THE INFLUENCE OF FRATERNITY OR SORORITY MEMBERSHIP ON THE LEADERSHIP IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF COLLEGE STUDENT LEADERS

By

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To the faculty of Washington State University:
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Abstract

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Active participation in campus organizations is an integral component of the undergraduate student experience, with meaningful involvement serving as the catalyst for persistence, relationships with peers, and the development of leadership. The need for the present study is twofold. First, although there is extant empirical work that examines the effects of the fraternity and sorority experience on college student development, very little descriptive or theoretical focus on this subset of students exists in the literature. Second, leadership development is an important aspiration shared by institutions of higher education and fraternities and sororities, but little scholarly work exists that considers the process by which one develops an identity as a leader.

Framed by an understanding of organizational culture, college student development, and emerging explanations of the process of leadership identity development, the present qualitative study examines the influence of fraternity and sorority membership on the leadership identity development of college students. The findings derived from semi-structured interviews with fraternity and sorority leaders illustrate the contexts and cultures in which the participants
develop an identity as a leader. In addition, the study describes the processes and experiences that facilitate or hinder development.

Nominated by fraternity and sorority life professionals, twenty-one undergraduate members of fraternities and sororities at three research institutions in the western United States participated in the study. Campuses included in the present study possess similar characteristics regarding the fraternity and sorority community and all are major, state supported institutions. The findings suggest organizational factors and meaningful relationships cultivate the development of an identity as a leader for fraternity and sorority members. Further, the study provides support for advancing practical applications of the theoretical construct of leadership identity development. The study concludes with recommendations for program development, practice, and further research.
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Chapter 1

The Influence of Fraternity or Sorority Membership on the Leadership Identity Development in College Student Leaders

As an alumna member of a women’s fraternal organization with a twenty-year career as a fraternity and sorority life professional, I have had the opportunity to develop relationships with countless fraternity and sorority student leaders and alumni. My own experience suggests the influence of fraternity and sorority membership on college student development is significant and enduring. While I approach my study with the musings garnered by experience and education, a decisive understanding of how and why the fraternity/sorority experience is meaningful remains ambiguous.

Like Molasso (2005), I see the potential for studying many aspects of the uniquely North American collegiate experience of fraternal organizations not only important, but interesting. Through my professional work with fraternity and sorority leaders, I ponder what is occurring with these students developmentally, in their leadership, and how their experiences have led them to the opportunity I have with them as a mentor and advisor. My passion for my professional work and the present study has led me to engage in deep learning about culture within organizations, college student development, and leadership identity development. Through the present study, I endeavor to understand and describe the role of fraternity and sorority membership in fostering student growth, particularly leadership identity development.

Background and Significance

With fraternities and sororities on more than 800 campuses in the United States and a overabundance of media readily available depicting the fraternity and sorority experience, most Americans have had some exposure to what they believe it means to be Greek. Fraternities and
sororities began more than a century ago as relationship building organizations in which leadership development could be cultivated. However, over the last several decades, fraternities and sororities have struggled to refocus on their espoused values and mission: scholarship, service, leadership and relationships.

Research suggests the fraternity and sorority experience provides members with opportunities for development, promotes persistence, more interaction with peers, and is associated with higher levels of alumni involvement and giving (Astin, 1993; National Panhellenic Conference, 2001). Even today, fraught with the complex issues of college fraternal organization culture, fraternities and sororities offer relationship-building opportunities that contribute to leadership development (Kelly, 2008).

Conversely, incidents of hazing, alcohol abuse, sexual assault, and substandard performance in the classroom, often overshadow the benefits of membership. Critics suggest fraternal organizations have strayed from their traditional and founding values (Garret, n.d.; Maisel, 1990) and even many advocates concur. Others argue that Greek-letter organizations are antithetical to the educational process (Kuh, Pascarella & Wechsler, 1996) and their members evidence less openness to diversity, lower average grades, and substance abuse issues.

Despite the prevalence of fraternal organizations and the leadership roles held by fraternity and sorority students on many college campuses, systematic examination of the educational experience of fraternity and sorority members is lacking in the literature (Dungy, 1999; Molasso, 2005). Molasso (2005) argues that, “...analyzing the discourse about [fraternities and sororities] assists practitioners and scholars in better understanding the nature of the discussions about this subculture in American higher education” (p. 1) and identifies areas of needed study. In addition, much of the student development literature points to the influence of meaningful involvement in campus organizations as a contributor to student development,
growth, and success. For many college students, fraternity or sorority membership provides such meaningful involvement.

Problem and Purpose

Modern fraternities and sororities epitomize a confounding dichotomy. Research suggests fraternity and sorority membership may hinder student development and negatively impact the well-being of college students (Maisel, 1990; Wechsler, 1996). Other scholars contend that many benefits of membership are realized by fraternity and sorority students (Center for Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2009; Kelly, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pike, 2003). In addition, despite the rich landscape of literature in leadership studies, there is little research about how leadership develops or how one's identity as a leader develops over time (Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella & Osteen, 2005). It is the intersection of student development, particularly leadership identity development, and membership in a fraternity and sorority that directs this study. Through this study, I examine how the culture within fraternal organizations influences the leadership identity development among fraternity and sorority leaders. In particular, I focus on leaders who operate within a relational leadership perspective, that which places value on relationship building as critical to leadership (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 1998; Uhl-Bien, 2006). The structure of this study utilizes three dimensions of understanding: 1) organizational cultures (Schein, 1993), 2) student development theory (Baxter Magolda, 2001 & 2008; Chickering & Reisser, 1993) and, 3) leadership identity development (Komives, et al., 2005, 2006).

Research Design and Approach

To better understand the contribution of fraternity and sorority membership in developing students, particularly with regard to leadership identity, the following research questions guide the present study:
1) How does the cultural milieu of fraternities and sororities shape the leadership identity development of undergraduate members?

2) How are enculturation processes and fraternity and sorority membership utilized by students to develop an identity as a leader?

3) What processes help students to create meaning from of their fraternity or sorority experience?

To address these questions, three areas of theory guide this study. Schein’s (1993) organizational culture, student development (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kegan, 1982 & 1994) and leadership identity development theories (Komives, et al., 1998; Komives, et al., 2005, 2006) frame the topic and provide an understanding of culture, college student development, and the leadership identity development process. The interview protocol and analysis also developed from a thorough review of the literature in these three areas.

Through this study, I describe the experiences of students at three universities, most of whom serve within specific leadership roles, and how their fraternity and sorority membership contributes to their development as a student and identity as a leader. Semi-structured interviews provide organization for the process of dialoguing with fraternity and sorority student leaders, therefore utilizing a qualitative approach is appropriate for understanding the experiences and development of fraternity and sorority student leaders.

For the purposes of this project, the terms fraternal organization and fraternity/sorority interchangeably describe student organizations more commonly known by Greek letters and that are social in nature (rather than professional or service organizations). This is common practice in current scholarship; however, until recently, the use of the term Greek frequently appears in the literature. In addition, although some women’s Greek letter organizations are known officially as women’s fraternities, for the purpose of this study I use the term fraternity to
denote men’s fraternal organizations and sorority to describe women’s fraternal organizations. Finally, the term chapter refers to a campus specific group of a national fraternity or sorority. I define other specific terms as they appear throughout the dissertation.

The structure of the remainder of this dissertation guides an understanding of the context of fraternal organizations in higher education, demonstrates the importance of the research, identifies and defines relevant theories and models that scaffold the study in chapter two, and describes the method for the project in detail in chapter three. Throughout the dissertation, I emphasize viewing fraternity and sorority student leaders through the lens of organizational culture, student development and leadership identity development. Also in chapter three, an overview of the participants and campus descriptions provide a foundation for understanding three dimensions; organizational membership, general student development and leadership identity development. Within the two primary dimensions, five major themes emerge from analysis of the data and are presented in chapters four and five. Finally, I advance three primary findings, discuss implications and summarize the study through the research questions in chapter six. Finally, I provide suggestions for further study, and identify recommendations for practice in chapter seven.

Through a review of relevant literature, chapter two provides a background of college life, an overview of the fraternal movement, and provides literature that grounds this study in three theoretical areas; organizational culture, college student development, and leadership identity development.
Chapter 2
Review of the Literature

Introduction

Since the 1960s, the academy has focused on developing theories and models that describe how college affects students. Within the landscape of college student development, understanding the experience of today’s fraternity and sorority members is a complex endeavor that necessitates a brief overview of the history, context, purpose, and espoused values of fraternal organizations. While the focus of the present study is to examine how fraternities and sororities influence the leadership identity development of undergraduate members, a historical overview of higher education and fraternal organizations, along with a review of contemporary issues associated with fraternities and sororities, provides background for the study.

One of the primary purposes espoused by fraternal organizations—leadership development through membership in the fraternity and sorority community—undergirds the present study. Thorson (1997) found one of the primary reasons for college students to seek membership in a fraternity or sorority is to become more involved and have opportunities for leadership development, and the potential for mentoring from mature adults, such as fraternity and sorority alumni. Scholars have studied leadership as a phenomenon; however, systematic examination of the relationship between student leadership development and fraternity and sorority membership is still lacking in the literature (Jelke & Kuh, 2003).

Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhardt (2001) examined the influence of leadership involvement on student development and found students who engage in campus leadership activities demonstrate improved leadership skills, increased civic responsibilities, and clarified societal values. Kelly (2008) surveyed former fraternity chapter presidents approximately ten years after college and found these men believed their service in the role as a
student dramatically impacted their development as a leader, a finding consistent with other scholarship (Harms, Woods, Roberts, Bureau, & Green, 2006). Additionally, contemporary fraternities and sororities tout the primary benefits of membership as involvement and leadership opportunities for college students (Beta Theta Pi, 2010; Pi Beta Phi, 2010).

A brief overview of the college experience and history of the fraternal movement begins the literature review, followed by a discussion on organizations and culture, particularly regarding fraternal organizations. Through this chapter, I extend understanding of college student development and leadership identity development and conclude with a description of the role the theories and models play in the present study.

The College Experience

Historians recognize some focus on student development has existed since the early days of colonial colleges as dormitories and dining halls played a central role in the life of students (Rudolph, 1962). While the collegiate way of life existed, there was a “notion that a curriculum, a library, a faculty, and students are not enough to make a college” (p. 87), and the college functioning in loco parentis supervised and directed the students until the 1960s. Under in loco parentis, the college was empowered to set rules, regulations, and utilize strict discipline with students.

Through decades of study, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) assert institutional culture and campus environments affect college students; their scholarship seeks to guide action that supports college student learning, growth and development. Additional scholars (Astin, 1993; Boyer, 1987; Kuh, 2001) have called for institutions of higher education to better understand how college affects students, what impacts them the most during college, and how to create programming, interventions and curriculum inside and outside the classroom that promote
greater success for college students. Fraternal organizations endeavor to provide members with much of what these scholars have called for in higher education.

Research consistently shows a wide range of positive outcomes associated with student involvement in campus organizations. Astin (1993) noted that growth in autonomy, self-esteem and communication skills are the result of increased personal development derived from organization involvement. Kuh (1991) found that students actively participating in co-curricular activities report higher levels of leadership and communication skills, are able to develop interpersonally and learn transferable skills. Like Kuh (1991), Cress et al. (2001) found that the more time students spend in volunteer positions the more likely they are to show growth in leadership skills. Co-curricular experiences and involvement in all types of student organizations both encourage and foster student skill development, particularly within fraternal organizations.

The Fraternal Movement

The Early Years.

Within the regimented culture of colonial colleges, students sought outlets to discuss forbidden literature and debate issues of the day. Phi Beta Kappa, widely regarded as the first Greek-letter organization, emerged in 1776 in response to the students' interests and desires not met in the classroom or allowed in approved venues. By the late 1820s and early 1830s, the fraternal movement began as a resistance to the academy and as an attempt to fill a void in the life of students.

Fraternities provided a social alternative for college students, an outlet to the rigorous academic requirements of college (Anson & Marchesani, Jr., 1991). These student resistances were usually the result of dissatisfaction with the prevailing methods of teaching, the intrusive forms of discipline imposed by the faculty, and the power and control of the faculty imposed, in
part, by the limiting curriculum prescribed by the college at the time (Komives & Woodard, 2003). The early fraternal founders sought to “redefine the American college” and “change the focus [of a college education] from the next world to this one. Their instrument was the Greek-letter fraternity movement” (Rudolph, 1962, p. 144). The founders seemingly knew that their experiences together, learning, growing, and changing outside the classroom, might very well be as important, perhaps even more so than what they could regurgitate in the lecture hall (Thelin, 2004). Students were trying to fill an “emotional and social rather than a curricular vacuum” (Rudolph, 1962, p. 146). Incorporating the expected societal Judeo-Christian values and dogmatic hierarchy as they formed, fraternities were present on many college campuses by the mid 1800s and the fraternal movement was in full swing.

