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NOT "SLATED" FOR LEADERSHIP: BARRIERS AND UNCLEAR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS IN PANHELLENIC SORORITY MEMBERS

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Abstract

National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) sororities promote leadership development and student learning as membership benefits. However, many women may not gain these experiences if they are not selected or placed on the leadership slate to be collectively voted into an executive position because the emphasis is on positional development. There is little research that nuances the different ways in which sorority women experience leadership development within their chapters. This qualitative study explored the leadership experiences of NPC sorority women who obtained leadership experiences to nuance to what extent sororities facilitate these experiences. It was found that not all members have equal access to these leadership opportunities, as there are structural barriers and unclear pathways for leadership development. Members sought non-traditional forms of leadership development without the context of connecting their own member experiences. Implications for practice are included to integrate findings from this study to inform practice for student involvement professionals, which may help improve programming and the experience provided to their student leaders.

Sororities in the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) offer leadership experiences through civic and chapter leadership experiences (Taylor, 2010). Each of the 26 member organizations also offers leadership development through regional and national programming at conferences, personal development programs, and by placing them in positions of responsibility on their chapter executive boards (Long & Snowden, 2011). Student involvement professionals also plan retreats and workshops to develop leadership skills (Martin et al., 2012). Little is known about how sorority women experience these leadership programs and development opportunities. Further, it is also unclear the extent to which all members benefit from these leadership opportunities or just those in the leadership positions that hold responsibility (Long & Snowden, 2011).

Women in NPC sororities are often placed into these roles of influence and responsibility through the slating process and then voted collectively as a singular executive board by their chapter peers (Schoper et al., 2020). The slating process has very little research support in furthering sorority leadership development, and scant research explores NPC sorority leadership development. Further, little is understood about how other members gain leadership development if they do not have a leadership position.

In this study, a leadership position is defined as serving on the chapter executive board. The executive board is the governing committee that holds responsibility and power for chapter operations. The composition can vary in size depending on the organization's traditions and the chapter's size. A tertiary component consists of

non-executive board positions such as chairs or directors with defined responsibilities. These positions are delegated tasks by the executive board.

Students are increasingly seeking leadership skills to grow during their undergraduate experience (Dugan & Komives, 2010; Schoper et al., 2020). The development of leadership skills is a significant component of the experience espoused by sororities (Taylor, 2010). Exploring the scope of sorority leadership experiences and to what extent sororities or campuses facilitate these experiences may help improve programming and the experience provided to their members.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing critiques and summaries of fraternity/sorority leadership development highlight the lack of a gendered context (Barber et al., 2020). It centers fraternity men and lacks recognition of the nuanced ways in which sorority women develop leadership (Schoper et al., 2020). This literature review includes a brief overview of co-curricular learning, women's leadership development, and sorority leadership development with the assumption that women should be understood from the position of role expectations and restrictions (Davis, 2009).

Co-Curricular Learning

Leadership development is a form of co-curricular learning which promotes integration between curricular and co-curricular learning spaces (Schoper et al., 2020). Continued participation creates interconnections between academic and outside-the-classroom learning which facilitates student development and learning and promotes individual student persistence (Tinto, 1993; Peck, 2018; Wolf-Wendel, et al., 2009). This form of learning also offers opportunities for connections to organizational meaning-making for values development and provides social capital with an increased sense of belonging, particularly among low-income students or Students of Color (Garcia & Shirley, 2020; Schoper et al., 2020; Tull et al., 2022).

This is salient concerning women's co-curricular participation access (Tillapaugh, 2019). Bureau et al. (2021) interrogated the systems of power to suggest that social class and other factors, such as race, filter who has access to co-curricular learning, particularly in fraternal organizations. Arnold and Barratt (2015) acknowledged that these organizations transmit social and prestige culture capital on campus through leadership programs or social skill development. Access is important to many women who perceive sororities to be a condition for social mobility (Bureau et al., 2021). Yet, there is a dearth of women's programs and specific programs targeted for their leadership development (Armstrong et al., 2014; Reyes et al., 2019).

Women's Leadership Development

College men and women develop leadership differently, particularly regarding how women negotiate power structures to navigate into higher positions (Marsden & Andrade, 2018). For example, Goodman (2021) noted that fraternity members might vote for their members into leadership, such as for student government association (SGA), over a more deserving female candidate. Gilligan (1993) suggested that women view leadership as responsibility, relationship building, and cooperation. Additionally, women believe leaders should empower others and work towards shared outcomes (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) suggested that women leaders in educational settings tended to use relational leadership in which women value having power with, rather than power over. This concept suggests a concept of horizontal, not hierarchical, power (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).

