

SISTERS LEADING TOGETHER: THE EXPERIENCE OF RECRUITMENT COUNSELORS DURING SORORITY RECRUITMENT

Patricia Witkowski

The purpose of this constructivist, ethnographic case study was to describe the experience of sorority recruitment counselors during formal recruitment at a mid-size university in the western United States. The findings of this study include the recruitment counselors' desire to give back to the fraternity/sorority community and their campus, challenges experienced during disaffiliation, their struggle between neutrality during the recruitment process and loyalty to their chapter, their perception of recruitment's "Disney World effect" (popularity of chapters due to decorations, costumes, etc.), and the development of their leadership skills. Finally, implications for fraternity/sorority professionals and researchers are presented.

The presence of sororities on college campuses began before 1902, but the organizations joined together that year under the umbrella of the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC). In 2009, more than four million women across the world were members of a sorority within the NPC. With almost 3,000 chapters on over 650 campuses across the United States and Canada and over 250,000 undergraduate and graduate members, sorority life in higher education plays an important part in the lives of many female college students (NPC, 2009). Despite the overwhelmingly negative images of sorority life portrayed in the media and literature, such as excessive alcohol use and body image issues, sororities continue to thrive as more than 90,000 undergraduate women joined a sorority during the 2008-2009 academic year (NPC).

The fraternal values of leadership, scholarship, and service provide opportunities for undergraduate women to pursue many of the intended learning outcomes of a college education (NPC, 2009). One of the many opportunities for increased involvement and leadership in sororities occurs during the recruitment of new members, when sorority women represent their chapters by serving as recruitment counselors. Recruitment counselors typically disaffiliate from their chapters to guide potential new members (PNMs) through the recruitment process and attempt to be unbiased when providing information about each of the chapters PNM's are considering. Although researchers have not yet explored the leadership experience of recruitment counselors and the challenges they face while serving as mentors to PNM's, this experience remains an important avenue for increasing involvement and leadership development in sorority women.

Therefore, the purpose of this constructivist, ethnographic case study is to describe the experience of sorority recruitment counselors during formal recruitment at a mid-size university in the western U.S. The primary research questions are:

1. What is the experience of recruitment counselors during sorority recruitment?
2. What are recruitment counselors' perspectives of the recruitment process for potential new members?

Review of Literature

A great deal of published literature in higher education around the fraternity/sorority experience explores alcohol, hazing, and body image issues - further promoting negative views of the experience. Fraternity/sorority members have been studied regarding issues including alcohol use (Alva, 1998; Caron, Moskey, & Hovey, 2004; Elias et al., 1996; Hutching, Lac, & LaBrie, 2008; LaBrie et al., 2007; Miley & Frank, 2006), eating disorders (Basow, Foran, & Bookwala, 2007; Cashel, Cunningham, Landeros, Cokley, & Muhammad, 2003; Kashubeck, Marchand-Martella, Neal, & Larsen, 1997), hazing (Spaulding, 1995), health behaviors (Dinger, 1999a; Miller, Statten, Rayens, & Noland, 2005; Shulken & Pinciario, 1997), academic dishonesty (Williams & Janosik, 2007), sexual activity (Dinger, 1999b), and dating violence (Anderson & Danis, 2007).

Research on sororities specifically is limited, and even less literature exists on understanding the recruitment process, particularly the experiences of students involved. The available research concerning recruitment explores the impact of recruitment on academic success (Nelson, Halperin, Wasserman, Smith, & Graham, 2006; Santovec, 2004), the effects of recruitment on self-esteem (Chapman, Hirt, & Spruill, 2008), and the psychosocial effects of recruitment on students (Atlas & Morier, 1994). Participation in sororities and fraternities remains strong in higher education and the positive aspects of the experience are frequently noted by its members and fraternity/sorority professionals.