Originally forbidden to meet outside the classroom and later existing under a great deal of scrutiny, the majority of fraternal organizations developed a culture complete with secret artifacts, stories, legends or myths, semiotics, and routines, in both action and communication. Most fraternal organizations refer to the secret elements and ceremonies within their particular culture as the ritual. The ritual reveals the meaning, values and expectations of membership, and members take an oath to adhere to the obligations of the organization. The popular film Dead Poets Society (1989) provides an interesting, and presumably accurate portrayal of the rigors associated with a prescribed curriculum, therefore it is fitting to imagine early fraternities convening like the boys in the film and facing comparable obstructions from the college.

The Middle Century.

In the 1870s, another movement was growing on college campuses; women began attending college and found themselves lacking opportunities for a social outlet and creative discussion and expression, much like their male counterparts a generation earlier (Turk, 2004). Women found the men’s fraternal organizations were not accessible to them; African Americans,
Jews, and Catholics found similar exclusionary experiences (Kimbrough, 2003; Turk, 2004). In turn, each excluded group of students formed their own fraternal organizations, with the purpose of uplifting and cultivating their members in a manner needed in the segregated society of the time.

Even while university leadership questioned the presence of fraternal organizations and sought to ban them from college campuses, the appeal of these groups was undeniable and major growth occurred in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century (Gregory, 2003). Further providing opportunities outside the classroom, the introduction of the fraternity or sorority house provided a supportive place away from the watchful eyes of the faculty and administration. Many college towns, underdeveloped, and ill prepared to house the growing number of students, turned to fraternities and sororities to provide living accommodations. At many universities as fraternal groups began cropping up, the administration actively solicited more groups to join the growing campus, often on one condition, they must build housing for students (Stimson, 1989). The movement to establish chapter houses coincided with a shift in higher education from the English model that maintained a focus on the moral and intellectual development of students, to the German model, with a singular focus on intellectual development.

Subsequent to the expansion of land-grant campuses, which in turn provided more post-secondary education options for students and more interest in higher education, modified restrictions on living off-campus allowed students to live in other places than residence halls. The post World War II era ushered in another expansion of enrollment on college campuses resulting in dramatic housing shortages for students. Fraternity and sorority houses became part of the solution to this shortage and on many campuses fulfill this role even today. Since their
inception, fraternities and sororities provide a co-curricular experience for college students and in many cases, affordable and safe housing that provides a home away from home.

**The Modern Era.**

The movement away from *in loco parentis* during the 1960s was detrimental to fraternal organizations, as university rules, restrictions, and reliance on self-governance was common. Lowering the drinking age from twenty-one to eighteen, ushered in an era of college student accountability for adult actions that had previously not been chargeable offenses. In addition, the lowered drinking age, provided a new freedom for college students that had not previously existed. Up until this time, chapter houses typically employed a ‘house mother’, an older woman who fulfilled an internal supervisory and mentoring role. During this era, fraternities eliminated the house mother position and despite some research that suggests such a role has significant, positive effects for the fraternity living environment (Kalkowski, 2005), it is doubtful this role will be fully implemented again (Gregory, 2003). It was also during this era that an interest in joining fraternal organizations waned dramatically, as college students of the time changed their interests and focus to less institutionalized organizations.

In the 1980s, several important shifts in the United States and college student culture occurred and record numbers of college students joined fraternal organizations (Anson & Marchesani, Jr., 1991). The joining rate offered a boost to the depleted finances of many organizations that had resulted in deferred maintenance of residential facilities and fewer programs or services offered by national-organization leadership. The result was sizable, largely deregulated student organizations on most college campuses without much support. The last two decades of deregulation resulted in modern fraternal organizations looking little like their predecessors of a generation earlier, particularly concerning the use of alcohol, hazing, facility management and the relationship with the host institution.
With a changing legal climate in the United States, the last twenty years have been the most legally difficult time for fraternal organizations in their history. As the drinking age increased to twenty-one in the 1980s, the era of risk management was ushered in and the cost of operating a fraternal organization skyrocketed (e.g. liability insurance) and increased regulation returned (particularly anti-hazing laws, social host liability laws). Fraternity house fires have resulted in regulations requiring retrofitted fire suppression systems. Courts have also challenged fraternal organizations’ freedom to associate, and to remain single-gender. Some private institutions have eliminated fraternities and sororities altogether.

This era of increased regulation coupled with the expectations of Millennial students (and their parents) has led to changes in the contemporary fraternity and sorority experience that impact student development. Undeniably, this changes the nature of the relationship between the chapter, the institution and the national headquarters, as well as the nature of the student experience itself (Gregory, 2003).

**Scholarly Interest in Fraternities and Sororities.**

It has also been during the last three decades that the impact of fraternity and sorority membership has garnered the interest of the academy. While the academy’s research foci is discussed later in this section, it is important to note here that the issues fraternal organizations have struggled to overcome since the age of deregulation (underage drinking, hazing, gender norming, academics, etc.) have also become a central focus of the academy. The results of scholarly work on fraternal organizations serve to shape the perspectives of host institutions and the public.

To many, the modern fraternal organization is a perplexing dichotomy. Although the basic purpose for fraternal organizations was co-curricular or social in nature from the beginning, modern fraternity and sorority chapters bear little resemblance to their ancestral
organizations. Many of the public actions of these groups do not readily signal a system of values and principles closely aligned with the mission of higher education exist. Nonetheless, these organizations have always had other fundamental foci. Most fraternal organizations espouse the following founding values or modern purposes (Gregory, 2003):

1) To complement the academic mission of the college.
2) To develop leadership among its members.
3) To serve the community.
4) To develop character.
5) To develop the whole person.
6) To build community.
7) To develop lifelong friendships.

Today, many argue that fraternities and sororities are an integral part of student life (Asel, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2009; Center for Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2009; Pike, 2003). With more than 550,000 undergraduate members and 9.6 million living alumni worldwide, fraternities and sororities represent a substantial population of college students on approximately 800 campuses (NIC, 2010). Particularly in the United States, these organizations are both cherished by student and alumni members (NPC, 2001) and typically disdained by non-members and members of the academy (Garrett, n.d.; Maisel, 1990).

The fraternity and sorority student population has been the focus of a multitude of studies that populate the research landscape. In the literature, two primary arguments exist regarding the influence of undergraduate fraternity and sorority membership. The dominant discourse contends that problems exist within the cultures of fraternal organizations on, and that the fraternity/sorority life subculture is significantly different from the general student population on any given college campus, particularly in regard to alcohol use (Danielson, Taylor & Hartford, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Because fraternities and sororities began as a student resistance to the power structure in higher education and existed in a cloak of secrecy, it is not surprising that early on the
academy began to problemitize fraternities and later sororities. Scheurich (1997) discusses the construction and recognition of a problematic group occurring within what he describes as a “grid of social regularities” (p. 98). Importantly, Scheurich describes this grid as “both epistemological and ontological; [for] it constitutes both who the problem group is and how the group is seen or known as a problem” (p. 107). The problemitization of fraternities and sororities has continued in the academy into the present era.

The majority of studies conducted regarding the common behaviors of college students advance the dominant discourse that fraternity/sorority affiliation contributes negatively to student development through behaviors such as alcohol abuse (Eberhart, Rice, & Smith, 2003; Park, Sher & Krull, 2009; Wechsler, 1996), academic dishonesty (Eberhart, et al., 2003; McCabe & Bowers, 1996), stereotyping (Schwartz, 1987), sexual promiscuity (Eberhart, et al., 2003), hazing (Drout & Corsoro, 2003) and gender-norming (Arthur, 1998; Robinson, Gibson-Beverly, & Schwartz, 2004).

Conversely, research exists on the margins of the academy contesting the dominant discourse. The counter discourse within the scholarship suggests spiritual development (Kuh & Gonyea, 2006), involvement and interaction with peers and groups (Asel, Pascarella, & Siefert, 2006; Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pike, 2003; Pike & Askew, 1990; Thorson, 1997), leadership development (Harms, Woods, Roberts, Bureau, & Green, 2006; Kelly, 2008), retention (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1988; Washington State University, 2008), residential living and learning communities (Blackburn & Janosek, 2009), the relationship to engagement in educationally effective practices (Hayek, Carini, O’Day, & Kuh, 2002; Pike, 2003), and achievement of learning outcomes is positively impacted by fraternity and sorority affiliation (Center for Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2009). The counter discourse also suggests
fraternity and sorority students report greater satisfaction with the collegiate experience (NPC, 2001) and loyalty to alma mater (Thorson, 1997).

Finally, most of the research that examines the effects of fraternity or sorority membership does so through quantitative methodologies, whereas this study is designed to develop understanding about the experiences of college student leaders within fraternal organizations. In order to scaffold the present study, I utilize a three-pronged theoretical approach to understanding the development of fraternity and sorority students. In order to comprehend the influence of membership in a fraternity or sorority, a cursory understanding of organizations is necessary. Next, key scholars (Baxter Magolda, 2002; Chickering & Reisser, 1993) guide my thinking about the ways in which students develop during college. Finally, as I seek to understand and describe the influence of fraternal organization membership on the leadership identity development of college students, I turn to the grounded theory work of Komives, et al. (2005) for guidance. Therefore, in the following three sections of the literature review, I lay the groundwork for the study by developing an understanding of 1) organizations, 2) student development, and 3) leadership identity development. These areas of literature also provide the foundation for the theoretical framework of the study.

Understanding Organizations

Theories about organizations and their culture populate many disciplines including economics, sociology, and anthropology. Particularly in understanding the influence of organizational culture on individual behavior, learning and values, theory plays a critical role. In the present study, several theories frame and shape the understanding of the influence of fraternity and sorority membership on college students. First, examining the influence of fraternal organizational culture on individual student development without a solid theory to
undergird the research questions would be futile. Schein’s (1993) organizational culture model is most germane for the purpose of this study. Schein described culture as:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (p. 12).

Schein describes culture from the perspective of the observer and includes three cognitive levels. First are the organization’s attributes that can be seen, felt, and heard by an observer. Schein refers to these attributes as *artifacts* and in that level, he includes physical space, group member mannerisms and dress, awards and recognition, as well as organizational mottos, creeds, and symbolism. In the second level of Schein’s model, the *espoused values* (i.e. professed culture) of the organization are typically made known when studied through interviews and questionnaires, but is not clearly seen by observers. Found in the third level of the model are the organization’s *basic underlying assumptions*. These elements of the organization are not recognizable to observers and not directly expressed between group members. Only with committed study are these elements discovered. Members of the group become enculturated over time and may no longer recognize the elements of the organization’s culture that were once apparent to them.

Figure 2.1 depicts Schein’s model visually.
Figure 2.1: Three Levels of Culture


Schein's (1993) definition is suitable for use when considering fraternal organizations as specific cultures as well as viewing fraternities and sororities as a culture unto themselves. Through unique experiences, membership in a particular organization contributes to each individual member's shared meaning about experiences. Collectively, in each fraternal organization, these shared meanings are the emergent understandings created by group members as they interact and 'live' together. During the socialization process, elder members teach newcomers the habits of thinking, mental models, and/or linguistic paradigms, as well as the elements of the shared knowledge that guides the perceptions, thought, and language used by the group. Subsequently, fraternity and sorority chapters, collectively on each campus, and additionally as a national movement, adopt certain defining cultural characteristics. Schein (1993) provides the following attributes associated with culture:

1) There are observed behavioral regularities when people interact (i.e. language use, evolution of customs and traditions, and rituals),
2) The group forms implicit standards and values that create norms,
3) There are espoused values that the organization uses publicly to state their focus,
4) There are formal policies and ideological principles that guide actions,
5) The rules of the ‘game’ are formed for getting along in the organizations,
6) There is a feeling or climate that is conveyed by the way group members interact with one another,
7) Embedded skills (special competencies) are displayed by group members and the ability to pass down certain things from generation to generation is key,
8) Habits of thinking and communication paradigms shape the perceptions, thought, and language used by group members and is taught to new members early in the socialization process,
9) Organizations develop shared meaning through interaction between group members, and
10) Symbols and metaphors are developed and shared with the organization that convey ideas and feelings about the group.

Kuh and Whitt (1991) describe the culture of an organization as an invisible tapestry. It is not difficult to conceive that strong cultures exist in every fraternal organization. With more than a century of history, ritual and tradition, even in modern society, fraternity and sorority culture is the result of a complex group learning process that is only partially influenced by leaders’ behavior. Neither culture nor leadership can be explained or understood independently of one another. Schein’s (1993) attributes described above aptly illustrate observable culture in fraternities and sororities.

Just as campus culture affects students at each institution, Jelke’s (2001) research concerning fraternity and sorority communities found the elements of ‘high-performing’ fraternity and sorority communities stress academic achievement, service, character building, institutional support and most important to this study, leadership development. While many already have, Roberts and Rogers (2003) suggest that modern fraternal organizations must change their programming models and leadership hierarchies to adapt to a contemporary emphasis on collective leadership, much like that described in the Relational Leadership Model (Komives, et al., 1998).

With regard to leadership and specifically within organizations such as fraternities and sororities, culture and leadership are “two sides of the same coin in that leaders first create
cultures when they create groups and organizations. Once cultures exist, they determine the criteria for leadership and thus determine who will and will not be leaders” (Schein, 1993, p. 13). Leaders must be aware of the culture of their organization or the culture will manage them and their ability to lead will be hindered substantially.