Reyes et al. (2019) noted, in a meta-analysis, the effectiveness of comprehensive leadership development programs and found that participation improved students' ability to become better leaders, rather than if they are actual leaders. They suggested that student affairs professionals place too much emphasis on learning outcomes and do not teach students how to transfer their newly learned leadership skills which they term the *transfer problem* (Reyes et al., 2019). This problem of application is particularly salient for college women in which their participation in leadership programs lacks a gendered context.

In coeducational environments, undergraduate women are challenged with balancing perceptions of acceptable leadership behaviors when working with male students (Mujani & Muttaqin, 2012). A primary obstacle is the gender bias women experience when considering leadership. It occurs when men doubt women's ability to lead in a large setting which causes them to reconsider their leadership abilities (Rhode, 2019). Thus, they are not able to engage in authentic leadership styles or relational leadership and instead experience difficulty earning the support of female peers (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Mujani & Muttaqin, 2012). Mentorship between women is especially salient in Women of Color in promoting leadership interests (Winkle-Wagner, 2010).

However, there are limited opportunities for women to intentionally engage in reflective learning about women's leadership styles because of the historical emphasis on "women's lack of access to positions of power (Carli & Eagley, 2001, p. 634). There is a lack of specifically designed women's leadership development, such as comprehensive curricular programs beyond position-specific, task-oriented, educational speaker events (Ericksen, 2009). Sororities offer some promise as sites for women's leadership development (Schoper et al., 2020). Yet, they lack womens' contexts, as Taylor (2010) noted that sorority leadership programs lack a context of women's identity and specifically do not intentionally include any women's leadership theory.

Leadership Development in Sororities

NPC member sorority participation broadly suggests positive educational outcomes (Martin et al., 2012). Women may seek leadership opportunities in NPC sororities to increase their capacity as they perceive sororities as pathways for their leadership development (Reynolds, 2020; Sasso, Nasser, et al., 2020). Their members have conceptualized the process of leadership as a growth process and an individual who inspires others to believe that everyone can be a leader (Reynolds, 2020). Sorority members are more engaged on campus, have a higher sense of purpose, benefit by developing leadership skills, and offer opportunities to practice and gain leadership experiences (DiChiara, 2009; Long, 2012).

Undergraduate sorority participation leads to increases in significant involvement and gains in leadership development during the first year of college compared to unaffiliated students (Aren et al., 2014; Chiara, 2009; Martin et al., 2012). However, these gains are equalized by the senior year when no significant differences exist (Hevel et al., 2014). NPC women primarily experience leadership development through holding leadership positions which is related to extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability (DiChiara, 2009; Martin et al., 2012; Harms et al., 2006). There are many other benefits to becoming a leader or officer in a chapter (Gastfield, 2020; Kelley, 2008; Long & Snowden, 2011).

Sorority chapter leaders demonstrate gains in leadership skills, diverse interactions, sense of belonging, interpersonal relationship skills, and self-perceived leadership ability (Long & Snowden, 2011; Martin et al., 2012). By the end of their college experience, sorority members believe in their ability to influence others at a higher rate than unaffiliated students (Hevel et al., 2014). However, there are limitations to these leadership experiences and opportunities. Sorority members do not have the opportunity to practice leadership if they do not hold a position (Long, 2012; Long & Snowden, 2011).

Only sorority chapter leaders experience executive meetings, retreats, and roundtables from campus programming (Long & Snowden, 2011). Similarly, only chapter leaders receive leadership programming from their inter/national headquarters, which has been found to only develop increased values congruence (Taylor, 2010). Other competencies, such as listening skills, finding one's voice, and developing self-confidence, are not fully conceptualized in inter/national headquarters leadership programming (Taylor, 2010). The overemphasis on chapter leaders, rather than all members, is concurrent with other structural limitations within NPC sororities that limit leadership development.

It is suggested that NPC sororities are too homogenous, creating barriers for members to develop social perspective-taking skills to help understand others from various backgrounds and collaborate across differences (Dugan, 2008; Long, 2012; Sasso, Biddix, et al., 2020). NPC sorority women exhibit higher levels of social perspective-taking than fraternity men, but lower than other women in identity-based or culturally-based organizations (Johnson et al., 2015). Sorority women also demonstrate lower levels of collaboration and civility across

differences than unaffiliated women (Hevel et al., 2014).

However, sorority membership offers an opportunity to increase a sense of civic responsibility or multicultural awareness (DiChiara, 2009). Sorority membership serves as a gateway for early leadership development in first-year students, although this gap is closed by the fourth year. Findings by Long and Snowden (2011) highlight the leadership gains between those who held a position of responsibility and those who did not.

