Acceptance. When individuals reach acceptance, they embrace an unstable future. Stable conditions of emotions characterize this. Some chapters and individuals participating in virtual sorority recruitment never made it to the acceptance stage because they felt the bitter loss of a treasured experience.

From the potential new member perspective, Grace said she "wasn't really influenced by [virtual sorority recruitment] at all." She said she "figured stuff will go online once things started getting crazy." She explained her reason for joining a sorority was that she "wanted to be involved all four years." Grace added that she understood why virtual sorority recruitment was occurring. She said, "I was upset, but I wasn't, like, devastated. I guess it was still happening. So I was okay with it." Some potential new members were excited to have their own sorority experience, no matter the circumstances.

Carly, a senior, explains how she felt she could accept the changes by processing them with her close friends. She said she "went to them just immediately and kind of tried to talk about like what was going on, how things are happening, what it's going to look like differently." She said, "I think at this point in my sorority life like I'm a senior, and I've seen like lots of good and bad things happen in the chapter." She explained, "Although initially it was kind of like a negative, I definitely kind of immediately was like, well, we have to deal with it anyways." Carly said she helped problem solve by asking, "How can we make it better? And like

what positive things can we do to like convince the chapter, that's a good thing to, like, help out to make this process run smoothly?" Chapter members were able to recognize that they were processing this information and see the bigger picture. Leaders like Carly are critical to the healthy functioning of a chapter as younger members in the chapter look up to seniors.

Cameron was the chapter leader who was responsible for Bid Day. When she began making her plans, she pulled her team together and asked them, "How can we transition these values of like belonging or inclusion or connectedness? How can we make that in an online environment?" Cameron polled her members and sought to inspire them. She asked them, "How can we be different? How can we provide experiences that are different from just online meetings?" Cameron explained those were their prominent, guiding questions. She said, "I don't know if we ended up succeeding doing that; we certainly tried." Chapter leaders in positions who could cope with the virus's circumstances could focus their energy on creating meaningful experiences for their members.

Cecilia said that "three-fourths of our chapters jumped on board pretty much right away, and I credit that I think to the inevitability of this situation." She added, "I don't think it was a huge shock to anybody that we headed that way as well as I think having their national organization also supporting that. So it was kind of coming from both sides." Cecilia gave an example of a chapter that accepted the COVID guidelines and was able to be high-functioning. She reported, "The point where they turn in an event form for an event and they have thought of stuff related to COVID precautions that even I haven't thought of." Cecilia said, "I think there's some really strong leadership there and like taking and adapting because they also haven't let that stop them, and they didn't let that stop them during recruitment either." She added, "They found ways to do those things, virtually, they found ways to engage their advisors to be really helpful,

they found ways to engage their [alumnae] who weren't local but now could Zoom in and could

help like practice and things like that." When chapters moved into the pandemic's acceptance

stage, they could safely operate and provide a meaningful experience for their membership.

Summary of Data Analysis

The goal of phenomenological research is to find commonalities among participants who

experience the phenomenon. A third-party company transcribed all thirteen interviews. I verified

every transcription against the original to review for accuracy. I hand-coded each transcription

three times, searching for emerging patterns, categories, and themes. I organized them based on

the research questions created for this study. All participant groups, potential new members,

general chapter members, chapter leaders, and the fraternity/sorority advisor provided quality

narrative data to analyze.

The first round of coding was done by searching for descriptive phrases, highlighting

phrases, and re-phrasing. I assigned phrases to a category. I read the transcripts a second time to

determine if the statements fit into the categories or if new categories emerged. I looked for

emerging themes and patterns and created subcategories to organize the data. I concluded data

gathering when the data reached saturation during the fourth round of coding. I organized data

into themes and subthemes.

Chapter 5. Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The first three chapters of this study covered an introduction to the topic, the significance of the study, a description of the phenomenological approach to qualitative inquiry, the data collection process, a literature review, and the research methodology for the study. Chapter 4 described the emerging themes and subthemes from the phenomenological study results, an analysis of the semi-structured interview data within each research question, and a summary of the data analysis. The qualitative study data contributed to a thorough analysis of the research questions. I matched the themes and subthemes that emerged with the related research questions focused on perceptions of benefits, challenges, and the emotional process of the virtual sorority recruitment model. This final chapter includes the conclusions of the research questions, recommendations for practice and future research, and concluding summaries.

