SORORITY MEMBERS' VIEWS OF NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES

Beate Wilson and Craig Tollini

The purpose of this study was to have sorority members identify the negative stereotypes they believed other members of the university community had of them and the extent to which they believed these stereotypes were both accurate for and damaging to their chapters. To gather these persepectives, four focus groups were conducted with thirty-six women from four National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) member sororities at a medium-sized, midwestern, public university. In addition to the findings, implications and recommendations are also provided.

Researchers have pointed out various issues or problems attached to sorority membership. Molasso (2005) found the majority of articles about sororities, as well as fraternities, in two professional journals addressed drinking, hazing, or sexual assault. Other recently studied problems include a lack of diversity and academic excellence (Matthews et al, 2009), the presence of cliques and a lack of community (DeSantis, 2007; Matthews et al), racism (Park, 2008), eating disorders (DeSantis), and a focus on reputation and conformity (DeSantis; Robbins, 2004). In short, the research provides a predominantly negative view of sorority members, one reminiscent of their portrayal in the television series Greek and such films as The House Bunny (2008) and Sorority Row (2009).

A topic that has been largely neglected by researchers is how sorority members themselves view the generally negative stereotypes of their organizations. Information on this topic may help explain members' resistance to certain policies, as well as identify potential ways to overcome this resistance and to work with members to address these issues. The current study begins to address this gap by having members of (NPC) sororities identify the negative stereotypes they believe other members of the university community have of them, as well as the extent to which these stereotypes are both accurate and harmful to their chapters.

Review of Literature

One reason to expect sorority members to reject their portrayal in research and the media is that they often believe other chapters reflect the stereotype, but theirs does not. There is some empirical support for the underlying argument that there are differences between chapters, which provides support for the sorority members who have this belief. Larimer, Irvine, Kilmer, and Marlatt (1997) found that members of different fraternity and sorority chapters vary in their level of alcohol abuse. In addition to potentially affecting members' acceptance of their portrayal, the differences that may exist between chapters may also affect members' support for programs and regulations.

In addition to largely ignoring the possible impact of chapter variations, the majority of researchers have also failed to address how sorority members themselves view the issues mentioned above. Research in this area is limited. Three studies were found that do so, and two of these studies focus on hazing. Owen, Burke, and Vichesky (2008) found members of various student organizations, including sororities, thought hazing was expected by new members and widespread in other organizations/chapters. They also provided the participants' preferences for how individuals, organizations, and universities should address hazing. Gordon,

Hall, and Blankenship (1979) found 57% of the fraternity and sorority members who participated in their survey thought no form of hazing was beneficial and 23% said hazing was harmful. But, 25% said hazing was an important part of their new member process and 55% said their chapter did not set any limits on the types of activities that happened prior to or during initiation. All of these percentages need to be interpreted cautiously because roughly half of the respondents selected "don't know" to all of the questions on the survey. The final source located was a report on Greek Life at the University of Minnesota, which included a section on participants' concerns before they joined a sorority or fraternity (Harrold, 1997). Among the frequently cited concerns were the organization's repuation, poor academics, and alcohol/drug use.

Gaining a better understanding of how members perceive themselves and the issues they face- or are believed to face- will allow student affairs professionals to better understand sorority members' behaviors. It may also reveal issues of which administrators, faculty and staff members, and non-affiliated students are unaware, but which sorority members believe are particularly pressing. This information may be particularly useful to both campus and organization-based fraternity/sorority professionals and volunteers as well as to consultants working to help members address perceptions and highlight the positive aspects of affiliation. Authors conducted a similar project with fraternity members (Tollini & Wilson, 2010). The present study addressed the same issues for sororities, and one part of the results section will compare the findings of this project with the previous project.