Even if members gain leadership experience elsewhere in their chapter, these experiences lead to greater involvement in other student organizations (Sasso, Biddix, et al., 2020). Yet, little research identifies what happens between the first and final undergraduate years. Further exploring how sorority members negotiate their leadership development processes may identify barriers and build on existing research about the extent to which leadership experiences are impactful.

METHODS

Research Design

This was a descriptive phenomenological qualitative study that followed the research design of similar previous studies about sorority women (Mendez et al., 2017; Russett, 2017; Witkowsky, 2010). Descriptive phenomenology centers around participant experiences and voice, which allow the researcher(s) to understand how these perceptions and experiences related to the phenomenon being studied (Giorgi, 2009). Descriptive phenomenology is described as, "the understanding of lived experiences is closely linked to the idea of the intentionality of consciousness, or how meaning is experienced…that our consciousness is always directed towards something, which means that when we experience something, the 'thing' is experienced as 'something' that has meaning for us" (Sunder et al., 2018, p. 734). Giorgi (2009) suggested that this approach emphasizes the words expressed by the participants, not their own interpretations. Thus, descriptive phenomenology is distinct from other forms of interpretive phenomenological research because of its use of openness, questioning pre-understanding, and adopting a reflective attitude to bracket or question researcher subjectivities against the meaning-making of participant realities (Giorgi, 2009). Findings were conceptualized through the interpretive relativist ontology paradigm, in which epistemology assumes that the researcher cannot separate themselves from what they know and is an instrument to elucidate participant experiences (Patton, 2015). The following research questions guided this study:

(1) What, if any, barriers to leadership did NPC sorority women holding leadership positions experience or observe as members?

(2) How, if at all, were campus and inter/national staff and programs helpful?

Positionality

In qualitative methodology, researchers should disclose their assumptions and perspectives about the phenomena experienced by their participants (Patton, 2015). All the authors are active student affairs educators and scholar-practitioners. They have previously served in student life coordinator roles facilitating leadership programming. All the researchers identify as cisgender. Three are white, and one of the researchers is a mixed-heritage Latino.

The researchers approach their work through the lens of gender equity to support women's liberation in removing the barriers of college patriarchal systems identified by Sasso, Nasser, et al. (2020). The authors also acknowledge their own biases in conducting this study as affiliated members of national sororities and fraternities, which may also provide them with a deeper, nuanced understanding of the participant's experiences. These positionalities may still limit their perspectives and require them to bracket their assumptions to better promote student learning and development.

Participants

Participant recruitment was facilitated using snowball sampling utilizing procedures outlined by Jones et al. (2014) to construct an intentional, purposive sample (n = 10). Potential participants were initially identified

through general emails to all sorority chapter leaders using the inclusion criterion, which included active undergraduate NPC sorority membership and good academic standing within their chapter. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality (see Table 1). All participants were upperclassmen from five different suburban Midwestern mid-sized institutions. No participants were in the same chapter at their institution, but all were from similar NPC organizations.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Name	Organization	Position(s)
Participant LL	Beta Omicron Epsilon	Alumni Relations Chair, Vice-President of Philanthropy, President
Participant BS	Lambda Mu Delta	Nominating Committee
Participant NS	Beta Omicron Epsilon	Social Media Chair
Participant SC	Beta Omicron Epsilon	Scholarship Chair. Panhellenic Vice-President of Education, Panhellenic President
Participant QT	Beta Omicron Epsilon	Recruitment Data Chair
Participant IU	Epsilon Sigma Zeta	New Member Educator, Sisterhood Chair, Standard Board Member
Participant FS	Epsilon Sigma Zeta	Member at Large (executive board), President
Participant QA	Upsilon Gamma Alpha	Philanthropy Chair
Participant ZU	Eta Kappa Theta	Events Chair

Data Collection

Participants were solicited through email after referral until there was saturation of the data, as outlined by Patton (2015), which occurs when no new data is obtained, and there is data satisfaction. A semi-structured interview guide consisting of 12 main questions with probing prompts that varied slightly between participants depending on rapport was utilized during individual interviews, which lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. The topics explored through the interview guide were informed by previous research on sorority leadership experiences and inter/national programs (Long, 2012; Long & Snowden, 2011; Taylor, 2010). Clarification of meaning was used when the participants introduced vague language or when they used organizational-specific vernacular. Audio-recorded interviews took place on campus to facilitate increased authenticity of responses in which they were presented with a standard informed consent form. The researchers performed transcription of the interviews to prepare for data analysis.