Summary

One overarching research question and three supporting research questions guided this phenomenological research study. Semi-structured interviews and researcher memos helped me derive the necessary data to capture a holistic view of the participants' experience of the phenomenon of virtual sorority recruitment. The findings and conclusions of this research may help to inform future practice and can apply to the area of sorority recruitment. Implications of this study could help sorority headquarters staff or volunteers and fraternity and sorority advisors improve their best practices and processes. Using phenomenological qualitative inquiry, I collected an accurate portrayal of thirteen participants' experiences with the phenomenon of virtual sorority recruitment. The data transcribed from the participant interviews provided me with comprehensive and in-depth data of potential new members, general members, sorority

leaders, and fraternity/sorority advisor perceptions of virtual sorority recruitment. This section describes the conclusions for each research question of this study.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of the benefits of the virtual sorority recruitment model?

Thirteen out of 13 participants noted the convenience of meeting online. The theme that emerged was that participants saved time in their day when they did not have to travel or go through an extensive beautification routine. Participants did not feel pressure to fit their appearance to a set of standards outside of their typical routine. Grace, a potential new member, indicated that she enjoyed the conversations with the chapters. All three potential new members indicated the meaningful conversations they had with the chapters allowed them to make informed decisions during selections. Because the potential new members had deep, meaningful conversations with chapter members, they were able to form a tight bond with their matched sorority. Carly and Ella pointed out the focus on conversations also impacted the chapter members' experience. Aiello-Coppola (2018) explains the way fraternities and sororities build meaningful relationships is through internal programming to make members feel wanted and a sense of belonging. While chapters explored how they were planning to implement virtual sorority recruitment, sorority leaders paired chapter members in groups outside of their regular friend groups. Individuals like Carly and Ella recognized this as an opportunity to create deeper relationships with their affiliated sisters they did not know well. The participants in this study did not acknowledge the impact that virtual sorority recruitment may have for access or inclusion initiatives for all who experience marginalization or participation barriers, including: people who identify as non-binary or gender non-conforming, individuals who are neurodiverse or have

neurodifferences, and individuals with attention disorders. The experiences of these populations should be considered when reviewing access and inclusion policies.

The first priority listed in the "Membership Recruitment" section of NPC's Manual of Information is values-based recruitment. NPC prioritizes values-based principles during the recruitment planning and implementation process. They say, "Since NPC expects member organizations and their members to uphold shared values, those values should be displayed through the activities of College Panhellenics and individual chapters" (National Panhellenic Conference, 2021a, p. 95). Roof (2013) recommended that sororities continue pushing for "no-frills" and values-based recruitment practices. The themes supporting this research question fit neatly into the categories NPC outlines as essential for values-based recruitment. Three out of three potential new members, five out of six general members, and two out of three sorority leaders indicated they felt less pressure to alter their appearance to satisfy the chapter members' perceived judgment. Participants noticed the reduction in pressure during the sorority recruitment process; this allowed them to enjoy the conversations with each other more freely. Miller (2003) indicated that individuals with high self-monitoring tend to notice cues for socially appropriate behavior and modify one's behavior accordingly. They are more likely than low self-monitors to use clothing to attain social approval. Eight out of 13 participants recognized that sorority recruitment online was more accessible to individuals' physical, mental, and emotional differences. All 13 participants recognized that virtual sorority recruitment created a healthy and safe environment for recruiting new members during a global pandemic. The CDC (2021) indicated that decreasing one's chance of getting and spreading COVID-19 individuals should not gather with people who do not live in the same household. Attending events and gatherings increases the risk of getting and spreading COVID-19 (Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention, 2021, February 18). All three of the potential new members interviewed wanted the

opportunity to join a sorority. Virtual sorority recruitment allowed that to occur. All chapter

members, chapter leaders, and the fraternity/sorority advisor acknowledged membership

recruitment's essential nature to continue. Roof (2013) stated taking into consideration the

history of Panhellenic sororities and their recruitment practices, it is only fair to assume that

formal sorority recruitment will not fade away soon. During their interviews, participants

highlighted lessons they learned and how they grew due to virtual sorority recruitment. Kase et

al. (2016) found that sorority membership (though not participation in recruitment) was

associated with increased feelings of belonging for women who successfully completed

recruitment. Unsuccessful participants did increase a temporary decrease in feelings of belonging

during the recruitment process but recovered to baseline two months later.