This study examines fraternity and sorority leaders as both members of fraternal organizations and as developing individuals. It is in these two realms the present study is constructed: the organization and the individual. First, understanding fraternities and sororities as organizations with unique cultures is important to the foundation of my research. As Schein’s (1993) model contends, members of an organization are often so immersed in their group they are unaware of the influences of their culture on their own behaviors, development and beliefs. The present study examines the influences, both recognized by and those less obvious to student leaders, derived from membership in a fraternal organization.

Second, understanding the individual identity development of college students through membership and leadership experiences in an organization with values, purposes, and goals such as those espoused by fraternities and sororities, is congruent with the focus of this study. Riker (1983) summarizes the fraternal experience by saying “the heart of the Greek system is typically described as the personal growth and development of the individual member, nurtured in a group environment of mutual trust and support” (p. 49). In addition, Riker states “key factors influencing this development are the quality of interpersonal relationships and the stimulation of the group environment” (p. 49).

In the final two sections of the literature review, I describe student development theory and emerging perspectives on leadership to facilitate understanding of the growth of college students and to provide additional theoretical grounding for my research. I review related literature regarding student development and student leadership in the next section and narrow
the focus to the leadership identity development process for college students at the end of this chapter.

Understanding College Student Development

The development of college students is the overarching concept that guides this study. Like others, I want to know how fraternal organization membership contributes to development for those students who participate in fraternity/sorority life. Many student development theories seek to understand the whole person, as well as provide description, explanation, and prediction as it relates to college students. Understanding identity development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), engagement in educationally effective practices (Kuh, 2002), achievement of critical learning outcomes (Center for Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2009), involvement (Astin, 1993), and self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001) are just a few of the strands in the literature regarding student learning and development. In addition, generational scholars (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Twenge, 2006) provide perspectives on contemporary student development. It is important to study the development of students within a particular place and time, which I do through an examination of the generational research.

Generation Matters.

Scholars (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Twenge, 2006) have contributed greatly to generational understanding and authored definitive resources on this subject. Howe and Strauss (2000) supply a vivid description of the ‘peer personality’ of the ‘Millennial generation’, those born after 1981, and who began arriving on college campuses in 2000. They contend the generation in which one comes of age significantly shapes values, attitudes, and behaviors. Critics of generational research (Brooks, 2001; Wartman & Savage, 2008) assert broad generalizations over simplify understanding. They contest well known Millennial research,
particularly that of Howe and Strauss (2000), as lacking scholarly rigor, and if valid at all, only representative of middle to upper class, majority college students and therefore ill-advised to describe all members of the Millennial generation.

While criticized, Howe and Strauss's (2000) work is widely accepted by the public and student affairs practitioners as consistent with anecdotal experience and therefore considered by many professionals as a foundational reference point to understand contemporary college students. Howe and Strauss (2000) suggest key characteristics of the Millennial generation, or what Twenge (2006) coins “Generation Me”, include: conventional values, self-confidence, a sense of entitlement, sheltered by parents and other adults, pressured to be busy and to succeed, achievement focused, and team oriented.

The role of the parent in the Millennial student’s life cannot be underestimated, indeed scholars write volumes about Millennials and how their connectedness with parents and other adults is changing the face of higher education (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Millennial parents are often referred to by college administrators as “helicopter parents” due to their hovering involvement in their student’s life. Millennials are confident; parents with an ardent belief in the importance of self-esteem raised them. In addition, Millennial students identify with their parents’ values, feel close their parents, and report their parents engage with them in ways they appreciate (Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), 2008). They accept authority and passively approach dissent (i.e. they are rule followers).

Millennials are described by generational researchers as civic-minded and consistently taught to think in terms of the greater good. Millennials are engaged in their communities and understand the importance of investing in outcomes of society as a whole and the micro communities with whom they associate, such as sports teams, fraternal organizations, and schools (Bureau & McRoberts, 2001).
The Millennials form a complex generation, with some conflicting characteristics. In contrast with Howe and Strauss (2000), Twenge (2006) found several themes that offer less optimistic conclusions about this generation. Twenge believes that Millennials seek or need the approval of others much less than other generations. Twenge coins the Millennials, ‘Generation Me’, a group that has been cultivated to believe in themselves, be opinionated, independent, and to do what makes them happy. Thus, Twenge (2009) believes the messages Millennials receive from parents, other adults, and schools, fuel an epidemic of narcissism in which romantic relationships are short-lived and a lack of empathy prevails.

Of keen interest to me as I approach this study, Millennials have spent their lives on teams and as members of community and faith-based organizations. Scholars agree that Millennials focus on learning to lead and to participate, as well as ensuring no one is left behind. Brooks (2001) infamously referred to this generation of college students as “organization kids” given their propensity to be actively involved in organizations. Howe and Strauss (2000) contend Millennials' belief in team play has broadened their capacity for relationships with peers. Millennials seek engagement in activities that permit them to exhibit their core values or those that are consistent with their values.

The perspective I present here is formulated not only by the literature, but also personal and professional experience. Overall, I advance the notion that Millennials are bright, concerned, connected and technologically savvy people that work and play well with others. The Millennial students described by Howe and Strauss (2000) and Twenge (2006) are similar to the students with whom I share my professional life. Beyond generational membership as a foundation for understanding college students, the academy has sought to understand the processes and stages through which college students develop coherent identities as adults.
My research centers on the belief that college students develop in specific and meaningful ways, and in particular that the process of developing a leadership identity is an important aspect of development. As I endeavor to utilize specific student development theories to frame this study, I concur with Parker, Widick, and Knefelkamp (1978) who assert student development theories should address four essential questions:

1. Who is the college student, what changes occur inner and interpersonally, and what do those changes look like?
2. How do those changes occur and what factors lead to their development?
3. How does the college environment influence student development? What aspects encourage or inhibit growth?
4. What development outcomes should colleges strive for?

Several broad theories of student development provide a foundation for viewing the college student as a maturing individual in the next section. I examine Chickering’s (1969) theory of identity development as it serves as a cornerstone theory of student development. I follow Chickering with a brief overview of Kegan’s (1982) stages of social maturity, and finally Baxter Magolda’s (2001) work on self-authorship. The theories advanced by these scholars shape my notions of college student development in general and guide my practice as a student affairs professional. Although stage-based models of student development receive critique for their rigid assumptions that all students develop in an aspiring, forward stepping manner, Chickering, Kegan, and Baxter Magolda’s work resonates with my professional experience with fraternity and sorority students. Finally, in order to understand the influence of fraternity and sorority membership on the process of leadership identity development, I focus my query using the grounded theory work of Komives, et al., (2005, 2006).
College Student Development Theory.

Chickering’s foundational work, *Education and Identity*, has shaped generations of student affairs practitioners and programs. Chickering’s (1969) student development theory contends individuals evolve in a specific, albeit not necessarily linear way, first in a broad manner, and later in a more refined mode and views student growth as a series of tasks or stages dealing with thinking, feeling, believing, and relating to others.

Revised by Chickering and Reisser (1993), contemporary research combined with Chickering’s previous development studies generated the seven vectors that symbolize the “direction” and “magnitude” of college student development (p. 34). The vectors include developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity (Chickering and Reisser, 1993).

Movement in a previous vector or a vector symbolizing further development can follow movement in another vector. Accordingly, movement from one vector to the next can also represent increased skills, strength, confidence, awareness, complexity, and integration (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). These seven vectors contribute to the formation of identity and as students move through each at different rates, the vectors can interact with each other. Students will often find themselves re-examining issues associated with the vectors through which they had previously developed. Although not rigidly sequential, vectors do build on each other, leading to greater complexity, stability and intellectual aspects of development. Chickering’s theory of identity development contends the establishment of identity as the core development issue with which college students grapple. Chickering also identified key aspects of the college experience that influence development and enhance student growth. His theory of identity development remains arguably the most well
known, widely used, and comprehensive model available for understanding and describing the psychosocial development of college students.

While Chickering's work is foundational to understanding college student development, scholars have advanced other explanations of development that are helpful to understand the experience of student leaders as well. Kegan's (1994) stages of social maturity/orders of consciousness influenced the work of Baxter Magolda (2001) on self-authorship, and these theories each influence the grounded theory work of Komives et al. (2005, 2006). Each of these scholars, view student development as a process of meaning-making through shared experiences within groups. In other words, development is not a solitary pursuit, rather the outcome of the construction of meaningful relationships with others. A brief synopsis of Komives' developmental theory follows Kegan (1982) and Baxter Magolda (2002).

**Orders of consciousness and meaning-making.**

The importance of meaning-making to constructive-developmental theory cannot be overestimated. So vital is the process that Kegan (1982) contends:

Meaning-making is fundamental to being human: the activity of being a person is the activity of meaning-making. There is therefore no feeling, experience, thought, or perception independent of a meaning-making context in which it becomes a feeling, an experience, a thought, a perception, because we are the meaning-making context. Human being is the composing of meaning (p. 11).

Kegan (1982) asserts the “participative” side of meaning-making is paramount (p.12). He focuses on the processes of making meaning which he suggests develop through five different forms of meaning-making, called orders of consciousness throughout one's lifetime.

According to Kegan (1982), stage three development should come in late adolescence or early adulthood with fully socialized adults. Young adults look to others in their community, family, and organizations in which they are members, as sources of values and self worth. They recognize that others have different points of view, and can empathize with others. However,
they are enmeshed in the roles and relationships around them, and tend to avoid conflict for fear that it will lead to the loss of esteem either for themselves or for others. With movement to stage four, individuals develop a value system that is truly theirs, a strong point of view that is self-authored (Kegan, 1982). In this stage, students are not dependent upon others for their self-esteem, rather, they are able to commit to an institution or organization without being engulfed or overwhelmed by it; they can be a part of a group, such as a fraternity or sorority, without being dependent on it. Millennial fraternity and sorority students are generally raised in close-knit families, and socialized through organizational memberships, teams, and community or faith-based organizations (HERI, 2008; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Wartman & Savage, 2008). With this in mind, the influence of fraternity/sorority membership on progression toward advanced stages of consciousness, vectors and self-authorship exists in the background of this study.

College student leaders must grapple with the reconciliation of their own values and beliefs and their organizational memberships as noted by Kegan’s (1994) theory. Baxter Magolda’s (2001) theory of self-authorship builds upon Kegan’s premise and asserts colleges should endeavor to create environments that foster self-authorship. Examining the opportunities and environments that cultivate self-authorship is relevant to this study. As a fraternity/sorority life professional, my hope is that positive development occurs for members of fraternities and sororities. However, as members of Judeo-Christian values-based organizations, fraternity and sorority leaders may struggle to ascertain their own values distinct from those of their organization or those values implicit within their peer group, as well as those cultivated by their parents. Abundant experience in organizations and close ties with parents combine and suggest pronounced challenges to developing self-authorship. An overview of Baxter Magolda’s (2001) theory of individual student development follows.
**Self Authorship.**

Building on Kegan’s (1982) work, Baxter Magolda (1992) contends that learning occurs in communities through a cycle of “discussion, disagreement and consensus” (p. 223) over what has been experienced and what that experience means. This process challenges students’ values and beliefs, presents new ideas, and provides possibilities and consequences that are new to students. For many college students, the struggle to understand and deal with these new experiences creates the impetus to create a self-authored sense of identity rather than a self that merely reflects the beliefs of the group. Fraternity and sorority leaders may experience this process differently.

Baxter Magolda (2002) describes self-authorship as “the capacity to author, or invent, one’s own beliefs, values, sense of self, and relationships with others” (p. 3). A self-authored individual is able to internalize others’ perspectives, reflect on them, and assemble them into their own experience (Ignelzi, 2000). However, becoming self-authored is not a solitary pursuit. Kegan (1994) emphasized that self-authorship involved each person determining for themselves how to construct mutually beneficial relationships and not separate from others, but rather reconstruct their relationships to be more authentic. Within fraternities and sororities, students construct relationships that foster authenticity and provide opportunities for self-authorship to develop.

Baxter Magolda (2001) suggests four phases to becoming self-authored: 1) following formulas, 2) the crossroads, 3) becoming the author of one’s life, and 4) internal foundations. Many of these phases occur after college for the majority of the participants in her longitudinal study. In the first phase, following formulas, individuals realize the importance of developing their own “minds and voices” (p. xviii), but did not yet have the experience of developing this internal voice. Individuals in this phase continue following the formulas for knowing the world and
themselves. Dissatisfaction with the formulas (i.e. realizing formulas do not work for the student) leads to the second phase, *the crossroads*. At this point, individuals realize that ignoring their own internal needs and perspectives creates dissatisfaction and they look inward for self-definition. Continued work in this area, internal self-definition, leads toward the third phase, *becoming the author of one's own life*. In this phase, individuals decide not only what to believe, but solidify their identity and how to interact with others. Here, individuals become more comfortable with disagreement because they have identified what is really important to them. Finally, individuals move toward *internal foundations* and self-authorship. Individuals in this phase manage external influences rather than being controlled by them. Self-authorship is not selfish or self-centered, rather “it involved careful consideration of external perspectives and others’ needs, but this consideration occurs in the context of one's internal foundation” (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p. xix). The journey from formula to foundations suggests three dimensions of development: 1) of one’s view of knowledge (epistemological development), 2) view of self (intrapersonal development), and 3) view of social relations (interpersonal development).