Data Analysis

The interpretive relativist ontology paradigm was used for data analysis in congruence with phenomenology. This paradigm posits that reality cannot be separated from previous knowledge and that researchers' positionalities are present across all phases of the research process (Angen, 2000). Relativist ontology holds that reality is subjectively constructed through socially and experientially developed understandings (Angen, 2000). Interpretive approaches rely on interviewing in which data is negotiated through the dialogue of the interview process (Patton, 2015).

The researchers followed Moustakas' (1999) guidelines for conducting phenomenological research. The first phase is epoche, in which the researchers bracketed their previous assumptions. These assumptions were acknowledged through reflexive journaling in which they described their own experiences with the study phenomenon to remain open to new ways of perceiving the study phenomenon.

Themes were generated through several phases of coding. To begin, the researchers developed a list of over 45 initial open codes, which Moustakas (1999) referred to as "horizons of experience" (p. 121). Open coding in-

cluded line-by-line reading in which initial codes were developed through textural descriptions. The researchers used textural descriptions as specific language from the participants to demonstrate how they discussed the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1999). These open codes were grouped into more abstract and complex categories using axial coding to create focused codes (Saldana, 2021). This is what Moustakas (1999) describes as "thematizing the invariant constituents" (p. 121).

Finally, selective coding was applied by, "selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development" to condense further the focused codes (Jones et al., 2014, p. 45; Saldana, 2021). This is a form of imaginative variation which Moustakas (1999) describes as "approach[ing] the phenomenon from divergent perspectives" to narrow the ways in which NPC sorority women negotiated their leadership experiences in their chapters (p. 85). Over 20 focused codes were collapsed into four final themes and organized using code mapping validated by an external auditor as part of trustworthiness strategies (Saldana, 2021). The researchers continuously reflected on their subjectivities to remain aware of how they influence data analysis.

The following trustworthiness strategies were employed as suggested by Jones et al. (2014): (1) an external auditor who was a university professor from a higher education graduate program with *a priori* experience and knowledge about sororities/fraternities; (2) a subject matter expert who assisted in reviewing and questioning the main themes to clarify researcher bias; and (3) member checking using the interview transcript data was sent to participants prior to the final coding process.

FINDINGS

Members viewed their leadership development similarly across their sororities. However, each organization has a different process for attaining a leadership position and terms for their executive board with compartmentalized members' expectations. The experiences described in this research study are not the experience of every undergraduate member but can provide context on how leadership development occurs within NPC sororities. Sorority women perceived leadership development as dichotomous, as either formal programming or gained through positional authority.

Sorority members identified various individual and structural barriers that limited their full participation in developing their leadership skills. They described individual barriers as interpersonal limitations within their sorority that helped them manage or negotiate relationships within their chapter. Structural barriers were identified as systems, traditions, or cultures which impeded their leadership development.

Structural Barriers

Homogeneity. The most significant structural barrier to leadership development identified by sorority women was the homogeneity of their chapters. They suggested that NPC sororities were not seen as organizations with diversity by the public or even their members. As Participant SC said. "Honestly, with our council, you don't see a lot of different cultural or ethnic perspectives or gender identity perspectives." Participant LL explained that the lack of diversity which was etiologically rooted in how members are socialized and recruited into their chapters:

> And so there's like very little time you're allowed to be recruiting, and you have to recruit certain numbers. And, like, we don't even really get to pick entirely ,since like we just sent them a list and then we're told who, and I don't think it's the most equitable. And I think it hurts us diversity-wise. I just don't think the way we get people signed up for formal recruitment and stuff is the most inclusive. Like, you have to, like, be aware of what's happening. And like, if you find out later than three days into the school year, you are kind of out of luck because, depending on numbers, the group that you wanted to be in might not be allowed to take you in a week.

Instead, sorority women defaulted to describing geographical identities to identify their limited learning about otherness in their chapters. Participant BS noted even homogeneity with regional geographic identities:

People (in the sorority) are from little, small towns, very small. Hick towns are what I would call them. I've never seen or heard about things like mudding or going on float trips. But like they (the other members) taught me about it. And like I definitely listen to more country music now, which I hated.

They called for more diversity in their chapter to provide them with cultural competency, which they believed was essential to being a leader in contemporary society. NPC women felt the structure of their chapter perpetuated homogeneity. They suggested that their chapter cultures and environments were not preparing them for the more racially diverse environments they might experience when they graduate college. Sorority women suggested that the structure of the sororities limited their friendships to racial homogeneity.

Slating. Participants described the chapter leadership hierarchy as limited and directional. They suggested that there was collective decision-making by executive boards that were implemented by lower positions. They also suggested that access to these leadership spaces was ambiguous beyond getting named on the annual leadership slate.

