

# STUDENT AFFAIRS PRACTITIONERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF SORORITY MEMBERS

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*This qualitative study utilized Super's Developmental Theory (1980) to explore practitioners' perceptions of sorority members' career development. Researchers interviewed five practitioners who work with sorority members in a variety of capacities. Four themes emerged: alignment of environment and values, connection between life cycle and membership, balancing multiple formal and informal roles, and impact of past experiences on future experiences. Implications included providing earlier education and support on transitioning between roles within and outside the sorority chapter, council, and community, providing structure reflection, and increasing collaboration between career centers and offices of fraternity/sorority life.*

Social fraternities and sororities exist to promote the development of their members through high scholastic, civic, and leadership standards (Kelley, 2008; Sermersheim, 1996). Banning and Kaier (1974) stated, "...institutions themselves bear responsibility for the design and creation of campus environments, arranged appropriately for meeting educational purposes" (p.371). Sororities or women's fraternities also share this responsibility. Aspects of these organizations have changed over time resulting in shifting resources away from their original missions of providing environments for intellectual development and preparation for post-collegiate life or career (Turk, 2004).

Ironically, many individuals tend to use the terms career and job interchangeably, including some student affairs practitioners. Sororities have the potential to fulfill their mission by playing a key role in students' career development. When practitioners fully understand the definition of career and the evolving world of work, practitioners can proceed with intentionality. A gap in the literature currently exists in this area. The purpose of this study was to examine student affairs practitioners' perceptions of the career development of sorority members.

## Literature Review

Before providing the theoretical framework for this study, the researchers examined multiple studies and theories in the literature on fraternities and sororities, leadership development, and career development.

### *Fraternity/Sorority Literature and Leadership Development*

Practitioners, specifically in fraternity/sorority life (FSL), work with members serving in leadership positions to navigate risk management, support service and philanthropic endeavors, maintain high scholastic challenges, and increase membership. FSL staff must also collaborate with sororities' organization staff members and local advisors to deliver programming that aligns with organizational and institutional missions. An ongoing challenge for FSL staff is the necessity of repetitive counseling and advising due to the rotation of members through fraternity/sorority organizations and specific leadership positions (Long & Snowden, 2011).

Several studies surveyed sorority members themselves about leadership and outcomes (Bureau, Ryan, Ahren, Shoup, & Torres, 2011; DiChiara, 2009; Kelley, 2008; Long & Snowden, 2011; Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2009). These

studies and others focused on self-reported data, often by members serving in formal leadership roles. Practitioners were not included in these studies, yet practitioners often develop and coordinate a majority of educational programming. Researchers have developed studies to identify if there is a difference in the educational gains of fraternity/sorority members in comparison to non-members (Long & Snowden, 2011; Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2009). Kelley (2008) saw the impact of fraternity membership on career success as it relates to leadership, specifically individuals who served as their fraternity's chapter presidents.

To broaden the body of literature, DiChiara (2009) used the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (SLPI) as the instrument to investigate if leadership styles were different based on the various governing councils for different fraternities and sororities based on the North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC), National Panhellenic Conference (NPC), and National Pan-hellenic Council, Inc. (NPHC). Many organizations, especially National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) groups, use national-level leadership programming that all of their chapters implement (Taylor, 2010). Two councils had either all male or all female members and the other two councils had both male and female members. While DiChiara (2009) could not find significant differences in the leadership styles between the groups, which aligned with previous studies, there was significance when examining specific traits. The women's groups fostered more collaborative relationships rather than competitive relationships and also demonstrated more respect and dignity than their male counterparts (DiChiara, 2009). Taylor's (2010) study supported the same findings about the development of relationships being key to leadership development and thereby contributing to their career development and success.

Even though leadership styles impact fraternity/sorority members' career development, these studies tended to focus on positional lead-

ers rather than all members. Furthermore, the studies relied on self-reported outcomes and perceptions of the impact of fraternity/sorority membership. In addition to reviewing several studies about FSL, leadership development, the researchers examined career development studies and theories.