Method

Sample and Procedure

During the spring 2011 semester, focus groups were conducted with members of four National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) member sororities at Western Illinois University (WIU), a medium-sized, midwestern, public university with an affiliated population that was almost 11% of the approximately 9,600 undergraduate students who were enrolled full-time. Following NPC and IRB approval, the authors attended a collegiate Panhellenic Council meeting to describe the project. After that meeting, the chapter presidents from all six PHC chapters were sent an email soliciting participation. Four chapter presidents agreed to allow the second author to attend a chapter meeting to explain the goals of the study and request focus group participation. On average, the participating chapters had about 50 initiated members.

Separate focus groups were conducted with members from each of the participating chapters. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours. The first author recorded and took notes at each focus group, while the second author facilitated the focus groups. To protect confidentiality, each chapter was assigned a Greek letter that was not used by any of the chapters at WUI. Chapter focus group demographics are summarized in Table 1, though the amount of demographic information presented is limited in order to protect the confidentiality of the chapters.

Procedure

The focus groups were semi-structured to allow for additional questions to be asked based on the participants' comments. The first question

Table 1

Focus Group Demographics

Name	Total Participants	Participants who were Initiated Members*	Participants who were Chapter Leaders**
Eta	9	5	9
Gamma	7	5	7
Nu	10	9	9
Pi	10	8	8

**Participants who were initiated in the Fall 2010 or Spring 2011 semesters were treated as uniniated members since they had less experience in the chapter*

***These participants were either current officers or chairs of committees or had held such positions in the past*

for every group was "What do you believe is the most commonly held negative stereotype of the sororities at WIU?" Participants were then asked to define and describe each stereotype and to discuss the accuracy of each stereotype, including the extent to which each stereotype was applicable to certain chapter or to certain members within every chapter. Towards the end of each focus group, participants were asked "Of the listed stereotypes, which is the most damaging for the sororities at WIU?"

Data Analysis

The recordings of the focus groups were transcribed, and any information that could potentially identify a participant or a chapter was removed or substituted with more general language in order to protect confidentiality. The first author's notes were used to check and clarify the recordings, and the recordings and notes were destroyed once the transcription process ended.

Each focus group was analyzed separately using an approach suggested by Maxwell (1998), whereby responses were organized first by the major topic they addressed and then by the content of the responses. A summary was created for each focus group, and a member check was performed by having participants review the summary for errors and to provide additional comments. Only two participants responded, only one of these participants provided additional information, and neither of these participants indicated any of the material in the summaries was incorrect. The reviewed summaries were combined to create the outline for this article.

Since there did not appear to be any systematic differences in the opinions of the non-initiated and initiated members, their statements were presented together. The results section does not designate how many participants made or agreed with a given statement because this number could not always be determined, in part because there was no systematic recording of body language. In general, at least one other participant echoed each statement, and the few disagreements that occurred are noted.

Limitations

The participants could have provided socially desirable results, particularly in regard to the accuracy of the stereotypes, given the sensitive nature of the topic. For instance, it is possible a participant might feel pressured by the other members of her chapter to state that a particular stereotype is not true or does not apply to her chapter. In fact, one participant told the second author after the focus group that she did not say certain things because they contradicted the statements of another participant. Furthermore, some participants spoke often and at length, while others were

largely silent. Each participant interacted, even if only by nodding; was asked to provide input at multiple times during the focus groups; and provided at least a few substantive comments. The participants also disagreed with and contradicted each other and referred to specific negative behaviors in their chapter. Therefore, it appeared the participants largely felt free to express themselves and contributed as they saw appropriate.

Results

Results are presented in narrative format, differentiated by which stereotypes members believed were most common, which they believed were most accurate, and which they believed were most damaging. Table 2 provides a summary of the stereotypes provided by the participants in each focus group when they were asked to provide the most commonly held stereotypes of sororities at WIU.