Participants described how there were nebulous pathways to obtain leadership development if they were not added to the slate for the executive board. Participant BS believed people were seeking leadership on the executive board for more genuine reasons:

> I think they had different ideas that they want to bring to the chapter… they want to bring it in, try it out, try and make the chapter better, improve sisterhood and everything… they want the position to be able to put it on their résumé.

To sorority women, there was only one clear pathway to a leadership opportunity in which there was a logical progression through a hierarchy. Participant BS outlined this process:

> I think they just, I think a lot of it is they've worked up the hierarchy a little bit of taking on a smaller role and maybe a little bit bigger role then maybe an exec role. I think for some people might just seem like the next logical step.

Regardless of the reasons for seeking leadership, each participant discussed the slating process as their only opportunity to obtain an executive board position. There was a perception of the limited executive positions as a process of nepotism, making them inaccessible. Participant NS indicated this partiality, "a lot of the people that are joining exec, they may have had a big or a close friend that previously was exec." When prompted, sorority women suggested that the slate is voted on collectively for the entire executive board and rarely challenged. If it was challenged, sorority members clarified that each position would be voted on individually.

Each sorority member suggested the only temporal frame of leadership opportunity was if they were added to the executive board slate during their sophomore or junior year. Positions ran from spring to fall, which overlapped at the end and beginning of two academic years. Thus, sorority women had a narrow window of opportunity to obtain a leadership position on their chapter executive board.

Limited Positions. Participants identified a general lack of leadership opportunities granted to a select few. They suggested that to gain leadership development training from their inter/national organizations, you had to hold an executive board position. However, there were few board positions compared to the number of members. Most of the sorority members suggested there were only seven executive positions in chapters that had an average size of 114 women.

This shaped the perception of women who did not see an executive board position as an accessible opportunity to develop leadership skills. Instead, it was perceived as a space of social prestige, as noted by Participant IU, who suggested,

> people just do it because it looks good; they get to do some opportunities that other girls don't, like planning bid day and assigning big littles.

Others perceived it as an opportunity to gain a voice, as Participant QT noted, "I've seen people get on exec to be on exec to have like a higher power/voice in the chapter and have more of a say in what goes on." However, sorority members suggested that those that want a voice often want power. LL said, "Some people want it like power or just want like the name to say that they were president or exec."

According to the participants, inter/national headquarters and on-campus professionals spent more effort developing members' leadership skills in executive leadership positions. Participant SC expanded on that by saying, "they (on-campus professionals) are usually more so working with the big leaders in the chapters and the big leaders in the councils." Sorority chapter presidents met with the on-campus professionals at least once a month for the duration of their term. Participants all described opportunities to attend a regional leadership summit each spring semester and a leadership conference over the summer. Other chapter leaders also described how they attended a supplemental leadership retreat hosted by the on-campus staff but shared that they have difficulty getting leadership development in from their student life offices.

Individual Barriers

Identity Advocacy. Sorority women suggested they gained new perspectives about social class, LGBTQ+ experiences, and women in leadership roles. Participant SC suggested that her worldview was broadened about others' "struggles" when she experienced an activity about privilege that her organization facilitated. Participant SC said previously, "I really haven't ever met people who came from that rough background," and she suggested her sorority leadership programming taught her about social class concepts.

Participants discussed how their experiences humanized relationships between members of the LGBTQ+ community within their chapter and their campus community. Most students previously did not have friendships with students that held these identities before joining their sorority. Participants suggested that their sorority leadership experiences normalized LGBTQ+ experiences, but they struggled to learn how to speak against intolerant members, specifically with regard to race.

Participant BS identified as Latina and shared that she experienced times when members appropriated her culture, like calling Cinco de Mayo "Cinco de Drinko" or mixing in some Spanish words in English sentences in what she called "mock Spanish." When prompted if she ever had conversations with her organization members about cultural appropriation, she said:

> I'm the type of person where not a lot bothers me. It doesn't bother me too much, or like I'll just laugh. It's obviously like nothing been to a point where it, like, truly bothers me. Otherwise, I would say something.

Participant BS believed that the members of her organization would be open to having those conversations if she ever felt the need to bring it up. She noted that if she wanted the microaggressions to stop, she would have to step out of her comfort zone and assume the role of educator towards the more privileged population because she lacked the competency to confront others to call out racism or gender bias. Sorority members suggested that they had to do independent learning, and there was a lack of personal development training to better help them understand themselves and the experiences of others. They suggested only a few leaders gained these sorts of cultural competencies or other leadership development programming.