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of the challenges in the virtual sorority

recruitment model?

Virtual sorority recruitment happened during a period of great adversity. The COVID-19

global pandemic created an environment that contradicted the driving purpose of sororities,

friendship. Thirteen out of 13 participants experienced a disruption in building relationships with

new connections and old friends. There is no research available for comparison. However, the

need is clear, "it is critically important to understand the impact and consequences of the

pandemic on U.S. college students because the pandemic's impacts will not only affect the

students personally but the future of our nation" (Columbia University Irving Medical Center,

2020). Due to the disconnect created by distance, some chapter members began to question their

purpose and did not have the same excitement to participate in sorority recruitment activities. All

participants indicated the significant losses resulting from the isolation from participating in

separate locations. Kelly struggled to make connections through technology barriers. General members and potential new members felt limited because they could not read the full spectrum of cues from body language received during an in-person conversation. Communication can be impacted by the audio-video quality, the lack of body language information, and users' confusion in exchanging gazes, as it is hard to understand where people are looking (Cataldo et al., 2021).

All 13 participants were able to indicate a flaw with the implementation process of virtual sorority recruitment. Their critiques included confusing communication, lack of communication, the inability to control the program's direction, and struggles with technology. Combined, these components create challenging communication during a crisis (Seeger and Sellnow, 2019). Three participants noted they had no involvement in the decision to switch to fully-virtual sorority recruitment but wished they had. The implementation process for virtual sorority recruitment happened in an extremely abbreviated timeframe. Sometimes, the leaders over the experience had to make decisions that required participants to learn a new way of doing a traditional routine. Cecilia explained those moments required chapters to use "creative thinking" and "flexibility." Chapters who did not "were very stagnant" or unsuccessful in their conduct or recruitment. Seeger and Sellnow (2019) indicate that accepting ambiguity during a crisis will create better results for the stakeholders.

Research Question 3: How did participants emotionally process the disruption to the traditional recruitment process during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The change in the traditions to sorority recruitment came suddenly to some participants. COVID-19 altered everyday life routines. When the virus was announced in the United States, very little was known about its spread (Haleem et al., 2020). With varying responses throughout

182

the United States, the spread of COVID-19 hit some regions harder than others. COVID-19 also became a politicized topic accompanied by views ranging from high political polarization levels and extremely low levels of trust in government institutions (Shepherd et al., 2020). As Cecilia shared, she did not grasp the longevity of the impact of the virus. During the interviews, participants shared insight into how they coped with the pandemic and virtual sorority recruitment intersection. The Kübler-Ross grieving model emerged with participants sharing their experiences in each stage. All 13 participants shared their initial reaction was shock of some form. Carly deviated from the group as she calmly and rationally explained that she almost immediately put others' experiences before herself. She transitioned to acceptance and recognized that she had influence as a leader with social capital in her chapter, which would assist the chapter leaders.

Carly, Cecilia, Miranda, and Nicole illustrated denial that the COVID-19 pandemic would continue to hold the country in its grip from May through September. They hoped the pandemic would dissipate, and they could go back to their routines. However, as the pandemic continued, some became angry at the circumstances. Nicole illustrated this stage when she asked herself why the pandemic hit during her presidency. She said, "why me? Why now?" Moving into the bargaining stage, Kelly indicated that she heard from some chapter members that they did not want to participate if sorority functions were virtual. Participants saw bargaining with the group and indicated they personally engaged in bargaining to keep in-person sorority traditions. Several participants indicated the funk hanging over the virtual sorority recruitment experience like a cloud. At the time of the interviews, participants were still dealing with the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some were not able to make it to the acceptance stage. Psychologists have labeled the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic as acute traumatic stress,

which is a direct threat to our life or the lives of others we know (University of California San Francisco Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, n.d.). The loss of how things were results in a collective sense of grief.