Student involvement and integration to academic and social aspects of student life have been linked to retention, academic achievement, social integration, appreciation and understanding of diversity, and a more positive college experience overall (Tinto, 1975). Astin (1999) stated that "student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 518). A major component of Astin's involvement theory holds that "the amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program" (p. 519). Sorority members are well-known for devoting a large amount of time to chapter activities, as well as developing high quality connections within their sisterhood. In a study conducted by Astin (1975) focusing on students who did not persist in college, he found that sorority participation was positively correlated with student retention. This alternative perspective of sorority involvement calls for further exploration into the experiences of sorority women and the positive contributions to its members' learning and development.

Methods

Ethnographic case study was chosen as the methodology to guide the exploration of sorority recruitment counselor culture during formal recruitment. Ethnography, commonly cited as the "hallmark of qualitative research" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 95), seeks to describe the culture of a group, including their beliefs, behaviors, and values (Goetz & LeCompte, 1993; Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Spradley & McCurdy, 1988; Wolcott, 1995). Using methods such as participant observation, document analysis, and interviews, the researcher strives to develop a written account of the culture from the insider perspective (Spradley & McCurdy, 1988). Both field notes from my observations (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995), as well as interview data using

participants' words (Merriam, 1998), are presented to understand the data gathered through the ethnographic research process.

Setting

The institution where the study occurred is in the western United States with a sorority/fraternity population representing approximately 600 of the 9,000 undergraduate students. At the time of the study, the fraternity/sorority community at the institution included five NPC sororities, seven North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) fraternities, and six multicultural fraternities and sororities. Sorority formal recruitment only involved the five NPC sorority chapters, because the multicultural sororities did not participate in formal recruitment due to specific processes and traditions. The study took place over the five-day formal sorority recruitment period in the middle of September.

Participants

Following IRB approval for the study, the total population of nineteen recruitment counselors, representing the five NPC sorority chapters, consented to participate in the study. The primary data collection method was observational and included several formal and informal settings. In most instances when the group was together, the Panhellenic Council's President, Vice President for Recruitment, Risk Management Chair, and the campus Coordinator of Fraternities and Sororities advisor were also present and participating; therefore, their perspectives were included in data collection. Five recruitment counselors were quoted using pseudonyms in the findings section, while the campus advisor, Ester (pseudonym) was also quoted when applicable. Two recruitment counselors who volunteered from an open call to all participants were interviewed following formal recruitment to provide additional data and/or clarification. No specific sample size is needed to justify qualitative research and the depth of the exploration with the two recruitment counselors provided strong data to support my observations of the recruitment process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Recruitment counselors were selected in the spring semester prior to fall recruitment. They underwent training throughout the summer consisting of teambuilding activities and skill-based education to gain the knowledge and expertise needed to guide the 75 PNMs through the recruitment process. Additionally, recruitment counselors were required to officially disaffiliate from their sorority chapter in May after graduation and remain disaffiliated until the day when PNMs receive their invitations to join the sororities (Bid Day).

Prior to the week of recruitment and following their training, the recruitment counselors were actively involved in recruiting undergraduate women to participate in recruitment activities. Once PNMs registered to participate, they were assigned to a small group of three to four other interested students and had two recruitment counselors available to answer their questions throughout the recruitment process. During the recruitment activities, the recruitment counselors informed PNMs of their schedules for each night. Additionally, the recruitment counselors escorted PNMs between chapter houses for the four nights of recruitment activities. Finally, the recruitment counselors spent time debriefing with their small group of PNMs each night before deciding which chapters the PNMs wanted to preference.

Gaining Access to the Field

Before beginning this study, I obtained access to the site and the participants through discussions with the fraternity/sorority professionals and Panhellenic Council Recruitment Chair. Sororities and their members value the traditions and rituals of their individual chapters and did not want to allow me access to the chapter houses where the recruitment activities occurred because of previous negative press. However, the recruitment counselors were not allowed into the sorority houses during recruitment either, so my entrance into them was not necessary to develop an understanding of the recruitment counselor culture. I was granted access to explore the experience of the recruitment counselors, thus not compromising the privacy of the sorority chapters.