Table 2

Summary of Major Results

Chapter Response to Stereotype	Partying	Promiscuity	Drugs	Hazing	Dumb	Poor Relationships	Rich
Commonly Held	Eta Gamma Nu Pi	Eta Gamma Nu Pi	Gamma	Gamma Pi	Gamma Nu Pi	Eta Gamma Nu Pi	Eta
Not true				Pi	Eta	Eta Gamma Pi	
True for certain women within every chapter	Eta Nu	Eta			Gamma Nu		Eta
True for certain chapters	Gamma Pi	Gamma Nu	Gamma	Eta Gamma		Nu	
Most damaging	Gamma Nu Pi	Eta Gamma		Gamma Pi		Eta Gamma	

Most Commonly Held Negative Stereotypes Members Perceived

Partying. Participants from all chapters said the stereotype that sorority members party a lot was the most commonly held stereotype. Participants from Eta, Gamma, and Pi included drinking a lot in their description of this stereotype, and participants from Eta added, in the words of one participant from this group:

> …if you are affiliated [with a sorority], you are affiliated with excessive partying, excessive drinking, getting arrested…. Not just us going out and celebrating a sister's 21st birthday, having a margarita, and going home. Its getting wasted out of your mind, not knowing who you are, and then doing the bad behaviors associated with that.

While the participants from Nu did not explicitly include drinking in their definition of partying, they arguably implied it in statements like "we're presumed to get on top of the bar and dance." Participants from Pi included two other aspects in their description of the partying stereotype: doing drugs and promiscuity. The only further description of drug use these participants provided was doing drugs a lot. In regard to the promiscuity aspect, participants from Pi described it as "making out in public," "dressing provocatively," and "get[ting] with every guy in a fraternity." While participants from the other chapters did not include promiscuity in their description of the partying stereotype, they did list promiscuity as a stereotype that was separate from the partying stereotype, and Gamma listed drug use as a separate stereotype as well (see those sections below).

Promiscuity. Participants from Eta, Gamma, and Nu indicated promiscuity or sleeping around was one of the most commonly held negative stereotypes. Participants from Nu describe this stereotype as "sleeping around with fraternities. It's not just sleeping around in general." In contrast, participants from Gamma described it as sleeping with everyone. The participants from Eta did not agree that the stereotype was limited to fraternity men, but they all agreed that there was at least an emphasis on fraternity men. In addition, all participants from Gamma agreed that there was a hyper-sexualized view of sorority women as part of this stereotype, including the belief that there were naked pillow fights in sorority chapter houses. As noted above, participants from Pi did not mention promiscuity as a separate stereotype, though they did include it as part of the partying stereotype.

Drugs. The women from Gamma listed drugs as one of the most commonly held negative stereotypes. As a participant from Gamma put it, "Some sorority girls are on drugs….They like to party, including drugs." Another participant from Gamma added to this description when she said "I think one of [the stereotypes] could be that some of the girls are just so skinny because they do drugs." As noted above, participants from Pi indicated that drugs were one component of the Partying stereotype instead of a separate stereotype.

Hazing. Participants from every chapter except Nu included hazing as one of the most commonly held negative stereotypes. Women from Gamma and Pi described hazing as, as two participants from Gamma put it, "anything that can make [an uninitiated] member feel uncomfortable." Participants from Eta and Pi described hazing as anything that took away uninitiated members' dignity or embarrassed them, as well as anything that caused harm to uninitiated members. For example, one participant from Eta said hazing was "mainly the embarrassment and the physical harm, like making us do crazy, ridiculous stuff that no one would do in 30 degree weather." Finally, women from Pi included the ideas that (1) uninitiated

members are required to do things that initiated members are not required to do and (2) uninitiated members have to do these things in order to be accepted.

Dumb. All of the chapters mentioned a stereotype that was related to intelligence. The participants from every chapter except Nu used the word "Dumb" as at least part of their description of this stereotype, and the participants from Nu described this stereotype as not caring about school, having test files, and skipping class. The participants from Gamma agreed that the "Dumb" stereotype could be combined with a stereotype that they initially listed separately and that they described as liking clothes and being girly and superficial. While the participants from Pi listed and described a "Dumb" stereotype, they connected it with stereotypes that were included as part of the "Poor Relationships" stereotype (see next section). As a result, the participants from Pi were not asked any questions about the accuracy of the "Dumb" stereotype.