While Baxter Magolda’s (2001) findings suggest many students become self-authored after college, some research suggests that self-authorship can develop before (Pizzolato, 2003) or during college (Abes & Jones, 2004). Some students in their early twenties develop self-authorship, particularly those who have experienced oppression and marginalization (Torres & Hernandez, 2007). The shift to self-authorship occurs when students encounter challenges that bring their assumptions into question, have opportunities to reflect on their assumptions, and are supported in reframing their assumptions into more complex frames of reference.

Many fraternity and sorority leaders experience difficult circumstances while leading their chapters. As a part of understanding leadership identity development, the present study
probes into the influence of difficult and challenging fraternity and sorority leadership experiences as to contribute to a “provocative moment” (Pizzolato, 2003), that which propels a student toward the crossroads and eventually self-authorship. Becoming the author of one’s life and developing as a mature leader are interrelated as confidence in one’s beliefs and abilities are critical to effective leadership. In the highly relational peer environment in which fraternity and sorority students practice leadership, challenging experiences that cultivate self-authorship abound.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) and Baxter Magolda (2001, 2008) share the assertion that practices outside the classroom, and often within a student organization, have significant impact on student learning and development. As this study endeavors to understand leadership identity development as developed from within the culture of a fraternal organization, a cursory understanding of culture is important.

Studying the development of fraternity and sorority student leaders calls for an understanding that college students are complex individuals with multi-faceted identities; a single theory cannot adequately describe the growth college students experience. Therefore, the work of Chickering, Kegan, and Baxter Magolda serve to ground my understanding of college student development as processes that occur in the socially constructed site of relationships within organizations.

Leadership development is a foundational theoretical concept in the present study. Komives, Lucas, and McMahon’s (1998) development of the relational leadership model, and Komives, et al.’s (2005) grounded study and formulation of the leadership identity development (LID) model, round out the theoretical framework for this study. Baxter Magolda’s body of work on self-authorship, “the internal capacity to define one’s beliefs, identity, and social relations” (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 269), intersects Komives et al.’s (2005) leadership identity
development (LID) model in the final stage. Simply, I maintain a fully developed identity as a leader requires college students to achieve a higher level of consciousnesses, or to approach self-authorship. Questions arise regarding the impact of organizational membership, common in the Millennial generation, and those processes that require individualized developmental work. The third aspect of the literature review and the last element of the theoretical framework in my study, the LID model, follows.

Understanding Leadership

Much of the literature on leadership examines it as a pursuit accomplished when people act with attention to a moral or ethical foundation. Leaders are deemed good or positive as determined by the norms of their organization (Harms, et al, 2006). Another area in the literature, transformational leadership, is believed to be critical to fostering positive culture in organizations. Transformational leaders are often described as inspirational and elevate and empower their followers (Burns, 1978). Historically, leadership presumably meant people were placed in positions of authority by their credentials (i.e. elected student leaders) amid a group of followers. Yet other scholars, view leadership as largely determined by a correlation between personality characteristics and achieving prominence in leadership within organizations (Harms, et al, 2006).

Leadership development has long been touted as the hallmark of fraternal organizations and suggested as their most germane reason to exist on college campuses. Many fraternities and sororities espouse leadership development as a primary outcome of membership (Beta Theta Pi, 2010; NPHC, 2010; Pi Beta Phi, 2010). A review of mission and purpose statements, web sites, and print materials readily provides insight into the value fraternal organizations place on leadership development. However, there is not a well-established body of research that
measures the outcomes associated with leadership development within fraternities and sororities (Bureau, 2007; Kelly, 2008; Molasso, 2005).

In addition, defining leadership is a challenge as many theories and definitions of leadership exist. The view that leadership is a social construction that emanates from the connections and interdependencies of members within an organization is an emerging discourse in the study of leadership (Uhl-Bien, 2006). A relational view of leadership asserts iterative processes, not persons, are at the core of leadership and that leaders are constructed through the social process of interacting with others in the organization. The relational leadership perspective considers leadership developing through a social influencing process in which values, attitudes, and behaviors are constructed and reproduced. Murrell (1997) views leadership as shared responsibility: “leadership is a social act, a construction...that takes the organization where it desires to go” (p. 35). In this view, organization members are all involved in the leadership process, not only the positional leaders or as in other theories, but those involved in a leader-follower exchange relationship (Murrell, 1997). Relational leadership theory (Uhl-Bien, 2006) is a framework offered to focus attention on the relational processes by which leadership is produced and enabled. Because leadership is about the relationships one builds, and not only the position one holds, the student leaders in this study are identified as those not only holding an official leadership position, but also those that function in the socially constructed environment of relational leadership.

Wheatley (1992) forwards the idea that “leadership is always dependent on the context, but the context is established by the relationships we value” (p. 144). Komives, et al. (1998) further the idea of relationships and leadership and developed a model focusing on the idea that leadership effectiveness has to do with the ability of the leader to create positive relationships
within the organization. The Relational Leadership Model (Komives, et al., 1998) includes five components and is illustrated in Figure 2.:

1) **Empowering** – encouraging members to actively engage and get involved;
2) **Purposeful** – committing to a common goal or activity;
3) **Process-oriented** – being aware of the way a group interacts and the impact it has on the group’s work;
4) **Inclusive** – understanding, valuing, and engaging all aspects of diversity;
5) **Ethical** – being guided by a system of moral principles.

Figure 2.2 The Relational Leadership Model

![Relational Leadership Model Diagram](image)


Each component of the relational leadership model suggests an orientation toward group membership, a perspective held by most Millennial generation students (Howe & Strauss, 2000). As established organizations, fraternities and sororities provide countless opportunities for relational leadership to occur. New members join each year and at many levels are invited to engage and become involved in the organization. Fraternities and sororities have established values, goals and traditional activities. As an ever-changing organization (with the influx of new members each year), fraternities and sororities are often process-oriented and attuned to the culture of the organization based on the members. Finally, fraternities and sororities invite
members to learn and appreciate one another as dynamic individuals that have come together in this particular socially constructed environment.

Astin (1993) contends college students develop leadership abilities through involvement in extracurricular activities. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) noted that involvement enhanced interpersonal and leadership skills that were critical to future job success. In addition, students who are involved on campus are more confident; develop mature interpersonal relationships and intimacy (Hunt & Rentz, 1994). However, few studies exist that specifically consider the leadership development of fraternity and sorority students. Hughes & Winston (1987) found fraternity membership increases the interpersonal values of leadership and independence. Posner (2004) contends that fraternity presidents perceive themselves using the five leadership practices as defined by Posner and Brodsky (1992) more often than other chapter leaders. Kelly (2008) asserts that while there are many opportunities for college students to serve in co-curricular leadership roles, serving as a fraternity chapter president can provide unique leadership benefits that are not available to other student leaders (i.e. supervising other leaders, facility and fiscal management, etc).

Each project with the purpose of studying leadership must utilize particular definitions of leadership and identify specific participants. The present study defines leadership, like Komives et al (1998) as a relational construction site in which leadership is not limited to formal or elected positions of ‘power’, but one in which anyone can be a leader. I endeavor to examine the process of leadership identity development as related to membership in a fraternity or sorority. Therefore, Komives, et al.’s (2006) theory, in which they describe the process of developing an identity as a leader, guides the crux of my inquiry.

With the leadership identity development model in mind, I approached each “inter view” (Kvale, 1996) as a site of meaning making and reflection (Kegan, 1982). Fraternity and sorority
Students involved in a broad array of leadership positions within and outside of fraternal organizations on three campuses participated in this study and in doing so further developed an understanding of how their membership influences their identity as a leader.

**Leadership Identity Development.**

Komives, et al. (2006) developed a six-stage model of leadership identity development based on a grounded theory investigation. The purpose of their project was to "explore the process a person goes through to come to awareness that they can make a difference and can work effectively with others to accomplish change" (p. 3). The Leadership Identity Development (LID) model suggests several key influences contribute to the development of a leadership identity arrived at through stages, and serves as the primary theoretical focus for my study on fraternity and sorority students. Komives et al. (2005) assert five influences contribute to a six-stage process toward the development of a leadership identity: 1) broadening view of leadership, 2) developing self, 3) group influences, 4) developmental influences, and 5) a changing view of one's self with others.

The stage in the LID model involves awareness, a notion of leadership exists although it is a concept outside of the student. Students in this stage perceive others as leaders, particularly those in official leadership positions. Stage two, exploration/engagement, is characterized by involvement in an increasing number of organizations and activities, however, leadership is still something others are or possess. In the third stage, leader identified, the student recognizes there are ‘leaders’ and ‘followers’. The student also has an increased desire to make changes and be a part of the inner workings of the organization(s) in which they are members. In this stage, there are two aspects: emerging and immersion. Students who are emerging try on new roles and identify skills and abilities they need to be effective as leaders or members. Students in immersion see that
they have an opportunity to experience the organization as a member and a leader. However, the perception that leaders are responsible for doing the work dominates the perspective of the students in this stage. In other words, leaders ‘do’ leadership and followers follow them (Komives et al., 2006).

Komives’ model includes a key transition between stages three and four. This transition is marked by an understanding that leadership is a complex process that cannot be accomplished only by one person. There is an increased awareness that perspectives of others must be taken into account and this stage “signals a shift in consciousness toward interdependence with others” (Komives et al., 2006, p. 4). Komives, et al.’s (1998) earlier concept of relationship leadership intersects the LID model here.

In stage four, leadership differentiated, students become aware that leadership is a relational process and understand that the role requires facilitation and community building. Just as in stage three, Komives’ team identifies two aspects in this stage: emerging and immersion. In the emerging phase students develop new capacities such as trusting others, listening and building community. In immersion, students understand and become more comfortable with shared leadership realizing that at times they will lead and at other times follow. Stage five, generativity, is marked by the student’s realization that they must cultivate other leaders within the organization and how their organization relates with other groups and entities within the larger system/community. In addition, students in stage five hold established views on leadership and a style or approach that is consistent with their values. In the final stage, integration/synthesis, a student’s awareness of their leadership and a confidence in their ability to take on leadership roles is evident. Students in this stage also have an awareness of the complexities of organizations and their own personal values. They are comfortable in leadership roles, but
understand that leadership is a relational process. Komives et al. discuss the importance of mentors throughout the process as adults and peers play an important role in helping the student progress through each stage. Figure 2.2 provides the LID model.

Figure 2.2: Developing a leadership identity: Illustrating the cycle


Over the last several decades, research on college students has focused on the processes of development as well as the factors that influence growth and maturity. Some scholars contend students must achieve certain developmental milestones (Kegan, 1982), while others suggest crisis propel students toward resolution (i.e. development) and achievement (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Others assert involvement in organizations allows a student a place in which to learn, try on new leadership styles and develop their knowledge, skills and abilities (Astin, 1993; Hayek et al, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Nonetheless, little scholarship has addressed the process of developing an identity as a leader (Komives, et al., 2005). Renn and Bilodeau
(2004), Onorato (2010) and Oldham (2008) utilized the leadership identity development model in their studies on leadership identity development of specific identity groups; gay, lesbian, and transgender students, Hispanic women, and African American men respectively. While Renn and Bilodeau, Onorato, and Oldham utilize the Komives’ model in their research to examine the process of leadership identity development for students who claim specific identities, the present study examines the influence of organizational attachment, specifically fraternity and sorority membership, on the development of an identity as a leader.

Summary

The purpose of the present study is to explore the leadership identity development process as influenced by fraternal organization membership among college students. The literature review summarizes the history and foundational purposes of fraternal organizations and provides a brief overview of the field of student development theory. The broad areas of understanding organizational culture, specifically that found in fraternal organizations, student development, and leadership, together sharpen the focus of the present study on the concept of leadership identity development.

Theories provide a unique way of perceiving reality, an expression of someone’s (the researcher or the participant) insight into an aspect of the world. Merriam (1998) states “many believe mistakenly that theory has no place in a qualitative study; actually, it would be difficult to imagine a study without a theoretical or conceptual framework” (p. 45). Merriam also emphasized that we would not know what to do in conducting our research without some theoretical framework to guide us, whether it is made explicit or not, and calls the theoretical framework “the structure, the scaffolding, the frame of [the] study” (p. 45). The theoretical framework is derived from the “concepts, terms, definitions, models and theories of a particular literature base and disciplinary orientation” (p. 46), and affects every aspect of the study, from
determining how to frame the purpose and problem, to what to look at and for, to how we make sense of the data collected.