Data Collection

As a participant observer, I interacted with and shadowed the recruitment counselors for 36.5 hours throughout the five-day formal recruitment process (Goetz & LeCompte, 1993). I kept a notebook and writing tool with me at all times to record observations of the settings, recruitment counselors' interactions with each other and with the PNMs, and a chronology of the events. The initial jottings from the field were expanded into full narratives of the observations and interpretations each day. As a result of the observations, theoretical notes (Richardson, 2000) also emerged as I began to make connections between what I was seeing and hearing and my knowledge of theory related to student involvement and leadership. I also maintained a researcher journal wherein I recorded my thoughts about the research process (Richardson, 2000). In addition to the observations, I was in continual dialogue with the fraternity/sorority professionals about the process and challenges. I also spoke with the recruitment counselors informally while in the field. The final step in data collection culminated in two one hour, semi-structured individual interviews with two recruitment counselors who expressed an interest in being interviewed. A sample of the interview questions developed following my time in the field and hours of reflection included:

- 1) Why did you want to be a recruitment counselor?
- 2) What did you gain from the experience of being a recruitment counselor?
- 3) What was the most challenging part of being a recruitment counselor?
- 4) How is the recruitment experience similar to and different from the rest of the sorority experience?

I completed transcriptions of the interviews and combined the interview data with the field notes during the analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began the moment I started observing the recruitment counselor culture and recruitment process (Huberman & Miles, 2001; Merriam, 1998; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Stake, 1995). I continually identified themes in the journals I kept throughout the data collection process. Following the initial stages of analysis, including deciding what to notice, record, and describe (Clifford, 1990), I immersed myself in the data by reading through the journals, field notes, and interview transcripts. Next, I re-read the data and took note of emerging themes through an inductive coding process (Patton, 2002). The themes emerged as I saw "phrases, events, activities, behaviors, [and] ideas" re-occur in the data (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 46). Following the development of multiple themes, I reviewed them for similarities and combined data and themes where overlap appeared (LeCompte & Schensul).

Findings

The findings presented below emerged from field notes during 36.5 hours of participant observation during formal recruitment, as well as data from individual interviews with two recruitment counselors following their recruitment experience. The data collected bear little resemblance to the results of previous studies of sorority members. This study provides an insider perspective into the views of the recruitment process and the values and beliefs of the recruitment counselors. Findings in the areas of giving back, challenges with disaffiliation, struggling between neutrality and loyalty, the Disney World effect, and leadership skills will be presented.

Giving Back

As is a common theme among students in leadership positions, the recruitment counselors' reasons for choosing to apply and accept the position involved wanting to give back to sorority life on campus and contribute to the positive experience of PNMs. When asked about her decision to apply to be a recruitment counselor, Ella shared:

I think just to like give back, I think would be the biggest thing. And just like help sororities and fraternities in general....I wanted to be like there to help build that and bring sororities and fraternities together instead of branching off.

The recruitment counselors saw a problem they wanted to address within the fraternity/sorority community at the university and by serving their community they were able to make an impact. Each had positive experiences once becoming sorority members, but frequently did not have the most positive experience with their recruitment counselor when they were PNMs and thus decided to change that relationship for others. Ella's experience highlighted that sentiment:

When I went through [recruitment] as a freshman, I didn't have a good recruitment counselor that I felt comfortable with....Ever since then, I've been [sic] I want to like help freshmen and I feel like I'm a really sociable person, so when it comes to shy little freshmen, I'm like 'hi.'...I felt like to be there for them so that they could have somebody they felt comfortable with and could talk to.

Oftentimes, sororities are perceived as portraying a false image and many of the recruitment counselors were working against those stereotypes. Ava's main goal for serving as a recruitment counselor was to "be seen as a leader and positive role model. We want to do good things for this campus. We want faculty and administration to realize we are positive role models on this campus." In addition to how they are viewed as individuals, recruitment counselors, including Ava, were concerned about the images chapters portrayed to PNMs throughout recruitment:

It was really important for me to be able to have that impact on someone else's life before I left [the university] to make sure that if nothing else, even if I wasn't able to impact a large amount of girls, even if it was just my own direct PNMs, whether it be eight or ten of them, to really make sure that they understand fully what they were getting themselves into, that they didn't have false images or ideals in their heads of what sorority life was or the [chapters] they were potentially joining, so they weren't shell shocked.