The women from Eta and Gamma described the "Dumb" stereotype as the belief that sorority members are dumb, and the participants from Nu described this stereotype as the belief that sorority members do not have good grades. The participants from Nu also mentioned skipping class and having test files, and participants from Gamma mentioned showing up late for class. The participants from Gamma and Pi provided descriptions of this stereotype focused on issues with sorority members' priorities (i.e. focusing on appearance rather than grades for the participants from both chapters and focusing on the chapter rather than grades for just the participants from Gamma).

Poor Relationships. Participants from each chapter mentioned stereotypes that dealt with the poor quality of sorority members' relationships or interactions with others, both within and outside of their organizations. The participants from Eta discussed the following stereotypes related to poor relationships: paying for your friends, which was described as the beliefs that members only interacted with each other because they paid dues and that they did not have genuine relationships with each other; being clingy, which they described as the beliefs that members did not interact with anyone outside of their chapter; and members of each chapter having certain traits in common, which they described as members being conceited, only thinking about themselves, and believing they are better looking than unaffiliated students. The participants from Gamma also discussed two stereotypes that related to the general idea of poor quality relationships.

The first centered on having money and the idea of "buying your friends," which the participants from Gamma described similarly to the participants from Eta. The second was commonly described as being "bitchy and stuck up," which was further described as fighting with other sorority members, only talking to members of one's chapter, and only partying with fraternity members. The participants from Nu discussed the following stereotypes related to poor relationships: "buying your friends," not having lifelong friendships, being stuck-up, not interacting with members of other sororities, and being "too good" for unaffiliated students. Finally, the participants from Pi provided only one stereotype they referred to as being "cliquey." Participants described this multifaceted stereotype as the belief that sorority members only interact with members of their chapter because they believe they are better than other people, that there are cliques within each chapter, that members of a sorority will dislike the members of another sorority if only one member of their sorority has an issue with that other sorority, that sororities will only interact with members of certain fraternities, and that sorority members only have friends because they paid for them.

Rich. Participants from Eta viewed being rich as one of the most commonly held negative stereotypes. These participants agreed that this

stereotype was tied to having lots of money. As one participant from Eta said:

> I've been called numerous times a little rich daddy's girl, and they all assume that my father pays for my dues and my father pays for my school….I think people perceive, especially on this campus, that…as soon as something goes wrong, we cry and throw a little bitch fit…until we get the money.

As noted above, the participants from Gamma described having money as part of the Poor Relationships stereotype, rather than a separate stereotype.

Accuracy of the Perceived Stereotypes

Participants from all four chapters had differing views of the accuracy of each stereotype individually, though there was general agreement that the stereotypes were not true. Table 2 provides a summary of their perceptions. Participants from three chapters argued that some of the stereotypes were not true at all. More specifically, the participants from Eta indicated that the Dumb stereotype was not true, and the participants from Pi said the Hazing stereotype was not true. While there was some argument between the participants from Pi regarding whether or not certain chapters were more likely to haze, they ultimately agreed that they did not have enough evidence to know whether or not this was true. In addition, the participants from Eta, Pi, and Gamma all indicated that most of the various aspects of the Poor Relationships stereotype were not true. The exceptions for Eta were the beliefs that sorority members thought they were better than independent students or members of other sororities, which the participants thought was true for some chapters. The belief that members of each chapter had certain traits in common was thought to be true by one participant.

The exceptions for Gamma were the beliefs that sorority members do not get along and are rich; participants thought both stereotypes were true for some individuals in different chapters. The exceptions for Pi were the beliefs that sorority members are cliquey, which the participants thought was true, and the belief that members are stuck up and rich, which the participants thought was true for certain chapters.