The theoretical framework in this study provides three arenas from which to derive understanding about fraternity and sorority student leaders. In the first arena, utilizing Schein’s (1993) theory of organizational culture allows me to appreciate and describe the unique culture of fraternities and sororities. In the second arena, student development theory broadly shapes my perspectives that college students mature in specific ways. These two arenas connect and background my understanding of leadership identity development. Finally, Komives et al’s (2005) theory of leadership identity development provides depth in understanding individual student leaders. Figure 2.3 illustrates the connections between the theories used to guide this study.

The literature and models described in this chapter scaffold this study in ways that provide structure to the purpose, research questions and method for the entire study. In the next chapter, I provide a detailed description of the research design and methodology.

![Figure 2.3: Theoretical Framework](image)
Chapter 3
Research Design and Methodology

Although scholars frequently study leadership styles, attributes, and practices, there is not a well-established body of research that examines the process associated with leadership identity development. There is currently no scholarship that describes this process of development specifically among fraternity or sorority members.

The intent of this study is to develop an understanding of the experience of fraternity and sorority student leaders. This is an endeavor into a broad, open-ended construction site of knowledge and meaning-making. The purpose and research questions for this study necessitate a qualitative approach to reviewing the literature, using a theoretical framework, collecting and analyzing data, and writing. By giving voice to fraternity and sorority students through a qualitative approach, the present study provides a deeper understanding of their experiences and development as leaders. Organizational culture (Schein, 1993), student development (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kegan, 1982) and leadership identity development (Komives, et al., 2005 & 2006) theories provide conceptual grounding, and guide the design, analysis, and overall conclusions of the present study.

The Influence of Theory on the Research Project’s Method

While no single theory or theoretical framework offers a perfect explanation of what is under study, a theoretical framework has the ability to 1) focus a study, 2) reveal and conceal meaning and understanding, 3) situate the research in a scholarly conversation and provide a vernacular, and 4) reveal its strengths and weaknesses (Anfara & Mertz, 2006). Creswell (2003) recommends the research design provide a framework for the research project. He identifies four components of a solid research design: epistemological stance, theoretical framework, methodology and method. In the previous chapter, I outlined relevant theories and models that
form the theoretical framework of the present study. Through this study, I endeavor to describe the developmental experiences of fraternity and sorority student leaders as influenced by the culture of fraternities and sororities. Continuing in this chapter, I consider and describe these components in order to develop a thorough understanding of the intentions and motivation behind my study as well as to delineate the methods and tools used to complete the project.

Epistemological Perspectives that Frame the Study

To pose the question regarding the influence of fraternity and sorority membership on leadership identity development among college students assumes a certain perspective. Overarching the specific theories used in creating the framework, the standpoint of social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) shapes my perspective regarding fraternities and sororities and their influence on student development. Social constructivists hold that individuals seek and create a subjective understanding of the world in which they exist. First, I contend learning is a search for meaning that starts with the issues around which college students are actively trying to construct meaning (e.g. what it means to be a leader). Second, meaning requires understanding wholes as well as parts, as well as understanding the parts in the context of the whole (e.g. one’s identity as a leader within the organization as well as outside of it). Therefore, the learning and development processes focus on overall concepts, not only isolated data. Third, students create and use mental models to perceive the world. Understanding the assumptions they make to support those models is important for research and for learning (e.g. how one knows they are a leader). Finally, one primary purpose of learning is for individuals to construct their own meaning (e.g. how being fraternity man or sorority women shapes one’s identity). Like other social constructivists, I believe that in order to understand and make meaning of the world, one must interpret it.
Fraternities and sororities provide opportunities for students to learn, make meaning of knowledge, and to share values within a socially constructed context. Students within fraternities and sororities actively construct knowledge rather than passively receive it from the environment. Their learning and development is a social, collaborative activity. Cobb (1996) examined whether the ‘mind’ is located in the head or in social action, and argues that coupling these perspectives is valuable. From one perspective, reasoning appears as a collection of individuals mutually adapting to each other’s actions, in another as perspective as the norms and practices of a community. Learning, then, is primarily a process of enculturation into a particular community and through these processes, the fraternity and sorority environment influences student development. As members of fraternal organizations, college students actively participate in the construction of their individual experience and identity as well as in the perpetuation of the group’s culture.

Because of my experience, both professionally as a fraternity and sorority life practitioner within student affairs, and personally as a member of a women’s fraternity for more than twenty years, I possess an insider’s knowledge and understanding of the semiotics, texts, and practices of fraternal organizations. Therefore, elements of the phenomenon I am studying are naturally visible, while others still are invisible to me (Fairclough, 2004). Importantly, I listen with a critical ear, attuned to learn different perspectives than what my current view provides.

For this research project, a constructivist perspective allows me to view the participants as learners who, along with me as the researcher, engage in making meaning about their experience as a fraternity and sorority member and leader as well understanding their identity as a leader. Through this sense-making endeavor, we engage in the process of arranging our understanding of fraternity and sorority membership and leadership experiences so that we can know what has happened and what is happening, and so that we more fully understand cultural
environments and their inhabitants. We construct knowledge of ourselves and the world (Drath & Palus, 1994). Through the reflection opportunities inherent in interviews conducted as part of this study, the student leaders and I create meaning and further construct their leadership identity.

Through participant interviews at three universities, this qualitative study examines leadership within the context of fraternal organizations using an operationalized definition of leadership - relational leadership (Komives, et al., 1998). Within this framework, I seek to examine how fraternal membership and practicing relational leadership influences the leadership identity development of fraternity and sorority student leaders. Defining and describing the frameworks and methods I utilize to address these questions are the purpose of this chapter.

The leadership identity development (Komives et al., 2005) framework and the Relational Leadership Model (RLM) (Komives, et al., 1998) provide the foundation for this study. Specifically, relational leadership theory focuses on leadership as a socially constructed perspective that derives from significant relationships and the LID model outlines the meaningful experiences and relationships that affect college students as they develop a leadership identity. The process of leadership described within the relational leadership model is predicated upon the idea of people working together with a common purpose. Presumably, the culture of fraternities and sororities contribute to the process of relational leadership.

To enhance understanding regarding the influence of fraternity and sorority membership on student development and the process of developing a leadership identity, three research questions guide my study:

1. How does the cultural milieu of fraternities and sororities shape the leadership identity development of undergraduate members?
2. How are enculturation processes and fraternity and sorority membership utilized by students to develop an identity as a leader?

3. What processes help students to create meaning from their fraternity or sorority experience?

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument. As an ethical and responsible researcher, I carefully weigh my positionality and subjectivity regarding the topic and the representation of the participants’ voice (i.e. narrators). In the following sections, I address these issues.

Fraternity and sorority membership can provide a positive, life-changing experience that is paramount to the success of many college students and alumni, those from all manner of backgrounds and aspirations. While there is literature that contends the fraternal experience is fraught with detrimental situations and contributes negatively to student development (Maisel, 1990; Wechsler, 1996), significant developmental potential and meaning-making experiences exist within fraternal organizations for college students. My ardent belief in the positive developmental influences of fraternity and sorority membership inextricably shapes the purpose of this study, the research questions and methods. As I embark upon this study, my perspective on leadership and fraternity and sorority membership is shaped by my own collegiate fraternal membership, but even more so by spending the last twenty years as an engaged alumna and fraternity and sorority life professional at a large college campus. My own experiences lead me to be exceptionally interested in the experiences of fraternity and sorority student leaders, particularly those Millennial students that serve as relational leaders. Many of these relational leaders also ascend to high-ranking leadership positions within their campus or Greek Community.
Through this process of this study, I seek not only to understand the experiences, learning and development of fraternity and sorority students, but also to provide an opportunity to represent their voices through scholarship. This is a difficult proposition, for as Guba & Lincoln (2005) state, “the way in which we know is most assuredly tied up with both what we know and our relationships with our research participants” (emphasis in original, p. 209). In qualitative research, voice can be described as “[the] struggle to figure out how to present the author's self while simultaneously writing the respondents’ accounts and representing their selves” (Hertz, 1997, p. xi). The researcher can easily take on an authoritative voice in the study or at the other end of the continuum, a supportive voice. Somewhere in the middle lies the challenge of displaying the complex interaction – the intersubjectivity- between my voice in the research and that of the participants. In this study, I endeavor to strike a balance in representing the participants.

**Theoretical Framework**

Understanding theory and its relationship to the research process requires perceiving reality just as the researcher does (Anfara & Mertz, 2006). My personal and professional experiences over the last twenty years shape my perspectives on leadership and fraternity and sorority membership. My epistemological stance of constructivism frames how I view learning through the exchange of information and ideas between the participants and myself as the researcher. Fraternities and sororities possess and perpetuate unique cultures, rich with traditions, semiotics, texts, and rituals, as well as provide college students relational opportunities unlikely to occur elsewhere. Nonetheless, college students are multifaceted individuals that develop because of and in spite of the influences of their environments.

The theoretical framework provides an informed approach to data collection that contributes to my understanding of the leadership identity development of fraternity and
sorority students. By using Schein’s (1993) theory of organizational culture, the concept of self authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2002) to understand student development, and Komives et al.’s (1998; 2005) work to understand leadership among college students, the three pronged theoretical framework undergirds the present study by illuminating the components of fraternal organizations and individual student development.

First, Schein’s (1993) theory describes organizational culture as the pattern of basic assumptions that a group invents, discovers, or develops in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration. Second, opportunities for college students to develop and to become the author of their own lives (Baxter Magolda, 2002) within communities through a cycle of “discussion, disagreement and consensus” (p. 223) over what has been experienced and what the experiences mean, guides my study with respect to the overall development of college students.

I utilize Komives et al. (1998) relational leadership model-the perspective on leadership that focuses on the idea that effectiveness has to do with the ability of the leader to create positive relationships within the organization-to identify the ‘type’ of fraternity/sorority leader I wanted to interview for the study. Finally, using Komives et al. (2005) leadership identity development model, I seek to understand the developmental processes fraternity and sorority student leaders utilize to form a leadership identity uniquely affected by the culture of their fraternal organization.

Fraternities and sororities provide opportunities for students to make meaning of knowledge, learn, and share values within a social context. Their learning and development is a social, collaborative activity. Fraternity and sorority membership, then, is primarily a process of enculturation into a community of practice and the environment influences student development. Finally, through a socially constructed site of knowledge formation (i.e. the
interviews and resulting analysis), I examine the fraternity and sorority experience for student participants and provide voice to their experience.

**Research Design and Methodology**

The present study utilizes a qualitative approach to better understand and describe the experiences of fraternity and sorority student leaders. Within qualitative research, the researcher exists as the instrument (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), trying to give meaning to what is seen, heard, or experienced. Qualitative research is:

A situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations...at this level; qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 3).

The findings and conclusions emerge from the data based on interviews with fraternity and sorority leaders within specific leadership roles and perceived as relational leaders. The semi-structured interviews focus on how the participants' fraternity and sorority membership contributes to their journey toward an identity as a leader. I used the interviews to “gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words so that the [I] can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 95).

The qualitative approach is particularly relevant in two ways for this study. First, in order to give voice to fraternity and sorority students’ experiences regarding membership and leadership development a qualitative method suits this purpose. This study endeavors to articulate the fraternity and sorority leader's experience by hearing it directly from the students as they make meaning of it. Second, research that endeavors to develop understanding about a group of people and their culture approaches this purpose effectively through qualitative means. Statistics tell a story about the result of a phenomenon, but voice provides the opportunity to
know what is happening in the particular context. A qualitative approach leads to greater understanding of the fraternal experience’s contribution to college student development.

Method

Participant profiles and campus descriptions.

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the influence of fraternity or sorority membership on the leadership identity development of student leaders. The participants are current students at three separate public, four-year institutions in the western United States. Each institution is similar in size, type, and hosts a significantly large and long-standing residentially based fraternity and sorority community. This section presents the context of each institution and an overview of the participants as a background for the themes and findings of this study. I now turn to institutional descriptions to provide contextual information. Following the institutional descriptions, an overview of the participants provides background information to guide understanding of their experiences in a fraternity or sorority.

The context of the institutions.

The purposeful sample of student leaders in this study hail from three similar campuses; each are 4-year public research institutions with a significantly large residential fraternity and sorority population located in the western United States. The campuses included in this study possess similar characteristics concerning the fraternity and sorority community and all are major, state supported institutions in their respective regions. I accomplished access to each site through contact with the campus specific fraternity and sorority life advising professional regarding the content, design and focus of the study. Because little research exists regarding fraternity and sorority student leaders, and fraternity and sorority professionals understand the need for study with this population, access to the site and participants came without hesitation. A brief description of each campus follows.
Sunny Flagship University.

Sunny Flagship University (SFU) is a four-year, land grant public institution located in the southwestern United States. SFU is located in the heart a large urban expanse of nearly a million people, yet the city itself is isolated in a rural region. Approximately 37,000 students enroll annually at SFU.