Conclusions

Previous chapters described the emerging themes and subthemes from the phenomenological study results, an analysis of the semi-structured interview data within each research question, and a summary of the data analysis. The qualitative study data contributed to a thorough analysis of the research questions. I matched the themes and subthemes that emerged with the related research questions focused on perceptions of benefits, challenges, and the emotional process of the virtual sorority recruitment model. A summary of the themes was provided in chapter five, situating these findings in context. From the three research questions guiding this study, the following findings and conclusions were revealed.

The Loss of In-Person Recruitment due to COVID-19 was Traumatic

Participants in virtual sorority recruitment from all participant types indicated the loss of in-person recruitment was significant, disruptive, and traumatic. Participants looked forward with great anticipation to sorority recruitment. They had pre-conceived hopes about the experience, making life-long friends, having tons of fun, but these fell short because the pandemic persisted through the summer of 2020 and into the fall academic semester. Members grieved the loss of this experience.

Virtual Sorority Recruitment Broke Entrenched Traditions

Many elements of in-person Panhellenic recruitment developed into a series of routine traditions. Many of these traditions were called frills and were superfluous to the process. Over

time, recruitment evolved into an experience that was the first product sororities sold to interested potential new members. It required potential new members to appear through dress and body language a certain way. These traditions intimated the sorority culture was to strive for perfection, be conversationalists, and live with excess to potential new members. Chapters were stuck in a loop, continually trying to outspend and outperform each other. Virtual sorority recruitment forced chapters to break the competitive cycle by stripping the experience back to the experience's foundational components. Chapters could not spend money on decorations and food to buy the hearts of potential new members.

Generally Unhappy with Video Conferencing, but Better Conversations

Participants did not enjoy participating in the Zoom video conferencing platform's virtual sorority experience because they missed the experience of connecting with others in-person. However, participants indicated that the video conferencing platform allowed them to have more productive conversations. Participants indicated they were focused less on appearance and superficial factors. As a result, fewer participants engaged in fewer conversations that felt meaningless and had more meaningful conversations. They also noted they were able to hear each other better. Participants explained that they could have meaningful conversations on topics that drew them together based on shared values by eliminating distractions.

Participants Struggled to Build Relationships with Each Other

Chapter members had past recruitment experience to draw on. They indicated that they missed the informal opportunities to build relationships with individuals outside of their immediate friend groups from that experience. They indicated that the settings like work week and in-between recruitment rounds when they were paired randomly allowed them to establish and build new relationships. That opportunity did not exist in the logistics of the highly-

185

structured work week and recruitment experiences during virtual sorority recruitments. Potential new members missed the opportunity to meet others during the process of recruitment. Participants recognized the informal opportunities while waiting for rounds with Rho Gamma groups while lining up to go into chapter structures. Potential new members felt connected to their chapters and the recruiters within their chapters, but they had little opportunity to meet new people.

Virtual Sorority Recruitment is More Convenient, Accessible, and Safe.

Participants recognized that virtual sorority recruitment was a more convenient schedule to manage, particularly for the first rounds. Participants indicated they felt more comfortable with what they wore, their beauty routine, and recruiting or participating in recruitment from home. Participants indicated they felt like participating in the program was easier for individuals with hearing loss or difficulties and mobility impairments. Participants also listed a safe way to participate in a large event during the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtual recruitment can reduce the spread of highly contagious viruses, making a safer experience.

Compressed Planning Timeline led to Imperfect Implementation

Compressed planning resulted in improvements to communication systems but created other significant challenges. The unknown issues created by COVID-19 were challenging to resolve. Problems ranged and intersected as they were predictable, unpredictable, simple, and complicated. Each issue required careful consideration for potential known and unknown outcomes. Some of these issues were foreseeable, but handling unexpected complications was challenging. The recruitment experience is vast, which means that what seems like a minor glitch could create significant, unsolvable problems during the event. During a pandemic with minimal margin for error, this had significant consequences.