## Career Development

Whitmarch and Wentworth (2010) raised important points about the impact of gender on career choice. They connected their study to Goffredson's (2002) theory of circumspection, compromise, and self-concept as well as Holland's (1997) typology of careers. The factors that go into making a career or vocational choice is part of someone's career development. Whitmarch and Wentworth (2010) supported that women are drawn to careers in the categories of Social, Artistic, and Conventional while men choose Realistic and Investigative. The author also connected socioeconomic status to career choices. The research reflected national findings with the career choice of men and women. Women were continually drawn to careers within the Social area, which involved developing strong interpersonal relationships and social connectedness. These qualities connected to characteristics of women's style of leadership, which aligned with the DiChiara's (2009) study referenced earlier. Even though it could be valuable to ask student affairs practitioners about their perceptions of the career fields sorority members select, their opinions would not yield usable results that connected with the focus of this study.

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule's *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1986) acknowledged women's multiple identities such as race, ethnicity, geography, and religiosity, can impact cognitive development (Love & Guthrie, 1999). The authors argued the five epistemological perspectives are not gender specific but are gender related. If a goal of sorority membership was

to figure out how to think rather than what to think, the Ways of Knowing framework could be helpful. For example, fraternities and sororities have local advisors in addition to FSL staff whose purpose is to be resources rather than give the exact answers on how to solve challenges. When members go from seeing these people as resources that can provide points of view rather than absolute answers, sorority members can construct answers.

Lent, Brown, and Hackett's (2002) Social Cognitive Career Theory connects self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals to how career choices are turned into actions. Fisher, Gushue, and Cerrone (2010) examined how variables such as gender and sexual identity impact career aspirations. Fisher et al. (2010) addressed the gaps in research about the career development of women and specifically, lesbians. While all sorority women do not identify as lesbians, the authors acknowledged how several studies pointed to the importance of family support as it related to career or vocational development. Often times college students are away from their families while in college. A sorority environment has the potential to provide the missing family support that used to exist on a day-to-day basis. Other studies outside of education suggest membership in multiple group organizations can assist with transitions, such as transitioning into college, roles within a group, or careers (Jones & Jetten, 2011). Fisher et al. (2010) indicated that support of the family and friends positively affected participants' career aspirations and development. These studies served to reinforce how student development, especially the career development process that occurs during collegiate years, can be quite complex.

## Theoretical Framework

Rather than focusing solely on leadership, cognitive development, or career choice, the researchers chose Super's Developmental Theory (1980) to ground this study. The three compo-

nents to the theory are life stages, self-concept, and life roles. The theory examines an individual over a lifetime or life span. Super's (1980) life stages include: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement. He stated a person should spend a certain amount of years in each stage during one's life or career. Sorority members do not join an organization and immediately serve in high-level, formal leadership roles. They must grow as people by integrating the organization into their lives and by being involved in something larger than themselves. Once established in the sorority chapter, members can maintain the status quo before being forced to disengage. Even though sorority membership is for life, the researchers defined the life span to be the time members spent in their sororities during college.

In addition to the stages, Super (1980) argued that feedback or perceptions of individuals around people affects individuals' self-concepts. Another effect on self-concept involved if the individual or other people perceived the development as on time in relation to a standard (Super, et al. 1963). Using Super's Developmental Theory (1980) allowed the researchers to explore how practitioners perceived the self-concepts of sorority members. If sorority members believe they have the skills, support, and strategies to be successful after college in their career choices, perhaps professionals can capitalize on putting programs or environments in place to build self-concept.

The evolution of life roles is another component of the theory considered in this study. Munson and Widmer (1997) suggested career counselors should holistically think of career as a larger concept rather than just an occupation, so roles like leisure can be included. Super (1980) identified roles that individuals take on during life such as worker, spouse, homemaker, student, son or daughter, parent, leisurite, and citizen. Super's Life Span Rainbow (1980, 1990) showed how these roles can shift over time and allowed for different roles to have different lengths and

intensity based on the individual. People can also experience satisfaction and stress simultaneously when playing multiple roles (Super, 1980, 1990). Once individuals identify how to navigate life in multiple roles, they can utilize various strategies to juggle multiple roles later in the life. Using Super's Theory to examine the central research question allowed the researchers to examine if sorority members are developing strategies they can employ later in their careers.