The concern for the good of all chapters and the PNMs as they chose which chapter to join was paramount in many recruitment counselors' decisions to disaffiliate and give back to the sorority community, which was a major part of their college experience. Disaffiliation required the sacrifice of chapter affiliation expression as well as sorority friendships.

Challenges with Disaffiliation

The disaffiliation process was by no means easy for the recruitment counselors. Since the social support afforded by sorority membership is one of the hallmarks of the experience, leaving their support system was challenging. As Ava shared:

For me it was difficult because some of my close friends live out of state, so they had been gone all summer and I hadn't seen them...And so I tried to prepare them like, 'if you guys don't get back by such and such a date, I'm not going to be able to go out in public with you anymore'....It was hard being disaffiliated just because there were so many people I wanted to say hi to and have a longer conversations with. It's hard to keep reminding yourself that you can say hi, but have to keep going, especially when you run into someone who looks like they're having a bad day and you can't check up on them to see if they're ok....It's a lot harder being disaffiliated than you think it's going to be. It's lonely. It's hard when you're going to the grocery store by yourself, going to work out by yourself and just everything by yourself.

Another recruitment counselor, Linda, described her experience living in her sorority house while disaffiliated. After an informal conversation, I recorded the following field notes:

She said she has been using the backdoor when she comes and goes and will have to move out of her house the night before recruitment begins and remain out until it ends. She said it's hard because she has paid for the food, but can't eat it, so she intends on raiding the kitchen before she leaves. She and the others who live in their houses will stay with other [recruitment counselors] who live off campus until the end of recruitment.

Struggle Between Neutrality and Loyalty

The primary factor in a recruitment counselor's effectiveness is the maintenance of neutrality in the eyes of the PNMs. As is stated in the institution's Recruitment Handbook (not cited to preserve confidentiality), recruitment counselors are "required to be completely unbiased" (p. 12). At the beginning of the summer before recruitment, the recruitment counselors were required to disaffiliate, or cease contact, with members of their chapter. They struggled between the need to be neutral in order to work with the PNMs through their decision-making process without fear of knowing which chapter their recruitment counselor belonged to and their bonds of sisterhood and previously pledged, life-long membership to their chapter. Although they were to be neutral and disaffiliated, the recruitment counselors still sought fairness in the process for their own chapter and experienced struggles being unbiased. The recruitment counselors revealed this theme both explicitly and implicitly.

While discussing the recruitment counselor selection process, Ava stated that only two women initially applied from her chapter. It was her feeling that "if only two applied...then it's my [chapter's] loss." However, if they are neutral, it would not matter if the chapters were equally represented among the recruitment counselors. There was also a great deal of discussion about

the number of PNMs assigned to the groups of recruitment counselors because then they would not be able to have as much influence over the PNMs. The first discussion I witnessed was at the recruitment counselor meeting following the recruitment orientation session, as recorded in my field notes:

As Ester (the Coordinator of Fraternities and Sororities) and I walked to the Panorama Room, I asked her about the complaints from some recruitment counselors about having less PNMs than others. Ester said she just addressed them about it and that it was not at all personal and only reflected where PNMs lived as opposed to whether they thought certain recruitment counselors could handle it. She reiterated to them not to complain about their numbers.

Ella expressed her concern about the division of PNMs:

I thought it was going to be like everyone has five girls or everyone has ten girls. Like when they divided up PNMs, I didn't know that it was not equal. Now some have two girls and some have 15 girls. And I think that discouraged a lot of people because I worked my butt off and I have two girls. For the longest time I had one girl. I feel like I could be helping my chapter more.

I also witnessed an exchange between two recruitment counselors epitomizing the tension over numbers of PNMs in groups and recorded it in my field notes:

After individual meetings, the recruitment counselors sat back in the front row and waited for all the PNMs to leave. One recruitment counselor said to another after talking about a PNM, 'she was on my list.' The other said, 'you can have her if you want.' Then, the other said 'I'm just kidding, I don't care.'