Recommendations for Practice

Data collected for this phenomenological qualitative study provided evidence for the following recommendations for virtual sorority recruitment practice.

- Sorority administrators and leaders should acknowledge the loss of recruitment in their communication with all stakeholders.

- Broadly, for organizations with major events, leaders should acknowledge the loss of a much anticipated event or activity in their communication with their stakeholders.

- Sorority administrators should evaluate their previous in-person recruitment trends for unhealthy entrenched traditions and eliminate them wherever possible. The focus of recruitment should be creating a positive process for potential new members.

- For broader organizational event management, after adapting to a fully virtual event, organizers and leaders should critically evaluate and review their event for unhealthy practices. This can include areas with risk management concerns, scheduling pressures, and high-spending areas in budgets.

- Sorority administrators and general event administrators should evaluate past in-person recruitment experiences or events for opportunities to improve accessibility and access to the sorority or event experience.

- The highest populated rounds of recruitment should occur virtually. Preference should occur in-person. If virtual rounds occur, Rho Gammas should be encouraged to meet with their Rho Gamma groups to foster a sense of belonging and connection.

- The Primary Panhellenic Advisor should set up a communication plan that clearly outlines where recruitment updates will be distributed and stored and where questions may be submitted.

187

- Event managers should have a specific communication plan where stakeholders can easily access information.

Sorority leaders and general event leaders should acknowledge the loss of the highly anticipated event personally and with all participants in the experience. By acknowledging and talking about the emotions surrounding the changes to a significant event, participants will be encouraged to process their feelings and move to a stage of acceptance. Allowing participants to express their thoughts is a coping skill that will allow participants to process their trauma.

Campus administrators and College Panhellenic Councils should evaluate their recruitment process to determine what frills and traditions used during in-person recruitment created an unhealthy environment. To accomplish this, they could send a survey to the potential new member participants and chapter recruitment administrators to gather data that will indicate what elements of the experience were essential. If the community is resistant to change, an outside evaluator should be brought in to manage the survey and compile results and recommendations. In non-sorority speak for general organizations, a critical eye should be cast on the event. The disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic created an opportunity to make significant changes that can improve access and inclusion.

Campus administrators, College Panhellenic Councils, and chapters should conduct assessments on their recruitment's physical experience to determine if an in-person experience is accessible to those with hearing loss or mobility impairments. They should seek support and feedback from campus disability services officers or other accessibility experts and implementing recommendations based on their campus's unique needs. This should be done proactively to create a space that leads with inclusivity rather than accommodating on a case-by-case basis. The convenience and participation of recruitment administrators and participants

should be considered. Meetings that are informational or involve stakeholders that cannot travel to campus should be conducted using a video-conference style platform. The health season should also be considered. Spring recruiting campuses may have to contend with contagious viruses like strep throat, flu, or norovirus. Considerations should be made to keep rooms from being over-occupied, lending to a virus' spread. Campuses may also consider requiring face wearing during in-person events, social distancing, and hand sanitizing during recruitment experiences.

Campuses that have multiple rounds of recruitment should consider hosting virtual rounds for their highest populated rounds. This will allow participants to focus on values-based recruitment and reduce the pressure of the recruitment experience. If in-person options are available during sorority recruitment, campuses should allow Rho Gamma groups to meet in-person before the first virtual recruitment rounds. Campuses should conduct their preference round in-person to allow chapter members and potential new members to meet in-person. This will allow chapter members and potential new members to create meaningful relationships in less overwhelming and more personalized scenarios. It will allow campuses to manage preference selections in-person, eliminating confusion during the preference selection process through video conferencing platforms.

The primary Panhellenic advisor or event communication team should set up communication systems that allow for the precise distribution of information to recruitment stakeholders. This includes using group text messaging platforms, shareable cloud drives that save past minutes for easy recall, and transparent meetings to discuss changes and seek ideas. As questions arise, Panhellenic recruitment administrators should prioritize listing these questions in a frequently asked questions document and finding solutions to problems. Information needs to

be made readily available to potential new members through statements on websites and updates in emails while using social media and videos to reiterate the statements' messages. Rho Gamma groups should contact potential new members to reinforce and support the statements. Campus leaders should seek answers to their questions and work on proactive messaging within their chapters.