## Research Design

### Sample

Since the research site did not have a large FSL staff, the target population was student affairs practitioners who had directly or indirectly worked with sorority members in a full-time, professional capacity. Due to graduate assistants being very close in age to the college students, the researchers did not include them in

this study. Focusing on practitioners allowed the researchers to better understand how the individuals advising members and developing programming perceive the career development of sorority members.

There were five female participants in this study: two affiliated with National Panhellenic Conference (NPC), two affiliated with National Pan-hellenic Council, Inc. (NPHC), and one affiliated with a local sorority at her undergraduate institution. The five participants came from different undergraduate and graduate institutions, and none of the participants had earned a degree from the research site. The participants joined their personal sororities at different times of their collegiate years. All participants had held formal and informal roles within their sororities and experienced a variety of advising or supervisory roles post-graduation. The advising capacity listed in Table 1 reflects the participants' roles at the time of the study.

**Table 1**  
*Participant Demographic Information*

<u>Name</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Council Affiliation</u>	<u>Year Joined</u>	<u>Advising Capacity</u>
Alpha	Female	Non-NPC	Freshman	Direct
Beta	Female	NPHC	Sophomore	Direct
Gamma	Female	NPC	Junior	Indirect
Delta	Female	NPHC	Sophomore	Indirect
Epsilon	Female	NPC	Sophomore	Indirect

Using the techniques of convenience sampling and referral method (Creswell, 2009), the researchers coordinated with the research site's Assistant Director of Fraternity/Sorority Life and other staff members to identify individuals who would possibly be willing to participate in interviews by distributing the researchers' contact information. These methods achieved the desired number of and differences in individuals needed to provide insights to the research question (Creswell, 2009; Litoselliti, 2003; Patton, 1990).

### Data Collection and Analysis

One of the researchers conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the five participants. Semi-structured interviews allowed interviewees "to explore a topic more openly and... express their opinions and ideas in their own words" (Esterberg, 2002, p.87). After providing a consent letter to the participants, the researcher used a digital recorder during the interviews to ensure accurate transcriptions. Interviews lasted from thirty to forty-five minutes.

An interview protocol guided the interviews.

After building rapport with the participants, the questions focused on their perceptions of the career development of sorority members using Super's Developmental Theory (1980). The questions addressed the three main components of life stages, self-concept, and life roles. For example, one of the questions had participants describe the life cycle or the journey of a sorority member during her collegiate years within the context of her chapter, organization, and/or council. Another question focused on participants describing the different roles they saw members of sororities playing in their lives inside and outside of their chapters, organizations, or councils. The researchers' sought to explore Super's (1980) stages, self-concept, and roles as it related to sorority members while allowing the interviewer flexibility to ask clarifying or follow-up questions.

After collecting the data, the same researcher that conducted the interviews transcribed each interview from the recordings and assigned Greek letters to each participant to provide anonymity. The researchers considered several options for analysis. To honor the diversity of the participants and their experiences, the researchers used In Vivo style for the first cycle of coding and thematic analysis for the second cycle of coding. In Vivo coding preserves the participants' original intent by focusing on the participants' direct words rather than making inferences (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2011; Saldaña, 2013).

After coding each individual interview, the researcher who conducted the interviews began comparing the key words and phrases between interviews and identified themes and descriptions. The themes and descriptions helped to define the categories. The categories helped create a coding scheme for a second cycle of coding (Saldaña, 2013). After this coding, the researcher read through the documents again to determine if topics should be combined or separated (Creswell, 2009; Saldaña, 2013). The second researcher served as a peer-debriefer to also review the coding (Creswell, 2009). Both

researchers found alignment with Super's Developmental Theory (1980).

### *Strategies for Trustworthiness*

Qualitative validity refers to the researchers checking for accuracy by using certain procedures (Creswell, 2009). First, the researchers incorporated language from Super's Developmental Theory (1980) into the interview questions. Second, since one researcher conducted and initially coded the data, it allowed the second researcher to review the coding and themes without being clouded by initial biases. Third, the researchers used member-checking to provide participants with the opportunity to review their transcripts and clarify anything that did not read as they intended (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### *Positionality of Researchers*

In qualitative inquiry, researchers should acknowledge their background and positionality as it relates to the topic. The researcher who conducted the interviews and analysis will claim her positionality helped to inform the research. She is a member of one of the 26 National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) organizations, but her sorority did not have a chapter at the research site. Participants could speak freely about their perceptions. She had first-hand experience of what it was like to go through college being a leader within and outside of her sorority as well as working directly with several campus professionals. As a volunteer and professional for over a decade, working with sorority members in a variety of capacities informed this study. This insight allowed the first researcher who conducted the interviews to ask appropriate follow-up questions, which led to rich data.