Participants from Eta, Gamma, and Nu also indicated that only certain women within each chapter engaged in other stereotypical behaviors. Participants from Eta indicated this was the case for the Promiscuity, Partying, and Rich stereotypes, participants from Gamma indicated this was the case for the Dumb stereotype, and participants from Nu indicated this was the case for the Partying and Dumb stereotypes. The participants from Gamma and Nu also argued that those stereotypes were truer for certain chapters because of the individuals in them. As one Eta participant stated regarding the Promiscuity stereotype:

> …there may be certain women who choose to behave that way, but I know a lot people in many chapters that have never behaved that way and would never behave that way, and I don't think that joining any sorta chapter would… promote that behavior cuz we all have our standards and our morals, and I don't think that the people we hang out with would totally change [them].

These findings may provide additional evidence that participants did not believe the stereotypes were true. Contrary, participants argue that the stereotypes were, at best, only true for a limited number of members.

Further evidence that the participants did not believe the stereotypes were true for all sorority members included participants from all four chapters indicated there were stereotypes

that were only true for certain chapters. Participants from Gamma and Nu indicated this was the case for the Promiscuity stereotype; participants from Gamma also indicated this was the case for the Partying stereotype and, with a lesser degree of confidence, the Drugs stereotype; and participants from Pi indicated this was the case for the Partying stereotype, which included drug use and promiscuity for that group. In addition, participants from Eta and Gamma indicated this was the case for the Hazing stereotype. Finally, the participants from Nu participants indicated that all aspects of the Poor Relationships stereotype except "buying your friends," which they indicated was not true at all, were more true for certain chapters, though one participant thought the accuracy of the belief that members only interact with each other was difficult to determine and another participant thought the "stuck up" aspect was true for certain individuals.

Most Damaging Negative Stereotypes Members Perceived

Multiple stereotypes. At the end of the focus group, participants were asked which stereotype was most damaging for the sororities at WIU. The participants from Gamma, Eta, and Pi selected more than one stereotype as the most damaging. More specifically, participants from Eta and Pi named two stereotypes as the most damaging while participants from Gamma selected four stereotypes. The participants from Nu mentioned one stereotype. The details about which stereotypes they selected and their reasons for selecting these stereotypes are presented below, and a summary can be found in Table 2.

Partying. Participants from Gamma, Nu, and Pi mentioned partying as one of the most damaging stereotypes. The participants from each of these groups also provided the reasons why they selected this stereotype. The participants from Gamma and Pi argued that partying was the most damaging stereotype because it negatively affected recruitment. As one participant from Gamma put it, "girls don't want to go through recruitment because they think, 'Well, those houses, all they do is party. I don't just party.'" The participants from Gamma, Nu, and Pi also indicated the partying stereotype could hurt members by negatively affecting their reputations. For instance, one participant from Gamma said:

> I also think it can hurt when it comes to…the people of Macomb or like the administration, teachers, and staff, if they hear stories of, you know, girls out partying, or the people of Macomb see those few girls walking home from the bar, you know, acting outrageous.…I think that can be pretty detrimental to our image.

In addition, participants from Gamma and Nu said this stereotype is the most damaging because it impacts the other stereotypes. For instance, one participant from Nu said,

> If you party, you're gonna miss class. Your teachers are gonna know you're coming hungover. They're gonna know that you're leaving class to go to the bars straight after, and chances are, if you are rumored to be a slut, it's because you were drinking heavily.

Finally, participants from Pi said this stereotype can lead to legal problems. While the participants from Eta did not list partying as one of the most damaging stereotypes, one participant from Eta indicated that partying could be damaging because potential members who only want to party may not be high quality members.

Hazing. Participants from Gamma and Pi said hazing was one of the most damaging negative stereotypes for sororities at WIU. Participants from both chapters contended that

this stereotype was the most damaging because it negatively affected recruitment. For example, a participant from Pi stated, "when I was going through [recruitment], I heard rumors [about a certain chapter hazing], and it totally made me not want to go to that house." Participants from Pi also indicated hazing can harm a chapter's reputation and lead to legal trouble. While the participants from Nu did not list hazing as one of the damaging stereotypes because they did not see it as a problem for their chapter, they did perceive hazing as the most damaging stereotype because one of the first questions potential members ask is about hazing and hazing can lead to death and, as a result, the loss of a charter.