There were several discussions where mistrust between recruitment counselors became clear despite their pledge of neutrality. In my field notes, I documented the following:

I found out that even recruitment counselors are not allowed to go in the houses when the active sorority women are meeting with the PNMs. It seems that a lot of it is because of rituals and the possibility that recruitment counselors will tell their own chapters about what they saw and how another chapter does things. Even though they are disaffiliated from their chapters, the recruitment counselors are still connected to them and thus the distrust. They attempt to display disaffiliation from their chapters to the PNMs, but among themselves, they are still wary.

A new sisterhood was supposed to be created for recruitment, but there continued to be undertones of competition for PNMs, because each chapter wanted to have new members. Although the recruitment counselors were to have created a new sisterhood among themselves during recruitment, clearly, outside of their recruitment counselor roles, they were still connected emotionally to their chapters.

Another concern expressed by Ava was that the recruitment counselors wanted to represent their own chapter well to other recruitment counselors:

I think somewhat we were all still on the level of wanting to make a good impression in front of the other [chapters] and needing to put our best face forward. So, I know I was nervous about one of our girls.

When asking what they found most difficult about the disaffiliation process, Ella said
Definitely listening to girls say bad things. Because so many girls thought I was a [member of sorority A], they would talk bad about [sorority B]. Some of those girls are in [sorority B]. You talked all that crap and now look where you're standing.

During a closing meeting one night of recruitment, I documented the challenges recruitment counselors were facing:

As the meeting started, they talked about how it's hard to hear negative things about your [chapter] and that tomorrow night's a big night. A recruitment counselor said a lot of PNMs don't know what to do. Ella suggested just going up to them and asking if they have questions. Lisa was worried because what if they don't want to talk to you because they're afraid of saying something bad about your chapter.

The recruitment counselors did their best to be sisters to each other during recruitment by doing things for each other that their sorority sisters would normally do, including baking cupcakes for someone's birthday, posting "happy birthday" signs for another's celebration, and giving roses to wish each other good luck during recruitment. The recruitment counselors also paid for and made each other the traditional paddles at the end of recruitment.

The difficulty of attempting to remain neutral and disconnected from their chapter culminated during bid night when the recruitment counselors' affiliations were revealed. The recruitment counselors were crying and happy to be back with the sisters in their chapters. They were also excited about bonding with the new members who were being revealed at bid night.

Disney World Effect

The recruitment counselors' main concern was that the PNMs would choose a chapter based on the theme nights and decorations as opposed to the experience they would have over the next several years. Throughout the recruitment process, the PNMs were encouraged to "look past the matching outfits and decorations and think about joining a sisterhood, not a picture" (Leslie). The two recruitment counselors interviewed for this study revealed their concern about the recruitment process as they discussed their distinction between recruitment and real life in a sorority. Ella's perspective was:

I feel like recruitment is very superficial. Like, I had so many girls say [sorority B] members are such high maintenance, they're such Stepford Wives, but walk in there any other time of the year and everyone has sweats on. So like, I had so many girls say they're such Barbie dolls, and I'm like, no really, they're not. Like, I've lived there for the past two years and everyone wears sweats. So I think that is what is so misleading. And then a lot of PNMs say this is so intimidating because every chapter had a shopping, materialistic theme. Like Juicy Couture, Tiffany's, Off Broadway, Victoria's Secret. Really, that's not what they are. You could probably guess that the [chapter] that had the Juicy Couture theme only 5% have something Juicy... And I think that if I were to run recruitment, I would not let [chapters] do a materialistic theme. What everyone says about a [chapter] is not how they are like a month later and I tried to explain that to them. Everyone has these themes, don't look at them as who they are. They're just themes.

While Ella was concerned with the negative images being perceived by PNMs, Ava was concerned about the positive misperceptions on the part of the PNMs:

Every [chapter] wants to give off the most positive image of itself, but I think a lot of times [chapters] give off the Disney World effect during recruitment and you know they attract wonderful girls and they get them in and they go to the first meeting and find out 'oh my gosh this is totally different than what I thought it was going to be.' Like, 'these girls don't treat each other like I thought they did' or 'this is a lot more serious than I thought it was,' or 'there's a lot more rules than I thought there was going to be,' or 'wow, I don't fit in here'...You're putting girls into real life situations and this is something that they're going to be in for four years. Because when all that glitter and balloons go away and they're in real life situations, they're going to live there, they're going to eat there, they're sleep there, they're going to do their homework there, they're going to cry there, laugh there, and that's where younger, less mature girls were having a really hard time being able to kind of take all those superficial things out of the room and be like ok well when all this goes away on Tuesday, am I still going to like this [chapter] just because I liked the themed night?