The second researcher has a broader knowledge of higher education and various developmental theories. Additionally, the second researcher was a more experienced researcher which allowed her to play an important role during the data analysis phase of the study.

## Strengths and Boundaries

The researchers acknowledge the strengths and boundaries of this qualitative study. They did not intend to generalize the findings. Merriam (1998) explained how qualitative research seeks small, nonrandom samples, “because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many” (p. 206). Since this study aimed to begin filling a gap in the literature, the researchers interviewed five practitioners to begin gaining an understanding of how they perceive the career development of sorority members. Due to the nature of advising a larger community at the research site, student affairs practitioners, especially FSL advisors, cannot directly interact with all members. Even though the researchers based the findings on the experiences and perceptions of participants with varied personal and professional backgrounds, participants admitted they cannot speak to the development of all sorority members due to the nature of working with members in formal leadership positions. Therefore, the intent of this study was not to generalize the findings but to assist in informing future studies.

## Findings

During the coding process, it was important to not force the theory into the findings. In the end, the findings aligned with the major areas of Super’s Developmental Theory (1980). The researchers organized the findings around four themes: (1) alignment of environment and values, (2) connection between life cycle and membership, (3) balancing multiple formal and informal roles, and (4) impact of past experiences on future experiences. The following sections provide samples of participants’ quotes that supported the identified themes.

### *Alignment of Environment and Values*

Participants described how sorority member-

ship provided an environment that aligned with students’ values. For example, participants described achievement, altruism, creativity, and social interaction. Participants provided concrete examples of members being able to see these values play out and develop strategies they used in future situations.

In discussing her perceptions on values, Alpha shared how:

*[She] sees a lot of women that are so excited and so passionate and want to create so much change and they’re just like trying to find anything, any resource that can help them be better and motivate their members.*

While Alpha discussed her experience with one member, she identified several values:

*I think probably her involvements before school and her desire to serve I think is a value of hers. Serving others is I think what’s influenced her to be so satisfied and so involved. And that doesn’t mean that I think she comes in and she’s frustrated with chapter members’ behavior or lack of involvement, but she is still so excited to figure out how to motivate them, how to get them involved.*

All five participants discussed how recognition and working together to make an impact were important to members. Beta specifically discussed how:

*When it comes to award recognition and things like that, they take pride in being able to say here are all the great things we’re doing on campus...They love that sense of satisfaction from that sense of achievement. When they can say they are moving their organization forward or in a different direction or when they can say, I implemented this new program to help our seniors get more involved and we’re seeing such a huge turnaround in senior apathy because we’ve now given them a place that they can declare or say that is their own. Or we raised this much more money than we did this year than last year or they can say under their tenure they achieved recognition either from the university or with their national organization, so I think*

*those women that like if they can see the change they're making they're fulfilled in it.*

Holland's (1997) work supported the participants' perceptions of sorority members finding an environment that aligned with their values. After graduating from college and continuing their careers, these individuals need to continue finding environments that align with not only their interests and skills but also their values.

### **Connection between Life Cycle and Membership**

When sorority members pledge to an organization, they vow it will be a lifelong membership. For the purposes of this study, the interview questions asked participants to focus on describing the life cycle of members during a member's collegiate years. All five of the participants described the same cycle of membership. Membership reflected life cycle stages as growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline (Super, 1980). Beta specifically referenced:

*Little bit of a slanted bell curve where you're starting out really small and narrow-focused and then it grows and expands.*

Even though Beta expanded on the slanted bell curve image, Delta went into even more detail by stating:

*They [sorority members] are super engaged, super involved um, with the organizations... I have seen them take on more of those positional leadership roles...they have much more of an idea of what's the purpose of this larger governing group and how does it connect to other governing groups, the institution, the administration... For the Panhellenic organizations, I find that as they get older, I know disaffiliated is not the word that I'm looking for, but their connections tend to wane from that - I'm on fire for this organization - in that first year maybe two to ah, I'm getting ready to graduate...I've got to get a job and so there may not be as much of a participation kind of in those senior years.*