Responsibilities for Conduct. There were perceptions that the executive board was positioned to dispense member conduct in their chapters, limiting their focus on leadership experiences. Participants suggested that being on the executive board may affect relationships with other members, leading to social isolation. Participant SC told a story:

> I remember one of our old presidents was like, yeah, no one ever wants to go out with me, like no one wants to go out and hang out with the president because they're all like, oh my god, I could get in trouble.

Similarly, participant NS highlighted other members' avoidance of chapter leaders, "This past year, they (the executive board) were ostracized. Like they were kind of, people were like, oh you can't show them this, or you can't go out with them type of things…" This sentiment was also felt by Participant QT, who suggested that being

on the executive board is unpopular:

Because you have to get everyone in trouble. People don't like you… I've seen friendships end over people on exec getting someone in trouble, like for something like a rule they broke, and the other person got mad.

Participant LL detailed how general members avoid executive board members and the tensions that exist with chapter leaders:

> We had problems with some girls, like, took all the exec members out of group chats with their friends because they were mad because they got in trouble for social media…I have been yelled at multiple times, once on bid day in front of the ballroom in front of the entire crowd, about the design of a t-shirt for pow-der puff football. I got yelled at for that, which, just, like why. Yelled at in the (Student Union) which was good cause it was in front of a lot of people. Yelled at during chapter. There is a lot of yelling too.

NPC sorority women felt that executive board positions spent too much functioning in standards, compliance, or conduct roles. Instead, they perceived executive board positions as an opportunity for authority or positional power, rather than leadership development. However, they cited that there were no other formal ways to get leadership experiences outside these positions within their sororities. This disorientated NPC members seeking leadership development because there were unclear pathways for them.

Unclear Pathways for Development

Sorority women were also bewildered about leadership positions as they described officer retreats and other formal training for executive board positions, but not for all leadership roles. Those in chair positions or other non-executive board positions were often excluded from national training or supplemental leadership develop-ment programming. While the excluded positions varied by organization, NPC women consistently described examples of a lack of officer transition with realistic positional expectations, leading to them seeking alternative experiences for leadership development.

Officer Transition. When sorority women obtained leadership positions, they described an anomic transition process. Participant SC explained this process, "a lot of the time, it depends on how much that person wants to put into transitioning you. Some people are a lot better at it than others." Participant QT described an example of a similar lack of transition experience:

> the girl actually like ended up going inactive, like, halfway through her position … And that's when I got
> it, so there was really nobody to transition me. So, like, I got thrown into that.

There were also unclear differences in the scope of responsibilities for positions. Some lower-tier positions were referred to as coordinators or chairs. These were assigned positions, rather than elected, in which they were se-lected by member(s) of the executive board to serve. These were positions described by Participant BS as, "they just don't want that responsibility, or they're comfortable just being part of the chapter, or they prefer coordina-tor positions because they say it's not too much on their plate." Participant SC suggested it was disorienting if sorority members should assume a lower or higher-level position because of the different responsibilities that may be related to stress:

> I know I've heard of some people saying they don't think it (joining the executive board) would be good
> for their mental health and stuff like that. That they have too much going on in their life.

For members taking on a lower-level leadership position, but not on the executive board, the primary form of training comes from a transition meeting with the person who previously held the position. As Participant LL describes,

> kind of just, there is not like a structure from headquarters that we have for that (transition), it's just kind
> of whatever. I guess the president tells the rest of the positions what to do.

Sorority members were concerned about being overextended. It was unclear to them which positions to assume if they wanted leadership experience because often there were unclear expectations or diffusion of power. Par-ticipants suggested that the stress of holding an executive position happens when either of the positions under

them does not fulfill their responsibilities, and executive board members are expected to assume unfulfilled obligations. Or, the members in the executive position do not trust the people under them enough to delegate responsibilities. General members perceived executive board members as ultimately responsible for the chapter operations. This indicates that general members see the executive board as finished products, instead of fellow students developing their leadership skills. NPC women felt that leadership transitions or training did not develop their leadership skills during their time in the chapters.

Seeking Alternative Experiences. Sorority members were frustrated with unclear progressions for leadership development, such as with established pathways beginning with the new member experience or prospective member stage. NPC women noted that eventually, many members gave up seeking leadership development within their chapter to look across campus and suggested a lack of accessibility of leadership development specifically for women. They cited a lack of specific programs or associated spaces for women's leadership development. Participant SC explained that the process of leadership is gained through experiential learning:

> I think a lot of it is honestly just self-taught…. Honestly, yeah, pretty much because a lot of that stuff I just learned from being in those roles and being in those positions and having to either go through uncomfortable situations.