Promiscuity. Participants from Eta and Gamma selected promiscuity as one of the most damaging stereotypes, though not all of the participants from Eta agreed. While the participants from both groups indicated this stereotype could help recruitment by attracting some women to the chapter, they also stated this stereotype would lead to both short-term and long-term recruitment problems. For instance, one participant from Gamma said,

> …you got some girls that don't want to go through certain houses…because they think of a stereotype that they're sleeping around, but then you have other girls that are saying, "Oh, I want to be a part of that house because I'm going to meet the most guys and sleep around," and then those are…the people that are going to be leading that house later, so if you have a bunch of girls coming in there for the wrong reasons, its kind of like a set-up for failure for that house.

While the participants from Nu did not list this stereotype as one of the most damaging, they did contend that some chapters embrace or promote this stereotype in order to recruit.

Poor Relationships. Participants from Gamma indicated two aspects of this stereotype may be the most damaging because of their impact on how sororities are seen and, therefore, recruitment. The first is the idea of "buying your friends." The participants from Gamma argued this stereotype could be the most damaging stereotype because, as one participant put it:

> A lot of people won't go through [recruitment] because of that, even after you tell them, "Well, you can be put on a payment plan."…It still is a huge turn-off to them, that they have to pay money just to be accepted or whatever they're thinking in their heads….Even if they get in, they're like, "Well, I won't have as nice as stuff as everyone else."

The second aspect is a lack of acceptance, which one participant said could impact recruitment because "going off of people are too scared to go through recruitment because they're not sure that any house will take them."

Participants from Eta indicated one aspect of this stereotype, namely being conceited, was one of the most damaging stereotypes. These participants agreed that this stereotype leads to competition that negatively affects the fraternity/sorority community. As one participant said, "the more conceited we are about our own chapter, the more we talk and bash other [chapters]….We're all trying to one-up each other all the time." Furthermore, participants from Eta agreed this stereotype could, as one participant put it "definitely [bring] down other chapters and it definitely [tear] the community apart." While the participants from Eta did not list the "clingy" aspect of this stereotype as the most damaging stereotype, they did argue that it could be the most damaging since other people may think sorority members exclude other people because they think they are better than other people.

Similarities to and Differences from Fraternity Members' Views

The authors had previously conducted a similar project with members of five fraternities that were affiliated with the Interfraternity Council at WIU (Tollini & Wilson, 2010). Like the sorority participants in this current study, the fraternity participants studied in 2010 listed seven stereotypes, and the list provided by the participants in each focus group varied. Furthermore, fraternity and sorority participants from both studies listed stereotypes that focused on or at least included drinking, promiscuity, hazing, poor academic performance, arrogance, being rich, and paying for friends. The sorority participants discussed additional aspects of poor quality relationships and also provided a larger discussion of partying, which included drug use, than the fraternity participants, while the fraternity members mentioned sexual assault and date rape. The most notable difference between the stereotypes listed by the fraternity and sorority participants was that fraternity participants listed not performing community service.

There were more differences between the fraternity and sorority participants regarding their views of the accuracy of the stereotypes. While sorority participants thought the stereotypes were at best only true for certain individuals or chapters, at least some of the fraternity participants stated there was at least some truth to all of the stereotypes they listed. The fraternity participants also argued at least some of the stereotypes were more/only true for the members of certain chapters, but they made this argument less often than sorority participants. Furthermore, the fraternity participants stated the hazing stereotype was true. One notable similarity between the fraternity and sorority participants was the different focus groups did not have the same view of the accuracy of some stereotypes.