Epsilon described a very similar cycle to Delta and even used some of Super's (1980) language:

*Most women go through that freshmen year trying to figure out who you are outside of your sorority and then there's these impacts of how the sorority...so I think the first year is very much like exploring who I am and then exploring who I am in relation to this new organization that I'm a part of...I think that sophomore and junior year from what I saw is very much like that emersion, like you are involved, very much impacting the group. I think you're finally in that place where maybe you're more comfortable in who you are and in your values and in how you connect to that organization. ...And then what I saw...is that senior year is like, there's some checking out of the organization.*

By progressing through the life cycle of sorority membership in college, members have strategies to navigate similar situations in the future as they can take on different roles during their careers.

### **Balancing Multiple Formal & Informal Roles**

Participants described sorority members holding formal and informal roles both within and outside of their organizations. Alpha referenced how collegiate members can struggle with whether or not to take on a role as it relates to the other informal or formal roles they are holding. She discussed how her advising conversations typically sound like:

*What are you gonna let go and what are you going to drop because you can't dedicate all of your time to these ten activities. Usually their signature block on their email is a mile long with all of their involvements and positions.*

Part of balancing multiple informal and formal roles is handling the confusion that exists when one role is in conflict with another role. Gamma provided an example of this confusion for a sorority member who also served the campus as a Residential Assistant on her hall:

*In their residential community, they're an authority figure, and responsible for holding students accountable...They may see those exact same things happening in an off-campus context in their organization and don't have any authority.*

Epsilon identified that many of the sororities at the research site support their members playing roles outside of their sororities. Specifically, she stated how they:

*Seem to have this identity outside of their sorority experience. I appreciate the women that I see that are in church organizations or in community organizations where they're playing the role of mentors to other people or even just familial roles being a big sister in real life, not sorority life, and being you know, daughters, sisters and friends, and aunts and all of that kind of stuff.*

As students take on or find themselves in different roles at different points in their collegiate sorority membership, they are identifying mechanisms for balancing these roles and having to reconcile when a role must come to an end. Gamma specifically stated:

*I've seen sorority members whose self-worth was so wrapped up in the positional piece that they didn't quite know who they were when that was no longer part of them. I've seen people be plenty successful too, but I can think of a couple of people in particular who their whole identity was about the organization and about that position. And when either they walked away from it by chance or by choice...they were a completely different person.*

Throughout individuals' lives, they will take on different paid and unpaid roles. The summation of these roles is defined as a career (NCDA, 2008).

### **Impact of Past Experiences on Future Experiences**

Participants' described that if sorority members met their own and other members' expectations of their roles, then it would result in the

member engaging in similar roles in the future. If it was a negative experience, it would result in the member no longer pursuing those roles. All five participants indicated positive and negative experiences related to voluntarily taking on these roles or having to take on roles without having a choice. Delta indicated:

*I think a lot of it has to do with how well-liked they feel they are within the community. It's almost this vote of confidence that they feel like perhaps that they either get from their organization and so therefore, I'm gonna be president because I've been given lots of positive affirmations and encouragement from my community, which at that point might be my organization. Then once I became the president and am interacting with the other presidents and they like me and I'm getting lots of good, positive affirmations from them, maybe I will go on and decide I want to be CPC president. I think a lot of it is all of that and confidence in their own abilities may have a lot to do with it as well. When they feel like they have the backing of the community and folks supporting them then that makes them more confident to seek out some of those roles of increasing responsibility.*

Gamma provided an example of a member who did not pursue any other formal roles within her chapter after serving and being removed from the position of president:

*Those who have a harder time staying the course or who are younger, so sophomores have talked about the struggle of providing leadership to that organization and feeling like it hurt them more than helped them. I can think of someone in particular who ended up being removed actually from the presidency. Her organization was seeing me for a conduct matter, and when I met with her she just articulated that like I was not prepared for this. I was not prepared for this, and I didn't know how to do it. And I felt completely, completely lost.*

All five participants discussed that when sorority members see something they want to change or improve about the organization and



take on a formal role, then even if things did not go perfectly, they are still satisfied and pursue similar opportunities. Alpha reaffirmed that:

*They're the least satisfied when they're not the ones that pursued that opportunity to be in a position.*

The influence past experiences have on future experiences impact an individual's self-concept. The paid and unpaid roles individuals chose or do not chose to take on through one's life or career is directly related to self-concept.