Given these leadership development limitations, sorority women shared how they gained leadership experiences through community service beyond holding any position because they felt some of those experiences were not developmental for them in shaping their leadership capacity. All sorority members were required to complete a specific amount of community service each semester, either with the partnered philanthropy or other organizations in the community. While most participants were not heavily involved with philanthropies and community service in high school, they all had profound experiences as members of their sorority. They perceived these experiences as forms of leadership development. Participant SC reflecting on her time, said,

> It's really like almost none of your time if you really think about it, like doing it like a couple hours here and there, like you're really not sacrificing much to do a good service.

These experiences happened independently from holding a leadership position but were not structured enough to be considered leadership development experiences. Instead, these experiences created a foundation on which future leadership skills can be built for sorority members. Participant BS talked about the different community service opportunities she learned about:

> When I did like the day of service, like for Greek Week, that was a lot of different types of community service as well there were different styles…the principal really loved whenever we came like they want us to come again and like seeing the feedback from the kids and the teachers as well. It does encourage us to continue to want to be part of the philanthropy, want to give back to the community.

Sorority women also discussed how they often felt overlooked by campus professionals and looked towards these offices to substitute or address their leadership development gaps. Participant ZU noted:

> I think all the student life staff assume we don't need more leadership training because we are in a sorority which is supposed to create women leaders. It's just like that is not happening, because only the exec boards get any leadership training from the national office and get to go conferences for that stuff. I can't find anything for women on my campus.

All the sorority women noted that there were no intentional, targeted women's leadership programs on their campus. The participants cited many examples for men and were very interested in participating in formal, curricular experiences which would be transcriptable or formally documented. Sorority women wanted their own leadership development programs to learn about their identities and growth to complement their sorority experience, which initially served as a gateway to develop their interest in leadership development.

DISCUSSION

This study explored how NPC sorority members negotiated leadership development and experiences in their sorority chapters. The findings from this study suggest that other chapter peers and the current infrastructure served as barriers to member leadership development. Current efforts from professionals focused exclusively on the executive board, especially the president. It is unclear if members experienced different levels of leadership development depending on their position. These findings contribute to existing research and directly address the research questions, which asked how NPC sorority members negotiate leadership opportunities and the extent to which inter/national programs were supporting their development.

Research question one explored the barriers identified by NPC women holding leadership positions. Sorority women recognized that leadership is not positional, and anyone in an organization can be a leader. Yet, they wanted formal positions for a variety of personal growth aspirations or to obtain power. Structural and individual barriers existed, including homogeneity and the "slating" process that women felt presented them with limited leadership opportunities, especially given the narrow window of opportunity to be selected. Sororities offered limited chances for their members to develop social perspective-taking because of their homogeneity, but peer interaction across racial or gender identity differences influences leadership development (Dugan & Komives, 2010; Johnson et al., 2015). Some NPC chapters may have the components needed for their members to develop social perspective taking, such as with LGBTQ+ or social class, as found in this study. However, simply being in a diverse group does not affect leadership development (Parker & Pascarella, 2013). There must be direct interaction between diverse peers (Goedereis & Sasso, 2020; Parker & Pascarella, 2018).

Research question two examined the extent to which NPC members felt campus, and inter/national staff and programs were helpful. Women indicated that others in the few executive board positions received leadership development opportunities they did not, as student affairs professionals and national staff focused on their development, rather than other women or the chapter. Both executive and non-executive members did not experience long-term programs that are shown to develop individual outcomes, such as those associated with the social change model (Martin et al., 2012; Hevel et al., 2014). Keating et al. (2014) identified having high leadership self-efficacy as a prerequisite to developing leadership skills and found that the practice of leadership skills develops leadership capacity. However, sorority women all felt overlooked by their campus staff and noted their awareness of a lack of intentional comprehensive women's leadership development programs on their campus. Thus, they were unclear about alternative pathways for leadership development if they did not have a formal leadership position and looked towards service learning opportunities which have a profound impact on participants (Snell et al., 2015).

Sorority women did not offer suggestions for sorority reform but instead negotiated chapters and organizational structures with acknowledged limitations. Moreover, the undertones of the women in this study suggest that they and other sorority women are seeking leadership experiences and curricular-based competencies. It is unclear if all the women in this study experienced a similar development pattern, although sororities are potential gateways for leadership development during the first-year experience (Martin et al., 2012). Therefore, NPC sororities offer sites of belonging and placemaking, which may allow for expanded women's leadership development if there is complementary co-curricular and curricular leadership development.

Limitations

There are limitations associated with the study and its findings. This study featured a heterogeneous sample drawn only from five public institutions. This may limit the transferability of the sample. The researchers of this study are members of national sororities and fraternities and may have *a priori* knowledge which may have influenced the participants' responses. Also, some participants may have selectively disclosed because of social desirability demands. Given these considerations, the findings are not necessarily transferable across all sorority leadership development experiences. Future research should address this research study's limitations to explore women's leadership development in other culturally-based and identity-based sororities.