Both fraternity and sorority participants listed four stereotypes as most damaging to their organizations: hazing, drinking/parting, promiscuity, and arrogance. However, the sorority participants listed other aspects of poor relationships as damaging to their chapters. Hazing and partying/drinking were the stereotypes selected by members of the most focus groups in both projects, and the number of stereotypes selected by members of each focus group varied for both the fraternity and sorority participants. Both the fraternity and sorority participants stated these stereotypes were damaging primarily because of their negative impact on recruitment and/or the quality of members that are recruited, though participants from both projects indicated that some of these stereotypes could boost a chapter's reputation.

Discussion

Participants listed the following as the most commonly held negative stereotypes of sororities: Partying, Promiscuity, Hazing, Dumb, Poor Relationships, Drugs, and Rich. The participants from each group did not discuss all of these stereotypes, and the difference in the number of stereotypes discussed in each group cannot be tied to the number of participants in the group because nearly all of the groups had essentially the same number of participants and the smallest group actually one of the groups that discussed the most stereotypes. The differences in the listed stereotypes indicate chapters differed in their views of which stereotypes were the most commonly held. The participants also differed in how they defined these stereotypes, and at least a couple aspects of the definitions that some of the participants provided for the Poor Relationships stereotype (i.e., paying for friends) have not been the focus of previous research.

Overall, participants from each focus group

argued the stereotypes were not accurate for all sorority members. More specifically, they argued the stereotypes were either not true or were only true for certain chapters or certain individuals within each chapter. The participants from each group did not view the same stereotype in the same way, however. For instance, participants from Pi argued the Hazing stereotype was not true, while participants from Eta and Gamma contended this stereotype was true for certain chapters.

At least some participants believed the Partying, Hazing, Promiscuity, and Poor Relationships stereotypes were the most damaging stereotypes for all sororities at WIU. In general, participants, even those who did not rank these stereotypes as the most damaging, believed these stereotypes negatively affected recruitment, though some participants stated that these stereotypes could also have a positive, if short-term impact on recruitment. The Partying stereotype was selected as the most damaging stereotype by women from three chapters, while the Hazing and Promiscuity stereotypes were selected by participants from two chapters. Poor Relationships was selected by participants from one chapter. Finally, women from two groups named two stereotypes as the most damaging, while the women from another group selected four stereotypes and women from the final group only mentioned one stereotype.

Implications

Campus and organization-based sorority professionals and volunteers should seek the perspectives of sorority members on their campus, perhaps by replicating the present study and/or holding public forums and online discussions. One benefit of obtaining this information is that programming could be designed based on whether members would classify a concern as major or minor. For instance, educational programs could be created to inform members about the concerns they do not seem to view as major concerns (e.g., racism and eating disorders), while programs regarding the issues about which they are aware (e.g., partying and hazing) could focus on strategies for addressing these concerns.

Practitioners may learn members believe they face issues of which the practitioners are unaware. Perhaps the clearest example of this is the stereotype that sorority members "pay for their friends." Gaining this knowledge may lead professionals to develop new programming and to work with members to address these "new" concerns which may encourage additional positive interactions between sororities and university personnel.

Insight into sorority members' beliefs about the accuracy of the negative stereotypes of their organizations enables sorority professionals to identify those concerns about which members need more information in order to perceive them as legitimate, either for all chapters and/or for their chapter specifically. Members may also be likely to address the concerns they believe are the most damaging to them. Determining why members believe a particular stereotype is damaging can also be useful; fraternity/sorority professionals could incorporate this reasoning into policies and discussions with members. During the focus groups, participants found stereotypes damaging predominantly because they affected recruitment. If sorority professionals focus on how certain actions may negatively impact recruitment results and/or provide evidence regarding how sharp the decline in recruitment numbers may be, sorority members may be particularly likely to change their behaviors.