## Discussion

Whether it was talking about the different roles sorority members play within or outside of their sororities, chapters, or council, or what prompts them to make transitions, the examples from participants came from experiences with members in formal leadership positions. Due to participants having more contact with sorority members in formal leadership positions rather than members-at-large, they acknowledged this difference during the interviews. These examples connected with Long and Snowden's (2011) research that found a difference in educational gains between members who had and had not served in leadership roles. In the study "educational gains were defined as members' growth in abilities, such as personal development skills, interpersonal skills, and leadership skills..." (p.1).

### *Alignment of Environment and Values*

While not part of Super's initial work (1980), participants mentioned how members found value in their sorority membership. They described an important aspect of the sorority environment that did not seem to exist in other ways for students to be involved on campus. The emphasis on numerous values led the researchers to look further into the literature.

Super, Sverko, and Super's (1995) work discussed the fourteen work values established from the international findings of the Work Importance Study. They argued that different careers

and environments provide opportunities for different work values. According to the participants in this study, the sorority environment provided an opportunity for members to engage in ten out of the fourteen work values (Super, Sverko, & Super, 1995). The values shared most frequently by participants were social interaction, achievement, altruism, and ability utilization.

While the interview questions did not lead participants to discuss values explicitly, every participant directly mentioned values at different points in the interviews. In the beginning of the interviews while building rapport, each participant indicated several of these values being a reason for joining a sorority themselves. While participants' experiences were not the focus of this study, they reinforced the current experiences of collegiate members.

Obtaining different experiences allow individuals to develop self-awareness. Holland (1997) argued individuals need to consider their interests, skills, and values when considering different jobs. When participants shared the experiences of members they worked with during their careers, they rarely mentioned helping members connect what they valued about the sorority environment to future environments where they would thrive.

### *Connection between Life Cycle and Membership*

Each participant described the same cycle of membership, which reflected the life cycle stages of growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline (Super, 1980). For example, participants mentioned exploring which formal leadership positions might be of interest to someone or grooming someone for a position. Super (1980) described this stage as exploration. The bell curve image participants used also aligns with Super's (1980) work. Participants described this life cycle of membership with ease and without hesitation.

As participants discussed examples of specific collegiate members, they identified empower-

ing, pivotal, or challenging times that helped students advance through these stages. Additionally, they noted how if chapters were larger in size it was easier for some members to not engage at the same level as other members. They noted how there were only so many formal leadership positions, so it was a challenge for all members to be at the same level of engagement.

Super (1980) estimated each stage in a person's life would take a certain amount of time and occur within certain years of one's life. Participants in the study connected different stages to different years a sorority member was in school. For example, freshmen and some sophomores spent time learning about the organization and meeting other members. After a semester, members would explore different engagement opportunities more intentionally. Looking at the downward side, seniors would begin to disengage from the chapter after transitioning out of their leadership roles. As a result, the steepness of the decline process directly related to a member's level of involvement.

Participants shared that more times than not, the life cycle was predictable. They acknowledged the structure of college also contributed to the predictability. At times participants mentioned capitalizing on this knowledge when working with seniors. When practitioners can recognize the life cycle of membership, they can capitalize on it and allow it to serve as a way for members to build strategies for the future as they navigate their careers.

### ***Balancing Multiple Formal & Informal Roles***

By chance and choice, sorority members are balancing roles in different "theaters" (Super, 1980). Without asking the questions in a way that utilized terms from Super's Development Theory (1980), participants used the language of the roles mother, daughter, and citizen. The examples participants shared supported the work of Fisher et al. (2010) regarding the importance of family. The sorority environment provided a

way for members to support one another in ways outside of leadership roles. Having the family-like support allowed the members to navigate challenges and seize opportunities they may not have had otherwise.