These five recommendations are based on the study findings and are applicable at the chapter, College Panhellenic Council, headquarters, or National Panhellenic Conference level. They are also applicable to event organizers responsible for large-scale events with complicated logistics. Evaluating and re-designing the sorority recruitment experience allows for sororities to make their experience more inclusive to those seek sorority membership. The sorority experience provides a valuable social network, learning opportunities, and experiences that positively supplement the undergraduate higher education experience.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study described the experience of some participants in the virtual sorority recruitment process. Because there is limited research regarding the impact of the COVID-19 on sorority operations, continued research is necessary. Future studies should take different approaches to examine the effects of COVID-19 on sorority operations, especially building relationships, adhering to guidelines, and the sorority experience's financial burden.

Recommendations for future studies include:

- Narrative-style documentation of the process campuses took to switch to virtual sorority recruitment and how it impacted participants' perceptions of the experience
- Mixed methods research exploring potential new members' interest in pursuing affiliation

190

- Mixed methods research on how body language is different between in-person and through web-conferencing platforms

- Qualitative research on how sorority culture changed during and as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic

- Mixed methods research on the impacts of the limited casual engagement between participants and potential new members during the majority of the spring 2020 semester and fall 2020 recruitment

- Qualitative research on why eligible individuals chose not to join sororities during the fall 2020 semester

- Mixed methods research on the impacts of expanded access to sororities through Continuous Open Bidding

I recommend that future research be conducted to explore why a potential member may or may not choose to participate in the primary recruitment process at institutions with National Panhellenic Conference member organization campuses. Research sharing the reasons individuals are or are not choosing to join a sorority demonstrates the current demand and relevancy of undergraduate sororities. This awareness could help sororities understand their position on their campus and make strides to assist the student body's needs. Information should be provided on the impacts of the primary recruitment process on potential new members. The sorority experience can be a potent change agent, but before a member can join, she may experience significant damage through facing a process that could reject an eligible and worthy candidate. Individuals who experience strong negative emotions before joining may add to negative stereotypes or biases around sororities. Web conferencing appeared to be a satisfactory solution for many types of meetings and interactions. Researchers should explore the

191

implications in a conversation regarding the impact of a lack of in-person connecting through body language. The COVID-19 pandemic changed many elements of culture in the United States. Future studies should capture this dynamic period in global history to indicate how practices change due to the pandemic.

Concluding Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the perceptions of sorority members and affiliated personnel regarding College Panhellenic Council virtual sorority recruitment at a large public university in the Midwestern United States. Chapter 1 introduced the need for research on virtual sorority recruitment and included the statement of the problem, research questions, definitions, and the limitations and delimitations of the study. Chapter 2 presented a literature review exploring the prominent themes of the history of women's fraternities, the National Panhellenic Conference, the history of Panhellenic recruitment, online student engagement, leadership, and the grieving process. Chapter 3 described the research methodology and the study design. It included the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, setting, population, sampling strategy, data collection procedures, measures of rigor, and data analysis. Chapter 4 presented my interpretation of the study's data, including participant provides, researcher notes and memos, interview results for all research questions. The research questions explored emerging themes and subthemes and data analysis. Chapter 5 presented the virtual sorority recruitment to conclude the study and summarize the study's key points about all research questions and recommendations for further research and practice.

As a phenomenological study, this research cannot generalize all participants' virtual sorority recruitment experiences. This study arose out of curiosity as the COVID-19 pandemic

eroded treasured and ensconced experiences. The higher education landscape is changing

rapidly, which will require extra-curricular programs like sorority membership to shed outdated

traditions and adapt to the new environments. This study presented suggestions for future

research to help secure the relevancy of the sorority experience.

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Title of Research Study: Sororities Surviving COVID-19: A Case Study of Panhellenic Virtual Sorority Recruitment
Principal Investigator: Maggie Darden
Principal Investigator's Contact Information: DARDENM@ETSU.EDU, (423)718-5430
Organization of Principal Investigator: East Tennessee State University

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR POTENTIAL NEW MEMBERS/NEW MEMBERS

Establish Common Meaning

Please tell me your age, gender, ethnicity, years as a member of a sorority and your educational background.