Implications for Practice

There are three recommendations for practice connected to the findings of this study to help facilitate gaps in programming to promote sorority women's leadership development. They are recommended with the assumption to redirect efforts to practices that could have a greater economy of scale to expand women's leadership development to include sorority women. Such programs should consider the limitations of social class to make them accessible to commuters or first-generation students (Goedereis & Sasso, 2020; Sasso & Paladini, 2021).

Inclusive Women's Leadership Institute. Sorority members wanted more personal development to become better leaders. They specifically struggled with cultural competency or confronting others. Therefore, inclusive leadership institutes in a weekend or modular format could be implemented to promote cultural competency. Schoper et al. (2020) also highlighted the lack of intentionality and anomic nature of "community-wide" programs to get involved in leadership programs, regardless of position. Schoper identified this as the, "positional, machine method approach to leadership development also focuses on what students need to know and lacks an intentional focus on how students come to know it" (2020, p. 100). These mandatory brief programs have less demonstrated efficacy (Reyes et al., 2019).

An inclusive women's leadership institute should address issues of personal development and humanize the experiences of difference and marginality (Parker & Pascarella, 2018). However, efforts to increase cultural competency can require disproportionate resources and draw these away from the needs of Students of Color and recenter whiteness (Ashlee et al., 2020). The curricula for leadership programs should be culturally sensitive by centering diverse voices by including more feminist perspectives (Sasso, Biddix, et al., 2020; Taylor, 2010).

Women in Leadership Development (WILD) Programs. The participants noted the different structures ranging from year-long or only semester-long leadership cycles and the nuanced ways the slating process filters women leaders. Sasso, Biddix, et al. (2020) suggested that chapter leadership opportunities could be expanded by decentralizing power to move towards more inclusive leadership involving more women. However, given the differences across organizations, student affairs professionals should consider implementing WILD programs, which increase self-efficacy and leadership capacity of undergraduate women who participate in long-term, comprehensive leadership programs (Ericksen, 2009). These programs are undergirded by feminist perspectives, which teach history and other gender-specific curriculum which addresses the gaps noted by the women in this study and Taylor (2010). Existing NPC leadership programming for women did not contextualize women's ways of knowing or other feminist perspectives (Taylor, 2010).

Complementary National Programs. Participants were approached during their new member period to apply for a leadership position within the chapter and were then slated. Therefore, new member education should be a space to teach and practice leadership skills to the new members beyond teaching the history and values of their organization. National organizations should move beyond the first-year leadership gateway identified by Martin et al. (2012) toward a more comprehensive total membership development program incorporating leadership education and development. Incorporate new members into committees and coordinator positions as early as possible. This will provide opportunities to practice these skills while they are new members, promoting an easier transition into positions with more responsibility. NPC organizations should consider implementing formal leadership programs for their members beyond short-term events such as leadership retreats or workshops which have demonstrated efficacy (Rosch & Caza, 2012).

Participants noted that the transition for their position was situational, which depended on one-time retreats or the willingness of the previous leader to train them. These programs should be organized through formalized curricula with measured learning outcomes using a conceptual framework such as the social change model (Parker & Pascarella, 2018). They should also integrate career connections to leadership development which helps integrate co-curricular learning (Peck, 2018; Peck & Callahan, 2019; Walker & Havice, 2016). These programs should be voluntary, supporting greater program efficacy (Reyes et al., 2019). Dugan and Komives (2010) also suggested that long-term leadership programs are best for developing individual leadership outcomes and last at least one academic year.

CONCLUSION

Sorority women had to locate unintentional, informal ways of learning as there were barriers from their peers and limitations to the leadership opportunities within their chapters. This study indicates that NPC sorority women often struggled to identify opportunities beyond their organizations. NPC sororities have the potential to be transformational for their women and their campus communities. Ballinger et al. (2020) stated, "a beauty of the system is its ability to meet the needs of a diverse student body" (144). Student involvement professionals must focus on "how all such groups can exist with a greater sense of purpose – one befitting colleges and universities that truly seek to shape lives that matter" (Sasso, Biddix, et al., 2020, xii). Leadership development programs should also be available to all sorority members to learn the position before they assume their responsibilities, but with the intention not to reinforce the "positional machine," as Schoper et al. (2020) noted. This consistent training could make the executive board more confident in delegating responsibilities to the positions under them. NPC sororities offer an opportunity for leadership development, but need additional opportunities for contextualization as women.

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