According to the participants, members learned how to navigate balancing roles, transitioning between roles, and reflecting on confusion when a role is in conflict with another role. More so, participants discussed how sorority members had to reconcile who they were in and outside of their organizations, chapters, or councils. Once members graduate from college, they will face times when one of their life roles will make fulfilling another life role difficult or impossible. Participants reflected how sorority members had the opportunity to experience this dissonance in their collegiate years. At times the participants mentioned having developmental conversation with students about managing multiple life roles.

Another component to life roles was saliency and intensity. Participants mentioned how some members in executive leadership roles could not see themselves outside of that role. When considering the National Career Development Association defines career as the summation of the paid and unpaid roles a person plays over a lifetime (2008), individuals have to acknowledge the different roles and identities they have experienced. If a role takes on too much of a presence, participants said members did not know what to do when they no longer served in that role. This critical point was where life roles met the life cycle in Super's (1980) work. Participants saw the sorority environment providing the opportunity for members to practice handling these challenges.

### ***Impact of Past Experiences on Future Experiences***

Super (1980) described roles by having two components: expectations and performance. Participants' descriptions aligned with Super's findings that if members met their own and other

members' expectations of the role by performing, then it would result in the member engaging in similar roles in the future. If it was a negative experience, it would result in the member no longer pursuing those roles. Ultimately these experiences impact an individual's self-concept.

Participants made a connection between the values discussed earlier and self-concept. Participants reported members wanting to be part of something larger than themselves, be recognized for their accomplishments, and make an impact. These values evolved into the standards that impacted a members' self-concept. The stakes were also higher in executive leadership positions. If members did not achieve the desired outcomes or perform at the level they expected, participants shared how it would be devastating to members. Likewise, if members excelled, they felt empowered to go from chapter president to a position on their council or student government.

Another factor that made a difference in self-concept was whether or not individuals chose to serve in roles. Examples illuminated the importance of this circumstance. Even though some members sought out certain leadership positions, other members seemed to serve by default. For those members serving by default, lacking the desire or confidence to serve placed them at a disadvantage. If things did not go well, it would further hinder the member from seeking leadership roles in the future.

Positive and negative experiences in formal and informal roles affect future collegiate and post-collegiate roles. The sorority environment allows for members to gain experience by taking on different responsibilities, managing multiple roles, gaining skills for the future, and obtaining clarity on what they do and do not want in future environments. Since the research participants noted a strong connection between how members navigate a role and willingness to pursue roles in the future, practitioners have the opportunity to be more intentional to ensure learning

occurs with positive and negative experiences. Given that sorority members will continue to have multiple roles after college, members can continue to develop strategies allowing them to navigate their careers with more confidence.

## Implications

A number of practical implications for student affairs practitioners, FSL advisors, and organization staff members can be taken from the results of this study. The basis for these implications rests on the definition of career as, "a sequence of positions held during the course of a timeline, some of them simultaneously (Super et al., 1957).

### *Educate Members Early and Often*

Student affairs practitioners and organization staff members must support sorority members earlier in their membership life cycle to ensure positive impacts on career development. Sorority members need to understand the different informal and formal roles they can take on in the sorority chapter, council, community, and outside of the fraternity/sorority community. Educating members on what transitioning from role to role looks like, so they are prepared is important. While many campuses, like the research site, believe in a more inclusive leadership definition having these conversations will support these leadership definitions.

FSL staff should partner with campus career centers to facilitate career development conversations. Knowledge occurs out of experience only when time for reflection exists (Kolb, 1984). Providing opportunities for dialogue and reflection at different stages in the life cycle would benefit sorority members. Allowing students to process what they are feeling while balancing multiple roles and transitioning between roles will help them clarify their feelings and what future roles they may decide to occupy. Some conversations may be beneficial to have within

class levels. At the same time., it may be advantageous for younger members to hear about the experiences of older members. Student affairs practitioners need to be equipped with counseling skills to have these conversations both in one-on-one and group settings. The more members are encouraged to see what other members are experiencing can allow them to understand how to process their feelings upon leaving the collegiate environment.

### *Engage Members-at-Large*

As Long and Snowden (2011) clearly indicated, the fraternity/sorority experience should positively impact all members, not just members who serve in leadership positions. The research site's division of student affairs understands leadership to be inclusive, relationship-based, and non-positional with the goal of making sustainable, positive change (Research Site, 2010). This philosophy is echoed by campuses and organizations across the country. While embracing this understanding of leadership, all members should be able to successfully progress through Super's life cycle while in college. If institutions of higher education along with sororities can provide this environment, assisting sorority members with their career development will occur.