The Coordinator of Fraternities and Sororities was also concerned about the decision-making process of the PNMs based on superficial things. I noted a conversation with Ester in my field notes:

Ester talked to me about wanting a 'No Frills' recruitment so PNMs don't get excited about a chapter because of their decorations. The importance of recruitment is to get to know the PNMs and decorations, skits, and slideshows do not fulfill that purpose.

Although the recruitment counselors are concerned about the images being portrayed by the recruitment process, they expressed frustration with not being able to alter what happens with recruitment, because all chapters must agree upon changes.

Leadership Skills

The recruitment counselors recognized and valued the leadership and job skills they developed throughout their experience in their sorority and in the recruitment process. The structure of the recruitment counselor position provides many opportunities for positive development. Many recruitment counselors noted the value of sorority membership in general and further explained the benefits of holding the recruitment counselor position. Ella appreciated the opportunities to develop communication and leadership skills:

I think just mentoring and speaking because like obviously PNMs are shy and you have to do most of the talking. And just relating, communication, mainly because just explaining to them how you felt and how you've been in the same experience and what not. And I'd say just leadership because there are a lot of times where you have to take the lead, take the lead within the recruitment counselors, or when you're like suggesting ideas, some people are just like sitting there. Initiative. I think just like stepping up and taking the lead and making sure that things are done and done correctly.

Ava recognized how her integrity was tested during recruitment:

Personally, I gained so many things. Just the ability to work with a lot more different people than I had anticipated....Time management definitely. I would definitely have to

say integrity. I was definitely put to the test and I had to choose between a sister and doing the right thing... So it was good [to] learn that we could be independent, and will have to do that very soon after graduation.

Leslie described the ability to be neutral and mediate conflict, as well as improved verbal communication skills and public speaking. Kara said she's "a better version of herself, a stronger woman, stronger leader, and friend." As the researcher, I saw leadership and organizational skills being displayed by the students. The recruitment counselors were able to juggle multiple responsibilities and continue their schoolwork as well. Despite the negative press sororities receive, the recruitment counselors clearly articulated how the value of leadership is embodied in their work with the PNMs, within their chapters, and in the community.

Reflections and Implications Practice

The use of ethnography as a methodology to understand student groups and processes of development is beneficial in understanding how students think, not just what they think. Participant observation, though time-consuming, provides an opportunity to understand the perspectives of students in their natural environment. Additionally, as an outsider to sorority life, I learned a great deal that I can use in my future practice in student affairs. My outsider perspective also allowed me to notice aspects of the culture that others entrenched in it may not recognize.

The findings of this study reveal potential for supporting recruitment counselors' leadership development during sorority recruitment. Many of the leadership opportunities occurring within the chapters are not closely supervised by a fraternity/sorority professional. The experience of recruitment counselors, however, provides practitioners with the opportunity to directly influence sorority members' leadership development. Although many traditions and structures are already formalized within fraternity/sorority life, professionals should seek out additional leadership development opportunities for fraternity/sorority members, such as collaborations among new members in various chapters and status-specific (e.g., first year, sophomore, junior) initiatives to improve fraternal life on their campus. Recruitment counselors viewed their role as an opportunity to give back to their campus. Professionals should further promote and formalize the generative nature of the recruitment counselor position to further develop members' citizenship and leadership.