Have you participated in a primary (formal) sorority recruitment before? If so, how did you participate?

Tell me the story about why you registered to join a sorority? How did virtual recruitment influence your interest?

Have you ever taken online classes? What are your experiences with online activities? Can you give some examples of your experiences using tools such as YouTube, Zoom, Facebook Live, or Instagram Live?

What is your opinion of the future of online activities?

Perceptions of Virtual Recruitment Model

Can you tell me the story about when you heard the recruitment model was shifting from an in-person experience? What were your first thoughts about the shift? How did it make you feel?

Tell me the story about what you did to prepare to participate in virtual sorority recruitment? Did you do research before the official process started? Did you talk to members of sororities? What questions did you have then?

Do you feel like the perspective of a person participating in virtual sorority recruitment was considered in the making of the plans? If yes, what things stood out to you as beneficial? What stood out to you as challenging?

Perceptions of Leadership with Virtual Delivery

What skills did you need to successfully participate in virtual sorority recruitment?

Tell me about times when you witnessed leadership during virtual sorority recruitment? Was it from your recruitment guide, the Panhellenic Council, or from a chapter leader?

What kind of communication did you receive about the transition to virtual sorority recruitment? Was it sufficient? What would you change?

What was the most helpful thing or person to you while you participated in virtual sorority recruitment?

Future of Virtual Recruitment Delivery

Now that you're done, name something that went better than you expected? Worse than you expected?

What was the biggest difference in your expectation of sorority recruitment versus the reality of virtual sorority recruitment?

If you had to do this again next year, what would you change? What would you keep the same?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR GENERAL MEMBERS

Establish Common Meaning

Please tell me your age, gender, ethnicity, years as a member of a sorority and your educational background.

Have you participated in a primary (formal) sorority recruitment before? If so, how did you participate?

Tell me the story about why you registered to join a sorority? How did virtual recruitment influence your interest?

Can you give an example of a time you managed an event with complicated logistics? What type of event was it?

Have you ever taken online classes? What are your experiences with online activities? Can you give some examples of your experiences using tools such as YouTube, Zoom, Facebook Live, or Instagram Live?

What is your opinion of the future of online activities?

Perceptions of Virtual Recruitment Model

Can you tell me the story about when you heard the recruitment model was shifting from an in-person experience? What were your first thoughts about the shift? How did it make you feel?

When you were working on putting your plan together to transition to a virtual recruitment model, where did you start? Who was on your processing team? What were your first steps? What were the hardest things to figure out?

Did you witness major resistance to the change to virtual recruitment? Was it a certain group of people?

Did you witness people quick to accept this change? What features of the virtual recruitment model did they list as beneficial?

Perceptions of Leadership with Virtual Delivery

What skills did you need to successfully participate in virtual sorority recruitment?

Tell me about times when you witnessed leadership during virtual sorority recruitment? Was it from your recruitment guide, the Panhellenic Council, or from a chapter leader?

Tell me about times when people were better at making leadership decisions. Tell me about times when people were worse at making leadership decisions.

How did communication change in the chapter?

What new educational programming did you have to create? What was the purpose of the program(s)?

Future of Virtual Recruitment Delivery

Now that you're done, what do you think was an intentional consequence? Did something go better than you expected? Worse than you expected?

What were the major differences between this method and face to face?

If you had to do this again next year, what would you change? What would you keep the same?

Title of Research Study: Sororities Surviving COVID-19: A Case Study of Panhellenic Virtual Sorority Recruitment
Principal Investigator: Maggie Darden
Principal Investigator's Contact Information: DARDENM@ETSU.EDU, (423)718-5430
Organization of Principal Investigator: East Tennessee State University

<u>INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER PRESIDENTS, RECRUITMENT CHAIRS, CHAPTER ADVISORS, AND RECRUITMENT ADVISORS</u>

Establish Common Meaning

Please tell me your age, gender, ethnicity, years as a member of a sorority and your educational background.

Have you participated in a primary (formal) sorority recruitment before? If so, how did you participate?