Practitioners, advisors, and organizations' staff members need to consider ways to provide roles for larger chapters. Utilizing more committees to allow members to explore different opportunities, improve their self-concept from having positive experiences, and experience transitioning roles will positively impact members' career development. FSL staff can also look beyond traditional methods for leadership roles. Members can serve as career-peers to help members across different sororities. Serving on different FSL programming or conduct boards can also serve as possibilities. Practitioners should think beyond traditional officer structures to provide every member with meaningful opportunities. Members will also be better prepared to contribute in executive leadership roles and roles

outside of the sorority.

### *Encourage Involvement Outside of the Sorority*

Supporting sorority members in having an identity outside of their sorority will encourage them to think about more than one facet of their lives. When members are encouraged to serve in a variety of formal and informal roles in college, members will learn different methods of balancing roles that will be beneficial after college. During reflection conversations, practitioners can help normalize the idea of doing more than having a job after graduating from college. Sororities should capitalize on their alumnae by coordinating panels and networking opportunities. Alumnae can easily speak to the multiple roles they have in their lives, transitioning jobs, maintaining ties to family and friends, accomplishing goals, and falling short in different areas of their lives. Just as younger collegians can benefit hearing from older collegiate members, seniors can benefit hearing from alumnae in different stages of their lives. These opportunities will help members see that the sorority environment helped prepare them to navigate their careers.

### *Equip Members with the Vocabulary*

A challenge for career counselors in higher education is helping students translate their experiences, either by including those experiences on professional documents such as resumes and cover letters, or by articulating those experiences verbally in an interview. Beyond technical skills like writing a budget or planning an event, it is incumbent for all campus and organization professionals who work with sorority members to help them understand how their experiences are preparing them for their careers, not just the first job. Whether it is through discussion groups, programming, or one-on-one meetings, sorority members should understand how this piece of their overall education is preparing them for their futures as well as managing the multiple roles Super's Development Theory (1980) says

people will take on during a lifetime.

Finally, several career development theories discussed in the literature review involved individuals needing to know what their work values are to identify an appropriate career environment. Practitioners and career counselors can help students articulate their values that allow them to identify potential industry or volunteer environments that align with their values. Whenever practitioners can provide opportunities for sorority members to see the relationship between their out-of-the-classroom experiences to their futures, the members gain a clearer picture of what a successful life looks like after college.

### **Areas for Further Research**

Career development is a large concept as defined by Super (1980). This study focused on life cycle, self-concept, and life roles. Future studies could consider the development of transferable or soft skills. Participants also noted mentoring/grooming as being a factor in a sorority member pursuing formal roles. Super (1980) did not include mentor as a defined role. In considering the term “big sister” as a role model and mentor, the examples provided by the participants provides insight into another research study. Future research could explore the connection between formal and informal mentoring and the ability to serve in various formal leadership roles. Future studies could also examine the experience of sorority women who are not in formal leadership positions.

This study supported the complex nature of the career development of college students as well as fraternity/sorority membership from the perspective of student affairs practitioners. Future studies could focus on the perceptions of chapter advisors who are not employed by the university since they may have a broader perspective of working with an entire chapter, not just its leadership. Investigating the perspectives of graduate students or organization staff

members or volunteers who work with different sororities, chapters, and councils could be informative. Ultimately it would be beneficial to explore sorority members themselves either while they are in college or after a designated time period. While this study focused on female members, mostly of NPC organizations, from a mid-sized public institution, it would be important to investigate if the theory is applicable to men’s or multicultural organizations as well as different types of institutions where chapter and campus population sizes vary.

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to fill a gap in the literature by examining how student affairs practitioners perceive the career development of sorority membership. With an evolving world of work and younger generations being on track to change jobs at a higher rate than previous generations, sororities can play an integral role in better equipping thousands of college students every year to navigate their careers, not just their first jobs out of college. The topic of investigating career development made the research timely and relevant. If career development theories are not taken into consideration when counseling students or developing programming, student affairs practitioners and organization staff members could be missing out on the opportunity to optimize member development.

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