The expectation of neutrality on the part of recruitment counselors ensures they may fall short, as they will never be able to truly rid themselves of their connection and loyalty to their chapter during recruitment. Another struggle for recruitment counselors included mentoring and guiding PNMs who expressed negative statements about their chapters. During the selection and training of recruitment counselors, the issue of neutrality should be further explored in a realistic manner to include the importance of appearing unbiased to the PNMs. However, recruitment counselors and fraternity/sorority professionals should also accept that recruitment counselors will never be value- or opinion-free during their exchanges with PNMs and other recruitment counselors. Throughout the training and community-building of the recruitment counselors, trust should be emphasized to avoid issues of competition during recruitment. Additionally, sorority members have strong feelings about their chapters, and thus recruitment counselors' maturity and ability to

address negative statements about their chapters should be assessed in the selection process. During recruitment, despite the already long days, time should be built into the schedule for recruitment counselors to reflect on their experience each day to process their feelings about such challenges.

The participants valued their experience despite the sacrifices associated with disaffiliation. Fraternity/sorority practitioners can continue to tap into the leadership development opportunity available during recruitment and use the recruitment counselors' positive energy and desire to give back to continually improve their institution's fraternity/sorority community.

Although sororities are often seen in a negative light on campus, given my experience in numerous areas in higher education and student affairs, I witnessed several similarities between sorority recruitment and other aspects of higher education. For example, sororities are often criticized for presenting a false front, or the Disney World effect as described by Ava. I see the presentation of the positive aspects as what occurs during campus tours and orientation activities for parents and students. Campuses strive to highlight the best aspects of the institution in order to recruit new students, just as the sororities seek to increase membership in their chapters by promoting the best they have to offer. The negative energy recruitment counselors are constantly working against from the media, students, and campus administrators may be taking time away from further leadership development and their ability to create positive change on their campus. Professionals should take the perspectives of recruitment counselors into account when revising and improving their recruitment processes because of their unique insight from both within and outside of their chapters.

Limitations and Future Research

As an ethnographic study, the experience of recruitment counselors was explored in-depth at a single institution. Thus, reader must determine the transferability of the findings and implications to the unique environment of their institution (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The structure of recruitment, including the amount of time recruitment counselors spent with the PNMs, recruitment counselor selection and training, and disaffiliation practices, vary by institution and should be considered by the reader when seeking insight from the experiences of this study's participants.

The experience of the recruitment counselors began prior to my introduction to them in the fall as they were selected and trained during the previous academic year. My inability to observe the entirety of their experience is a limitation of this study. Although the number of hours of observation may seem limited (36.5 hours), the majority of the observation hours occurred over a four-day period, meaning I was deeply entrenched in the recruitment counselor experience as it occurred. Future research of the recruitment counselor culture should begin with the recruitment of sorority members for the position and continue through recruitment process. Additionally, ensuring the availability of all recruitment counselors for interviews following the experience will further enhance research of the recruitment counselor culture.

In regard to future research, although access to the sorority houses at the institution posed a challenge to the study, expanding the study of recruitment counselors to the perspectives of the

sisters in the chapters who welcome the PNMs would provide a fuller understanding of the recruitment counselor culture. Little discussion was held around issues of backlash from the active members in the chapters or how the chapters' leaders' absence influenced the recruitment process.

References

- Anderson, K. M., & Danis, F. S. (2007). Collegiate sororities and dating violence: An exploratory study of informal and formal helping strategies. *Violence Against Women*, 13(1), 87-100.
- Astin, A. W. (1975). *Preventing students from dropping out*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Astin, A. W. (1999). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(5), 518-529.
- Alva, S. A. (1998). Self-reported alcohol use of college fraternity and sorority members. *Journal of College Student Development*, 39(3), 3-10.
- Atlas, G., & Morier, D. (1994). The sorority rush process: Self-selection, acceptance criteria, and the effect of rejection. *Journal of College Student Development*, 35, 346-353.
- Basow, S. A., Foran, K. A., & Bookwala, J. (2007). Body objectification, social pressure, and disordered eating behavior in college women: The role of sorority membership. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 31, 394-400.
- Caron, S. L., Moskey, E. G., & Hovey, C. A. (2004). Alcohol use among fraternity and sorority members: Looking at change over time. *Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education*, 47(3), 51-66.
- Cashel, M. L., Cunningham, D., Landeros, C., Cokley, K., & Muhammad, G. (2003). Sociocultural attitudes and symptoms of bulimia: Evaluating the SATAQ with diverse college groups. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 50(3), 287-296.
- Chapman, L., Hirt, J. B., & Spruill, N. R. (2008). The effects of sorority recruitment on self-esteem. *Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity Advisors*, 3(2), 38-51.
- Clifford, J. (1990). Notes on (field) notes. In R. Sanjek (Ed.), *Fieldnotes: The making of anthropology* (pp. 47-71). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Dinger, M. K. (1999a). Physical activity and dietary intake among college students. *American Journal of Health Studies*, 15(3), 139-148.
- Dinger, M. K. (1999b). Sexual activity among college students living in residence halls and fraternity or sorority housing. *Journal of Health Education*, 30(4), 242-246.
- Elias, J. W., Bell, R. W., Eade, R., Underwood, T., Winsky, K., Shonrock, M. D., Treland, J. E., & Fiel, R. (1996). 'Alcohol myopia,' expectations, social interests, and sorority pledge status. *Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education*, 42, 78-90.

- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Goetz, J. P., & LeCompte, M. D. (1993). *Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research* (2nd ed.). Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
- Huberman, A. M., & Miles, M. B. (2001). Data management and analysis methods. In C. F. Conrad, J. G. Haworth, & Lattuca, L. R. (Eds.), *Qualitative research in higher education: Expanding perspectives* (2nd ed.) (pp. 553-571). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Hutching, K., Lac, A., & LaBrie, J. W. (2008). An application of the theory of planned behavior to sorority alcohol consumption. *Addictive Behaviors*, 33, 538-551.
- Kashubeck, S., Marchand-Martella, N., Neal, C., & Larsen, C. (1997). Sorority membership, campus pressures, and bulimic symptomatology in college women: A preliminary investigation. *Journal of College Student Development*, 38, 40-48.
- LaBrie, J. W., Hutching, K., Pederson, E. R., Hummer, J. F., Shelesky, K., & Tawalbeh, S. (2007). Female college drinking and the social learning theory: An examination of the developmental transition period from high school to college. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(3), 344-356.
- LeCompte, M. D., & Schensul, J. J. (1999). *Analyzing & interpreting ethnographic data*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miley, W. M., & Frank, M. (2006). Binge and non-binge college students' perceptions of other students' drinking habits. *College Student Journal*, 40(2), 259-262.
- Miller, K., Statten, R. R., Rayens, M. K., & Noland, M. (2005). Levels and characteristics of physical activities among a college student cohort. *American Journal of Health Education*, 36(4), 215-220.
- National Panhellenic Conference (2009). *NPC Statistical Information June 2009*. Retrieved from http://www.npcwomen.org/resources/pdf/2009%20Stats_Final.pdf
- Nelson, S. M., Halperin, S., Wasserman, T. H., Smith, C., & Graham, P. (2006). Effects of fraternity/sorority membership and recruitment semester on GPA and retention. *Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity Advisors*, 2(1), 61-73.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Richardson, L. (2000). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 923-948). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Rossmann, G. B., & Rallis, S. F. (2003). *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (1995). Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Santovec, M. L. (2004). Greek rush delay doesn't affect academic success. *National On-Campus Report*, 32(17), 1-2.
- Shulken, E. D., & Pinciario, P. J. (1997). Sorority women's body size perceptions and their weight-related attitudes and behaviors. *Journal of American College Health*, 46, 69-74.
- Spaulding, D. J. (1995). Fraternity & sorority hazing violence: Elements of a comprehensive plan to combat this campus scourge. *College Student Journal*, 29, 368-373.
- Spradley, J. P., & McCurdy, D. W. (1988). The cultural experience: Ethnography in complex society. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45, 89-125.
- Williams, A. E., & Janosik, S. M. (2007). An examination of academic dishonesty among sorority and nonsorority women. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(6), 706-714.
- Wolcott, H. F. (1995). *The art of fieldwork*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.

Author Autobiography

Patricia Witkowsky, Ph.D., is Student Affairs Program Manager at Colorado State University-Pueblo.