Forty-seven fraternity and sorority chapters receive recognition from SFU. Approximately 11 percent of the undergraduates are members of campus fraternities and sororities. Four umbrella councils govern the fraternal organizations at SFU. The Interfraternity Council (IFC) represents 17 fraternities, the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) represents 5 historically African-American fraternities and sororities, the Panhellenic Association (PHC) represents 14 sororities and the United Sorority and Fraternity Council (USFC) represents 11 multicultural and multi-interest Greek organizations. The majority of IFC fraternities and PHC sororities maintain a chapter house in which the majority of the membership resides. Chapter houses are located near the heart of campus and provide efficient access to classes, activities in the union, restaurants, and shopping. In addition, SFU is home to more than 500 philanthropic, multi-cultural, social, athletic, academic, and student clubs and campus organizations (Sunny Flagship University, 2011).

Flagship University.

Flagship University (FU) is a residential, land-grant research institution located in a small city in the Pacific Northwest. Approximately 10,000 students enroll annually at FU (Flagship University, 2011). The city was built around the college; therefore, the campus is located in the historic center of the community.

The Interfraternity Council (IFC) represents 17 residential fraternities, the Panhellenic Association (PHC) represents 10 residential sororities, and an additional seven multicultural
and multi-interest Greek organizations receive recognition from FU. Undergraduate members of fraternities and sororities make up more than 20 percent of the student population, and over 44 percent of the students live on campus. Many of the chapter houses, built in the early 1900s, are in the center of campus and provide efficient access to classes, activities in the union, and restaurants. The fraternity and sorority community is unique; freshmen move into the chapter houses during their first semester, as opposed to waiting until a student’s second semester or sophomore year. The system seemingly works well for FU and the students, with the fraternities and sororities maintaining a higher grade point average than other students for nineteen consecutive semesters (Flagship University, 2011).

*State University.*

State University (SU) is also a residential, land-grant institution located in a small city in the Pacific Northwest. Approximately 19,000 students enroll at SU each year (State University, 2011). Student life at the SU campus includes more than 400 student organizations. The Interfraternity Council (IFC) represents 25 residential fraternities, the Panhellenic Association (PHC) represents 14 residential sororities, the United Greek Council represents eight multicultural and multi-interest Greek organizations, and the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) represents five fraternities and one sorority that receive recognition at SU. Undergraduate members of fraternities and sororities comprise nearly 20 percent of the student population. The chapter houses, many of which were built in the early 1920s, form the “Greek Row” area adjacent to campus, which is a diverse community of students, faculty members, families, and includes the university president’s home.

*Participants.*

Thirty fraternity and sorority leaders were nominated by the student affairs professional responsible for the fraternity and sorority life program on each campus. Nominators used the
following criteria to assist in the nomination process: 1) the participant is currently enrolled in college, 2) the student is affiliated with a fraternal organization, and 3) the student is perceived as a relational leader. I defined relational leadership in my initial correspondence with nominators to include; the student exhibits participatory (vs. hierarchical) leadership, recognizes leading is a process of involving others in decision-making, and is confident and comfortable in their role as a leader. Nominators could chose fraternity and sorority leaders that practice their leadership in any number of roles on their particular campus. The nomination request letter appears in Appendix A. The criteria used to select participants limits the study exclusively to fraternity and sorority leaders. Future studies using a similar theoretical framework and methodology would further the understanding of the influence of other membership experiences on the leadership identity development of non-fraternity/sorority affiliated college students.

Out of the thirty nominated students, nine fraternity and twelve sorority student leaders aged 20–23 responded to the interview invitation and subsequently participated in my research study. As a group, the participants appear to be outgoing student leaders with a background in organized faith experiences and high school leadership. Based on the demographic information collected, all of the participants in this study are part of the Millennial generation.

The participants represent different racial and ethnic groups with five of the students identifying as students of color. The participants also represent various socioeconomic classes, and chapter types. Chapter types include social and/or residential fraternities and sororities sometimes described as historically white organizations (i.e. NIC and NPC) as well as historically African American and Latino/a fraternal organizations (i.e. NPHC and NALFO).

Table 3.1 presents basic demographic data gathered through the interview cover sheet and background portion of the interview. I provide a detailed profile of each participant for
interested readers in Appendix E. The profile of each participant provides context for perspectives and experiences which are used to illustrate the findings presented in the next two chapters. However, the profiles are not included here as the findings suggest themes across participants more than to each as individual student leaders.
Table 3.1: Basic Demographic Data of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age (years/months)</th>
<th>Class Standing</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Faith Groups</th>
<th>High School Leadership &amp; Involvement</th>
<th>Chapter Type¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allegria</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>not much</td>
<td>NALFO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Senior (5th year)</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>NPHC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>Senior (5th year)</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>NPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buck</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Boy Scouts</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>NIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtney</td>
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<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>NPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>21.11</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>only as Sr.</td>
<td>NPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>some</td>
<td>NPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
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<td>Junior</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>NIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>NPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>NPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>some</td>
<td>NIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
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<td>Junior</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>raised</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>NPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>some</td>
<td>NPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Christian</td>
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<td>NIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Youth</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>yes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Jewish</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steven</td>
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<td>Christian</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Senior</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>NPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>21.8</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>NIC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ National Association of Latino/a Fraternal Organizations (NALFO). The organizing body for more than 20 historically Latino/a fraternities/sororities (See also www.nalfo.org)
National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) - The governing body for 26 national and international women’s fraternities/sororities. (See also www.npcwomen.org)
National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) - The governing body of nine historically African American fraternities and sororities. (See also www.nphcqc.org)
North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC) - The governing body for more than 70 national and international men’s fraternities. (See also www.nicindy.org)
Interviews.

The focus of a qualitative research interview is to understand the world from the participant’s points of view and to unfold the meaning of their experiences. Interviews are “particularly suited for studying people’s understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective of their lived world” (Kvale, 1996, p 105). In addition, an interview is a “construction site of knowledge. An interview is literally an ‘inter view’, an inter change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest” (p. 2). The research interview is an interpersonal situation, a conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest in which knowledge evolves through a dialogue. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) describe interviewing in qualitative methodology as a technique that is “used to gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world” (p. 95).

After I received nominations from fraternity and sorority life professionals, I invited each student leader to participate in the study. While not every nominated leader responded to my invitation to participate, those who did expressed their excitement to do so and for my study overall. Follow up via electronic mail or phone, included the details of the interview’s date, time, location, a description of the study, and consent form. Communication prior to the face-to-face interview allowed the student to understand the nature of the study and their role in it before they chose to participate. The Invitation to Participate is included Appendix B.

Each of the interview conversations ranged from 60-90 minutes and utilized a semi-structured interview to explore the influence of the participants’ fraternal organization, family, peers, and involvement opportunities on their development. The audio-recorded interviews
allowed the voice of each student leader's personal experience to be heard and later represented in the themes and findings that emerge from the data.

Through the interview protocol, the present study works to understand the role of each participant's fraternity and sorority membership experience in their development. The interviews explored three key areas: 1) background, 2) organizational involvement, and 3) individual development. Through sharing about family, high school and early college experiences, the students provide a backdrop from which I could extrapolate developmental challenges and opportunities. Next, the participants describe experiences within organizations, engagement on campus, and how and by whom they felt supported as student leaders. In the last portion of the interview, participants focus on the key areas of their values, leadership perspectives and leadership development. Each of these broad areas provides a path to guide the interview and shape the presentation of the themes in this study as they continue to emerge as significant patterns in the data. The Interview Protocol appears in Appendix D.

Methodologically, interview studies provide a unique opportunity to gain access to the “inter view” (Kvale, 1996, p. 2) of the participant and share in the experience of constructing knowledge and making meaning between the researcher and the participant. Therefore, it is essential that the highest level of ethical considerations guide the structure of the study, and particularly the interviews. The qualitative research interview involves different ethical issues than those of a standardized questionnaire or a therapeutic conversation. As suggested by Kvale (1996) through briefing and debriefing, the participants were informed about the purpose and the procedure of the interview prior to the beginning of the interview (the process of obtaining informed consent). Finally, the participants and I discussed and resolved any possible consequences for them before beginning the interview. The Informed Consent Form is included in Appendix C.
Each of the participating students created their own pseudonym, and I maintain the coded list of participants separately from any corresponding documents that could identify the students. All documents coded for possible emerging themes are stored securely in my home office and on my personal computer. In addition, all participants’ information and interview data appear under pseudonyms in the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collected through the interviews follows guidelines provided by Seidman (2006) and Kvale (1996). Drawing upon Kvale’s (1996) recommendations for field notes, immediately following each interview, I recorded reflective and descriptive notes that supplied contextual detail to the data including the setting, the participant’s non-verbal behavior, and my general thoughts, reflections, and questions about each interview.

Overall, the theoretical framework guides the entire study. My study involves focus at three areas as described previously in the review of the literature and theory: 1) influences of fraternity and sorority membership at the organizational level (culture), and 2) student identity development, and 3) identity development specifically as a leader. By utilizing these areas to frame the interview questions, I collected and analyzed data with significant intentionality.

Gay et al. (2009) suggest identifying themes from within the literature as a guiding framework to begin analysis and to code with these themes in mind. In the broadest perspective, Schein’s (1993) organizational culture theory, Baxter Magolda’s (2001) self-authorship, and Komives et al.’s (2005) leadership identity development provide structure for themes and categories that emerge from streams in the literature and guide analysis. The influence of organizational culture for fraternity and sorority students, along with challenging and refining experiences as a leader, form the foundation of analysis categories, codes and eventually themes. By using theory in my research project, an “enlightening story” (Anfara & Mertz, 2006, p. xvii)
about the leadership identity development of fraternity and sorority students emerges that provides new insights and broadens understanding.

Designed with these three areas in mind, the interviews allow rich, descriptive, stories to develop and prompt probing questions that lead to greater understanding. Analysis of the data began with a review of the interview recordings during which I took notes on key concepts, words, phrases and ideas as I listened to each participant. As I listened, my understanding of culture, student development, and leadership identity development derived from the theoretical framework, provides a filter to determine what is important for the purpose of my study. Next, a professional transcriber and I transcribed the interviews. Once all of the transcripts were completed, I cursorily read each interview. With elements of culture (Schein, 1993), stages of development described Baxter Magolda (2002), and influencing aspects of leadership identity development described by Komives et al. (2005, 2006) in mind, I tentatively identified coding categories and themes. Doing so allowed me to determine how certain codes could conceptually cluster together and form themes that explain the research questions and support theoretical suppositions. Later, during deeper readings of each transcript, I applied codes to indicate key phrases, concepts, and in some cases, clear examples of developing a leadership identity. To maintain order, more than 200 codes exist in a spreadsheet for easy access to themes, and participant quotes.

Developed through careful coding and analysis, five major themes and three primary findings emerge. The themes in chapters four and five point toward two broad dimensions that illuminate the story of the leadership development experiences of fraternity and sorority students. First, current fraternity and sorority leaders, as members of the Millennial generation, have been oriented toward organizations, membership, and belonging their entire lives (Brooks, 2001; Howe & Strauss, 2001; Twenge, 2006). Komives et al. (2005) contend meaningful
involvement, reflective learning, and relationships with peers and adult mentors provide important developmental influences in the construction of an identity as a leader. Two themes that comprise the organizational level dimension emerge from the data and are presented in the next chapter, 1) genuine and encouraging relationships, and 2) the role of fraternity and sorority structure, hierarchy and opportunities. In addition, the influences of groups, in this case fraternity or sorority membership, contributes influentially to the participants’ understanding of organizational dynamics and the role and function of leaders within groups.

The focus of chapter five is the second dimension of themes derived from the data. As individuals oriented toward belonging, the participants are relationship builders and team players that practice relational leadership. Group influences (Schein, 1993), such as the culture of each particular organization, contribute to the participants’ personal development and in turn, their broadened view of themselves and others (Komives, et al., 2006) as leaders engaged together in a leadership process. Derived from their membership experiences, the participants in this study, however, possess unique perspectives about what it means to be a leader. The data gives rise to three themes that fall under the dimension of practicing relational leadership: 1) the importance of values-based leadership, 2) the unique leadership perspectives of fraternity and sorority student leaders and 3) opportunities for learning and reflection. Finally, three overall findings of this study are presented in chapter six.

**Trustworthiness.**

The credibility of the data collected is vital to establishing validity in the overall study. Guba (1981) suggest criteria for validity, or trustworthiness, in qualitative research that includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe credibility as being equivalent to the quantitative notion of internal validity, transferability as being related to external validity, dependability as connected to the concept of reliability, and
confirmability as equivalent to objectivity. The present study employed peer debriefs to assist in ensuring trustworthiness and credibility. Peer debriefs are “…a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). Two experienced student affairs colleagues reviewed several of the coded transcripts and provided feedback regarding my coding categories. Dialogue with both colleagues proved valuable in refining the focus of themes and overall findings. Two other colleagues provided feedback on drafts of chapters offering clarification and thought-provoking questions that prompted me to articulate the findings clearly. In addition, the findings and conclusions in this study incorporate feedback of transcript analysis from committee members which allows for alternative explanations of the data.