Tell me the story about why you registered to join a sorority? How did virtual recruitment influence your interest?

Can you give an example of a time you managed an event with complicated logistics? What type of event was it?

Have you ever taken online classes? What are your experiences with online activities? Can you give some examples of your experiences using tools such as YouTube, Zoom, Facebook Live, or Instagram Live?

What is your opinion of the future of online activities?

Perceptions of Virtual Recruitment Model

Can you tell me the story about when you heard the recruitment model was shifting from an in-person experience? What were your first thoughts about the shift? How did it make you feel?

When you were working on putting your plan together to transition to a virtual recruitment model, where did you start? Who was on your processing team? What were your first steps? What were the hardest things to figure out?

Did you witness major resistance to the change to virtual recruitment? Was it a certain group of people?

Did you witness people quick to accept this change? What features of the virtual recruitment model did they list as beneficial?

Perceptions of Leadership with Virtual Delivery

What skills did you need to improve to lead the chapter through this transition? What strengths and skills did you need to lead the chapter through this transition?

Tell me about times when people were better at making leadership decisions. Tell me about times when people were worse at making leadership decisions.

How did communication change in the chapter? How did communication change within the leadership?

What new educational programming did you have to create? What was the purpose of the program(s)?

Future of Virtual Recruitment Delivery

Now that you're done, what do you think was an intentional consequence? Did something go better than you expected? Worse than you expected?

What were the major differences between this method and face to face?

If you had to do this again next year, what would you change? What would you keep the same?

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Organization of Principal Investigator: East Tennessee State University

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FRATERNITY AND SORORITY ADVISOR

Establish Common Meaning

Please tell me your age, gender, ethnicity, years as a member of a sorority and your educational background.

Tell me the story about your experience with sorority recruitment. How many years have you administrated recruitment? What other major changes have you witnessed? Anything that created disruption on this scale (like going from frills to no-frills recruitment)?

What type of professional support do you have (in your office, colleagues, sorority/fraternity connections)?

Have you ever taken online classes? What are your experiences with online activities? Can you give some examples of your experiences using tools such as YouTube, Zoom, Facebook Live, or Instagram Live?

Perceptions of Virtual Recruitment Model

Can you tell me the story about when you heard the recruitment model was shifting from an in-person experience? What were your first thoughts about the shift? How did it make you feel?

When you were working on putting your plan together to transition to a virtual recruitment model, where did you start? Who was on your processing team? What were your first steps? What were the hardest things to figure out?

Did you witness major resistance to the change to virtual recruitment? Was it a certain group of people?

Did you witness people quick to accept this change? What features of the virtual recruitment model did they list as beneficial?

Perceptions of Leadership with Virtual Delivery

What skills do you think chapter leadership needed to improve to lead the chapter through this transition? What strengths and skills did chapter leadership needed to lead the chapter through this transition?

Tell me about times when people were better at making leadership decisions. Tell me about times when people were worse at making leadership decisions.

How did communication change in the community? How did communication change within the leadership?

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Principal Investigator: Maggie Darden
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Organization of Principal Investigator: East Tennessee State University

What new educational programming did you have to create? What was the purpose of the program(s)?

Future of Virtual Recruitment Delivery

Now that you're done, what do you think was an intentional consequence? Did something go better than you expected? Worse than you expected?

What were the major differences between this method and face to face?

If you had to do this again next year, what would you change? What would you keep the same?

VITA

MARGARET ANNE DARDEN

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	B.S.W. Social Work, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2012
	Notre Dame High School, Chattanooga, Tennessee
Professional Experience:	Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2017-Present
	Admissions Counselor, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2015-2017
	Collegiate Operations Specialist, Sigma Kappa Sorority, Indianapolis, Indiana, 2014-2015
	Graduate Assistant, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Center for Leadership and Involvement-Fraternity and Sorority Life, 2012-2014
Publications:	Darden, Margaret, A. (2014). Book review: More than Title IX: How equity in education has shaped the nation. *AFA Essentials*. Association of Fraternity/ Sorority Advisors.

Honors and Awards: Lifelong Learner Award, ETSU Division of Student Life and

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Summit Awards, 2020