Campus and organization-based sorority advisors and volunteers should also be aware of differences between chapters. Participants in each focus group did not list the same stereotypes, nor did they define or describe the same stereotype in the same way. In addition,

participants in each group ranked between one and four stereotypes as most damaging. Furthermore, participants from each group who mentioned a given stereotype did not necessarily agree on why the stereotype was damaging or even if it was damaging. Participants from some groups even provided reasons to believe that a stereotype could have positive consequences (i.e., chapters that match the Partying stereotype may be more appealing to potential new members because they have a lot of parties), though they acknowledged that these benefits may be short lived (i.e., chapters that match the Partying stereotype may have problems completing the work of the chapter because their members focus on having parties). All of this indicates there is variation between and within chapters. As a result, a "one-size-fits-all" approach is unlikely to be well received.

In addition, the comparison of the results from this project and previous studies involving IFC fraternities (Tollini & Wilson, 2010) indicate sorority and fraternity members have similar perceptions of the negative stereotypes that others have of their organizations. Therefore, similar programming could be used for both fraternities and sororities. That being said, there should be at least some differences in this programming because there are slight differences in the stereotypes listed by men's and women's groups. Perhaps more importantly, fraternity members may be more open to programming because they were more likely to believe there was at least some accuracy to the stereotypes, though fraternity and sorority members are somewhat likely to believe the stereotypes are truer for chapters other than their own.

Suggestions for Future Research

Additional research on how sorority members view the negative stereotypes of them is needed, in no small part because the research described above is preliminary. This study needs to be replicated at other universities, especially those with a larger fraternity/sorority population. Future research should also address each commonly held stereotype in more detail and determine the extent to which sorority members (1) are aware of the various stereotypes of them, (2) would rank the same stereotypes as damaging, and (3) have the same definition of the stereotypes. Finally, additional research should address how sorority members believe these stereotypes should be addressed.

References

DeSantis, A. (2007). *Inside Greek U.: Fraternities, sororities and the pursuit of pleasure, power, and prestige*. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky.

Gordon, K., Hall, H., & Blankenship, B. (1979). Having revisited!?: An institutional self study. *Southern College Personnel Association Journal, 2*(1), 31-38.

Harrold, R. (1997). *The Greek experience: A Study of fraternities and sororities at the University of Minnesota*. Bloomington, IN: Center for the Study of the College Fraternity.

Larimer, M., Irvine, D., Kilmer, J., & Marlatt, G. A. (1997). College drinking and the Greek system: Examining the role of perceived norms for high-risk behavior. *Journal of College Student Development, 38*(6), 587-598.

Matthews, H., Featherstone, L., Bluder, L., Gerling, A., Loge, S., & Messenger, R. (2009). Living in your letters: Assessing congruence between espoused and enacted values of one fraternity/sorority community. *Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors, 4*(1), 29-41.

Maxwell, J. (1998). *Designing a qualitative study*. In L. Bickman & D. Rog (Eds.), Handbook of applied social research methods (pp. 69-100), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Molasso, W. (2005). A content analysis of a decade of fraternity/sorority scholarship in student affairs research journals. *Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors, 1*(1), 1-12.

Owen, S., Burke, T., & Vichesky, D. (2008). Hazing in student organizations: Prevalence, attitudes, and solutions. *Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors, 3*(1), 40-58.

Park, J. (2008). Race and the Greek system in the 21st century: Centering the voices of Asian American women. *NASPA Journal, 45*(1), 103-132.

Robbins, A. (2004). Pledged: The Secret Life of Sororities. NY: Hyperion.

Tollini, C., & Wilson, B. (2010). Fraternity members' views of negative stereotypes. *Oracle: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors, 5*(1), 34-44..

Author Biographies

Beate Wilson (M.A., Western Illinois University) is an assistant professor of sociology at Western Illinois University. Her research interests include college students' perceptions of fraternities and sororities. She can be reached at bi-wilson1@wiu.edu.

Craig Tollini (Ph.D., Western Michigan University) is an associate professor of sociology at Western Illinois University. His research interests include college students' and faculty members' perceptions of homosexuality, academic bias, and fraternities and sororities. He is the chapter advisor for the Kappa Theta chapter of Theta Xi fraternity. He can be reached at cd-tollini@wiu.edu.