In addition, I utilized member checks to ensure trustworthiness of the data. Shortly after I transcribed each interview, I emailed each of the participants a copy of the transcript and I asked several of them to clarify answers to particular questions. This allowed for data and conclusions to be tested and checked by the individual participants in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each of the participants were invited to not only review transcripts for accurate transcription, but later in the process I shared an electronic draft of chapters 4-7 with each participant. I invited each to review the analysis of data, findings and conclusions to contribute further insight or clarification as applicable. Several student leaders, offered comments and feedback through email, phone or face-to-face conversations. Where appropriate, I incorporate this information in the final dissertation. The construction site of meaning making through the interview, provided the opportunity to build relationships with the participants, therefore dialogue with many of the students continues.
Thick description also helps to ensure trustworthiness in this study as it defines parameters of the research site, participants, and culture that allows for a deeper understanding of the research setting and context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I acknowledge the perspectives and experiences of the fraternity and sorority leaders in the study through brief profiles, thick description and direct quotations throughout the remainder of this dissertation. While this study does not specifically investigate the life history of each student, nor do I delve deeply into components of identity formation such as race, gender, and socioeconomic class, college students do not develop one piece of their identity, that of a leader, in a vacuum. Through the profile of each participant, the students’ perspectives on leadership and membership, as well as a glimpse into the culture of their fraternal organization, is accessible and allows the findings to be clear and understandable in terms of their context.

Kvale (1996) further develops the argument for validity in qualitative research by suggesting that validity is inherent in quality craftsmanship of qualitative research. Kvale contends that to validate is to check (to be critical of one’s findings and aware of bias and perceptions), to question (by ensuring the content and purpose of the research project precedes the method), and to theorize (to generate theoretical questions about the nature of the phenomenon being investigated). My inexperience as a researcher, alumna membership of a sorority, and familiarity with fraternity and sorority leaders, limit my interpretations of the data. The opportunity to check, question and theorize with several trusted colleagues and my dissertation chair provided crucial constructive criticism that offers alternative explanations of the findings. Their critique and feedback contributes beneficially to the final presentation of the findings, conclusions and recommendations.
Limitations.

As in all scholarly work, there are inherent limitations to this study that may influence the findings. As the purpose of qualitative research is not necessarily to generalize to a larger population (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003), this study is not intended to generalize findings to any other population but to describe the experience of fraternal membership and leadership identity development of collegiate members of several fraternities and sororities enrolled at three similar campuses. However, through careful attention to trustworthiness as described previously, this study aims to contribute to further development of theory (leadership identity development in particular) and the body of knowledge that informs student affairs practice.

I approach this study believing fraternity and sorority membership positively influences leadership identity development among college student leaders. Twenty years of professional and personal experience with fraternity and sorority leaders inform my epistemology. The unacknowledged yet overt bias of many quantitative researchers who study the fraternity or sorority experience position the research agenda in the academy in a way that limits positive counter discourse claims. While I view my experience both personally and professionally as an asset to this study, some readers may consider this a serious limitation and overt bias. Nonetheless, through careful attention to developing trustworthiness by means of the methods previously described, I attempt to mediate this concern.

Like any research that examines college students, there exist several noteworthy limitations to this study. The bounding of this study brought together a relatively homogeneous group of college students for participation. Although not all of the student leaders in this study are Caucasian, most are presumably of middle to upper socioeconomic status and the majority come from intact parental relationships. The participants in this study experienced opportunities for extracurricular and community involvement from an early age in most cases.
Such opportunities may not exist for youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or those from homes with a single head of household. In addition, my study primarily considers only the influence of organizational membership in a fraternity or sorority, and does not delve deeply into issues specifically associated with gender, race, or socioeconomic class as related to leadership identity development.

Secondly, the theoretical framework I utilize in this study depends heavily on stage-based models of development for consideration of overall college student development and specifically leadership identity development. Love, Bock, Jannarone, and Richardson (2005) argue that linear stage models of identity development are not sufficient to examine and understand the intricacies of numerous identity elements. In addition, stage models presume an American world-view in which the individual and autonomy are of the utmost merit, “they assume that progressive development occurs as individuals engage in an increasing level of independent thinking, become more autonomous and less rooted in family ties, and reject authority” (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006, p. 62). In addition, stage models assume each stage intimates a higher or better way of thinking while moving toward increasingly abstract ways of thought (Chickering, et al., 2006).

Finally, the study is limited to nominated student leaders at three research universities, each with a substantially large and residential fraternity and sorority community. Arguably, institutional context, and size and type of fraternity and sorority chapters influence college student development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). As a result of the site selections, the findings may not be transferrable to other fraternity and sorority students at other campuses, particularly those who are members of substantially smaller, non-residential chapters and those from campuses at which the fraternity and sorority community is significantly smaller. Even so, the reader must determine the applicability of these findings to their own context.
Summary

A broad understanding of student development, organizational culture theory, and a narrowed focus on leadership identity development frame my study. Recall the Leadership Identity Development (LID) model (Komives et al., 2005) proposes five categories that influence the development of a leadership identity through six stages. They include: 1) a broadening view of leadership, 2) developing self, 3) group influences, 4) developmental influences, and 5) a changing view of one's self with others. For the purpose of my study, these categories illuminate aspects of the participants' fraternity and sorority experiences and guide the themes derived from data analysis. The major themes are organized in the following two chapters. In chapter four, The Organizational Kid, I illustrate the ways in which the participants are akin to commonly held assertions about the Millennial generation and the role fraternity and sorority membership serves in advancing the participants' notions of what it means to belong to an organization and to lead. This chapter presents the themes as they relate to Komives' model categories of developmental influences (peers, adults, meaningful involvement) and group influences (membership in a fraternal organization, perceptions of groups). Chapter five, Practicing Relational Leadership, presents themes that exemplify the manner in which the participants practice relationship leadership within the context of fraternity and sorority membership. This chapter incorporates the findings as they relate to the LID categories of a broadening view of leadership, self-development, and the participants changing view of themselves as members of organizations.
Chapter 4

The Organizational Kid

At the turn of the century, a new generation of students enrolled at colleges everywhere. Coined the Millennial generation (Howe & Strauss, 2000) or Generation Me (Twenge, 2006), these students have been the focus of much study. As a group, they have provoked culture change in educational settings and the work environment (Howe & Strauss, 2007). Millennials are oriented to work in teams or groups and typically eschew hierarchy. They are involved in service organizations, organized religious activities, and believe they can make a difference in the world (Coates, 2007).

Members of the Millennial generation are confident, optimistic young people who feel valued and wanted (Howe & Strauss, 2000). On the other hand, some scholars contend Millennials are also narcissistic and miserable (Twenge, 2006). Critics of generational research, point to characterizations of Millennials that align only with middle and upper middle class families and contexts (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Nonetheless, understanding the characteristics of the generation in which the participants in this study are members is important to set the stage to appreciate the themes presented in this chapter and the next.

Today's college students are orientated toward organizations, shared leadership, and collaboration. Not coincidentally, the number of collegiate members of fraternities and sororities has increased in the last decade (North-American Interfraternity Conference, 2010).

The Organizational Kid: Raised to Belong

The first dimension that emerges as the themes developed during analysis is an elaboration of the phenomenon Brooks (2001) coined as “the organizational kid.” (p. 6). Organizational kids are those Millennials acculturated as members of teams, clubs, and organizations by their families that seemingly derive much of their identity from belong to
groups. Brooks (2001) observes that Millennials from all backgrounds “lead lives that are structured, supervised, and stuffed with enrichment” (p. 3). He criticizes the organizational kids as success driven, noting the pressure Millennials feel to succeed academically, coupled with their deference to authority, that creates apathy about social justice issues. The participants in this study reflect Brooks (2001) description of the organizational kid in some ways, and differ in others. As I present the themes about the organizational kids in my study, the similarities and differences emerge.

The participants’ reflections of their experience reveal the dynamic process of developing a leadership identity as a member of a fraternity or sorority. The experiences of the participants in this study varied in the manner in which they came to see themselves as a leader and the ways in which their context shapes them as student leaders. Nonetheless, their experiences validate the notion that leadership is a socially constructed concept shaped by the context, values, and experiences of society (Klenke, 1996). In this chapter, I illustrate the ways in which the participants utilize their fraternity and sorority membership to advance their development regarding what it means to belong to an organization and to lead. Noted are the influences of several key factors, such as a desire for building genuine friendships, encouragement to become involved and lead, and how the structure and hierarchy inherent in fraternal organizations propels students into leadership. Two themes described in this chapter authenticate the notion that the participants are organizational kids: 1) genuine and encouraging relationships, and 2) fraternity and sorority hierarchy, structure and opportunities. The participants are drawn to relationships and group membership, a finding consistent with generational scholarship and the leadership identity development (LID) (Komives, et al., 2005) categories of influence (peers, adults, meaningful involvement, group influences (i.e. membership in a fraternal organization).
The first two themes and brief analysis follow in this chapter and exemplify each level of theory in the present study (organizations, student development, and leadership identity).

**Genuine and Encouraging Relationships.**

The importance of genuine and encouraging relationships emerges as a salient theme for fraternity and sorority leaders, as fraternal organizations create and maintain highly relational environments. Hayek et al. (2002) found fraternity and sorority affiliated students to be more highly engaged than non-member students in several areas. Relevant to this theme, fraternity and sorority students scored higher in gains related to personal and social growth. Baier and Whipple (1990) affirm fraternity and sorority students are more dependent on peers and family members than non-member students. Coupled with other research about fraternity and sorority students, this suggests they share close relationships with family members, peers, and develop interpersonally and socially during college.

The theme of genuine and encouraging relationships describes the meaningful ways in which significant people or groups of people in the lives of the participants influence their development. The ways in which these relationships influence the identity development for each of the students in the study is unique and varied, depending on where the participant was in their overall identity development as well as growth in leadership identity. The significant relationships clearly arrange into three areas: 1) family, 2) peers, and 3) mentors. The remainder of this section describes the nature of these relationships and how they influence the participants’ leadership identity development.

**Family Members.**

The literature intimates the importance of family in the leadership identity development of students (Komives, et al. 2005). From an early age, the influence of family, particularly parent(s) that believe in the student, profoundly enhances the ability of each participant to
develop themselves through involvement with extracurricular programs, sports, community service organizations such as the Lasallian Youth, Invisible Children, and the Boy/Girl Scouts, or church activities.

Consistent with the literature regarding the Millennial generation, the students in this study possess a strong orientation toward the importance of family, education, service, and involvement in schools and the community. Such values and characteristics are consistent with the middle class American culture that emphasizes independence, adherence to intrinsic standards, valuing innovation and respecting non-conformity (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Research suggests emphasis is placed on curiosity, individuality, self-direction, and openness to new ideas, in the upbringing of middle class children (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Although a relatively small portion of the interview focused on life history experiences, the impact of family members and other adults that believe in them is undeniable in the development of the participants and make up the first key factor in this theme. Family provides the central source of support in becoming the person they are today for most of the participants. Regardless of other factors such as race, culture, and class, their family of origin gave the participants the initial push to become involved and believe they can lead. For many of the participants, involvement in community organizations or religious activities also contributes to the foundation of values and subsequent behaviors. Parents play a role in two meaningful ways. First, the majority of participants’ parents cultivated a positive and open relationship with their student before college. Second, most parents provided a perspective on college choice and involvement in a fraternal organization that influenced the participants’ decisions.

Positive Relationship with Parents.

Although student affairs practitioners express concern about the negative effects of parental involvement, research suggests parental involvement is beneficial to Millennials. Many
of the participants' parents (or in some cases a stepparent) play a key role in the students' development, a finding consistent with other research on Millennial students. For example, Wartman and Savage (2008) assert “parental involvement provides important benefits in terms of adjustment to college, academic success, and retention.” (p. 31) and HERI (2008) reports college students describe parental involvement as an enriching experience. Twenge (2006) found 40 percent of teenagers see their parents' opinions as important and many adopt the values of their parents as their own. Like many Millennials, most of the participants maintain a close and positive relationship with their parents while in college. Several examples from the participants illustrate this connection. Raised primarily by her single mother, Kendra clearly admires and is inspired by her mother:

My mom is a powerhouse. She is the strongest person I have ever met in my entire life. She always instilled in me and my brother that we can do whatever we want. We are smart enough. We are motivated. We just need to put our minds to it and develop a plan and just follow through with it. She was really helpful in that and very supportive.

The messages Kendra heard from her mother, typify the self-esteem building mantra of the parents of Millennials. Steven's father passed away not long before he left for college. He described his close relationship with his father:

I wanted to be just like my dad, in everything. I think that is why I was a lot more mature in a lot of areas. He would teach me a lot of philosophies on life and I would take those to heart and try to model my life after them. He was my best friend. So when he died it was really hard. I felt alone.

As a first generation American, John values educational opportunities: His immigrant mother pushes him to succeed academically but he appreciates her greatly:

The most important person [to me] is my mom. I am at the university because of her. She is the one that pushes me every day to be better and better. I always had this connection with my mom. She is my best friend. I told her when I started partying, when I am doing well in school and when I am doing badly. I call her when I have a question about something. She is the most important person to me because of what she went through when she had me.
Courtney described her father as “my hero, my idol, everything. I love my dad...he’s so amazing...he is like the dad of the century.” Millennial students are very comfortable in their dependant relationships with parents (Twenge, 2006) as expressed by Ross and Melissa:

I am not afraid to tell anyone that my mom calls me every morning. For people that don’t understand that, or dread their parents calling them, well, one, I love my mom more than anything, and two, I invest [a little time] every morning and then I don’t have the 1 hour call on Sunday of “you haven’t called all week.” She just calls to say hi usually, but sometimes she calls if I ask her to talk to me by a certain time to make sure I’m up. She knows my schedule pretty well, so she usually calls me when I’m walking out the door or something. She is a good support for me. I talk to my dad a few times a week and...if I really am making an important decision, he is the one I’m going to call (Ross).

I have an amazing family...the reason we still get along so well is because there is no superiority with my parents. It is completely open. We know we have different opinions. But we really do make decisions as a family which I think is really neat. For some people it is struggle with transitioning to be an adult when you come home. But I don’t feel that way (Melissa).

Other family members played a role in shaping the development of the students in this study as well. Thomas learned a great deal about working with adults by spending time with his grandparents. He conveys “I enjoy going to church with my grandparents because I enjoy all the old people so much. I have always loved doing that.” He also shares about the important people in his life:

My family, every single one of them. Especially my grandparents...my Grandpa is a hero in my life. Hardworking but a big loving guy who would do anything for anyone and sacrifice himself to help out. I think that is one of the things that I try to live by. I definitely don’t do as well as he does but it is something I strive for. He is very humble about everything and I think that is a great attribute to have – to not boast about your accomplishments. It makes you more real.

Other family members play a role in developing the leadership identity of the participants as well. With a large extended family, Ryan “looks up to” his aunt, recently becoming quite close with her and her husband. He says, “They are kind of the hippies of the family, but they give me some perspective. They say, ‘Oh, you should take some time off to travel or this or that.’ They give me an alternate outlook than what my parents have.” Melissa describes
her relationship with her older sister, “we are very different in a lot of ways but she is definitely my best friend.”

To the students in this study, family members are important, but the network of other adults in their lives that love and support them, also play a critical role in their development. Through neighborhood groups, car pools and volunteer involvement with teams and clubs, the participants had opportunities to cultivate cross-generational friendships. Sarah describes her parent’s best friend, Lynn, like family, “[She] got me through everything with my parents. She understood them and me; she has been a huge constant in my life. I go to her when I don’t have anyone else to go to.” Thomas describes the parents of his best friend as:

I am part of his family and he is part of my family. I will call his mom up every once in awhile. I work for his dad [during breaks]. It’s been great...having that second family. They are very important to me.

All of the participants in this study describe significant relationships with at least one parent or another family member and the majority of them enjoy a close and nurturing relationship with their parents. Several participants speak with their parents frequently and seek their advice or approval before making decisions. Others described the role a parent plays in making sure they “take care of their business” (such as schoolwork, paying bills, etc.). These findings are consistent with the HERI report (2008) and other scholarship (Wartman & Savage, 2008). However, as Twenge (2006) suggests, the Millennial students in this study show potentials signs of extended adolescence that may affect the identity development process. In addition, parents play a significant role in the participants’ college choice, as well as their decision to join a fraternal organization.

*Parental involvement in college and fraternal organization choice.*

The overwhelming majority of freshmen at four-year institutions believe that their parents are involved the “right amount” in key college decisions, according to an annual survey of
college freshmen (HERI, 2008). The participants' parents involved themselves in college choice decisions as well as the decision to join a fraternal organization. However, as it relates to fraternity or sorority membership, interestingly only one quarter of the participants have Greek-affiliated family members in any generation of their family. For students with familial ties to fraternal organizations, some parents minimally suggested their child join a chapter, and at the other end of the continuum, some required their student to do so. Other participants' parents ranged from indifferent to supportive of their student's decision to seek membership in a fraternal organization. Only a few participants' parents felt strongly that their child should not join a fraternal organization, a decision later reversed through persistence on the participant's part. What makes this finding intriguing is the negative influences and outcomes associated with fraternity and sorority membership as described in the literature review are well-known by the public, yet many parents endorse joining a fraternal organization by their student. Seemingly, in the decision-making process that balances absolute safety or membership in organizations, both a high priority for the parents of Millennials, the later wins out.

The participants' parents, while very involved in their lives and in many cases, very protective, also overwhelmingly trust and support their child's decision-making processes. This finding is consistent with information available about the parent-child connection common among today's students (Twenge, 2006). Buck's experience is reflective of the parent-child relationship characteristic of a Millennial student. He shares:

Once I got here, I wanted to go Greek and my parents were kind of iffy on it. Some of my parents' reasons for me not to go Greek were the drinking and the grades. I decided to respect that. First semester was probably the worst time of my life. Living in the residence halls didn't get me stellar grades either. I almost flunked out of school. That was embarrassing. Over the summer, I told my dad I was going Greek. This is what I wanted to do. I was able to convince my dad this is the way for me to get involved I went through summer recruitment and I found my fraternity and everything worked out really well. It is awesome.
Paradoxically, in several cases, participants were expected or in one case actually required (by their parents) to participate in recruitment (the process to join a sorority or fraternity). Molly says:

My entire family is Greek. My aunts, uncles and grandparents...all different chapters. I am the first [sorority name]. I had a lot of different legacies [close family members who are Greek-affiliated] and connections and a lot of positive information about the Greek community. I came to SU excited to go Greek, even though it was expected.

Like Molly, Elizabeth was very familiar with fraternity and sorority life. She shares:

My whole family has attended [this university]. My grandma, my grandpa, all my aunts and uncles. My mom and dad met here. They were all Greek. I was kind of stubborn and didn’t want to attend this university, but, it is what our family does. I wanted to be different. I ended up visiting my sister here and she is in a sorority and I just loved it. I loved the town and the people were just so down to earth and it was a real college experience. My family always said I wasn’t allowed to go somewhere close to home because people who do always drop out of school and come home. They really had such a great experience here that they knew I should go away. It has been an amazing experience. I have come out of my shell.

Like Molly and Elizabeth, many Greek alumni populate Anna’s family. Nonetheless, she initially resisted her parents’ wishes for her to join a sorority and shares:

I did not want to be Greek. I saw my brother [who had joined a fraternity] come home and he had changed so much and I thought, ‘I do not want to be a part of that. He thinks he is too cool for school.’

Once her parents realized she might not attend their alma mater or join a sorority, they ensured opportunities to visit campus and found ways for her to participate in aspects of student life, such as Homecoming. Eventually, Anna fell in love the campus and decided to attend her parents’ alma mater. However, she was still determined to avoid joining a sorority. Nonetheless, her parents insisted:

My mom said [I would go Greek and I would] like it. It was a big fight in our house. My dad finally said I could go to a community college and live at home or I could join the Greek system. I think they had to give me an ultimatum like that to make me want to join. Nothing against the residence halls but they knew that if I had gone to the residence halls I wouldn’t have had the experiences that I have had and the opportunities that I have gained. So I said, ‘fine, whatever’, but showed up at recruitment as an unhappy
camper. I am sure my recruitment counselors thought, ‘we do not want that girl here.’ I went through recruitment and actually had a really positive experience.

Buck and Anna’s examples are consistent with Twenge’s (2006) assertion that Millennials’ parents play a substantial role in the life choices of their students, more so than the prior generation. However, not all of the participants in the study experience this type of involvement from their parents. For example, although John’s mother works hard to ensure he can obtain a college education and is accepting of his decision to join a fraternity, his father feels differently. John shares:

It has always been really hard, me pushing for school and my stepdad pushing me away from school. He would prefer that I work and make money. I have always enjoyed school and wanted to go to college. My mom has always helped me. It hasn’t been easy going to college money wise. We are working through it and making it work.

Sarah’s parents did not attend college and she describes her relationship with them as strained. Even without their support, she chose to attend an out-of-state university and shares:

I believe all these experiences will help me make me a better person, a better parent, a better citizen, a better individual altogether, than they are. They are supportive, they want me to have this experience, they’re proud of the things I do, but most of what I do, is regardless of what they think I should or shouldn’t do. I’m very independent from my parents.

Like the participants in Brooks’ (2001) study, several students in this study lamented that as they entered college, they were “burnt out” from or “tired of” significant involvement in high school and had planned to “take a break.” Interestingly, as organizational kids, the participants in this study were raised to become involved, engaged, and busy college students, by parents that prompted their children toward membership in purposeful organizations. For some participants, the parental expectation for them to continue involvement and engagement in collegiate organizations was clear, from others, suggested but not overtly required.

Overall, parents play a positive and encouraging role with the participants in this study and foster strong familial relationships, which create a solid foundation for students to feel
supported, trusted, empowered, and valued. In addition, the participants’ parents ensured opportunities for their children to get involved or belong to school or community organizations as children and adolescents. It is within the framework of school or community involvement that the participants found opportunities to interact with adults outside their family. While family members often were the first to recognize and encourage the leadership potential of the students in this study, the participants repeatedly describe the important role of mentors and role models, other than family members during the interviews.

*Mentors.*

The opportunity to belong to something bigger than themselves (i.e. teams and organizations) provided fertile ground for the participants to learn the importance of developing relationships with their peers and adults outside their family. Nearly every participant mentions teachers, coaches or counselors as important to their development before college. Therefore, the role of mentors specifically emerges as the second category within the theme of genuine and encouraging relationships. Mentors provide encouragement and challenge the participants to think critically regarding their views of leadership. They entrusted the students with projects and events and urged them to take on new challenges. Mentors help them create meaning out of their experiences and contribute to developing an environment in which participants felt comfortable learning to communicate their thoughts, relate to peers, and experience group dynamics. In addition, many students depict mentors as positive examples of leadership in action. This finding is consistent with Komives et al. (2005) supposition that mentoring relationships are especially important for students as they develop as leaders.

The participants describe mentors, broadly used to encapsulate teachers, advisors, counselors, and coaches, in two distinct periods, early life and college life. In addition, mentors
play a role in specific leadership and organization advising and the broader realm of supportive life relationships. The next section delves into the relationships students hold with mentors.

*Early life mentors.*

With their frequent exposure to the adults involved in a variety of ways with their activities and those of their friends and teammates, Millennials are more likely to name a parent or close older friend as a mentor than previous generations (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Millennials typically seek tight bonds with mentors that are close, caring, and aware. Millennials possess great respect for leaders and remain fiercely loyal to them once the leader or mentor earns their respect. For many of the participants, it was early life mentors who befriended them and identified them as a leader. These interactions built confidence in the participants, particularly as they engaged in teams, organizations, and leadership activities as secondary school students.

For many of the participants, the encouragement of mentors helps them gain a sense of confidence in themselves and challenges them to get involved with leadership opportunities they may not have considered on their own. Congruent with contemporary egalitarian approaches used in schools and on teams, Katie’s school district prohibited hierarchy and official leadership positions on teams and in clubs. Nonetheless, she realizes there were many times when a teacher identified her as a leader:

I remember as early as second or third grade teachers pulling me aside and telling me to tone it down because a lot of students looked up to me. I started realizing ‘oh, okay you are coming to me.’ It happened all the time.

Courtney realizes now she would have made the “wrong choice” in choosing a college had it not been for the caring advice of her high school track coach.

He made me realize that the reasons I wanted to go [to another college] was because it was warm and it was California; and I was really trying to run from the problems that I had. I thought about it, and at the last minute, I decided I would go to this university and I’m so glad that I did.
For many students, a high school student government advisor played a key role in their development. Noting the importance of her high school student government advisor, Sarah said:

She said one thing to me that I will never forget. I was really upset with something that happened with a friend in student council, and she said, ‘Sarah, it’s business, not personal.’ I could tell you exactly where we were that day; from that point on it really influenced my leadership style. Those things that seem personal are often really business and should be handled as business. So, she was really important in my life in high school and she was knowledgeable about college and helped with my application and recommendation letters. To this day, she keeps in touch with me and I babysit her kids when I am home.

Thomas believes:

I think I have always had the ability to work well with people that are older than me. I developed strong relationships with the administration and teachers at my school. They really got to know me more than a lot of students so that played a role in [my involvement opportunities].

As high school students, the majority of participants were very engaged and involved. The sense of belonging they derived from their extracurricular involvement in high school provided opportunities for friendships to flourish and skills to develop. Early life mentors were instrumental in facilitating the students’ interest in active involvement in college and their capacity for leadership. Naturally, most of the participants in the study gravitated toward campus involvement, with many of them planning to join a fraternity or sorority early on in their college life. In fact, several of the participants describe interactions with fraternity and sorority alumni from various generations that encouraged them to continue their involvement in college through membership in a fraternal organization.

The opportunity to continue building relationships with older adults through campus organizations presented itself for the participants in various ways and at different times through involvement in college. Many of the early life mentors maintain relationships with the students, but new mentoring relationships develop easily from campus organizations. As Millennial students, the participants are not only comfortable in multi-generational relationships; they
expect and desire relationships with older adults. The college students in this study looked first to their parents, and later to organizational advisors, coaches and mentors for involvement in their lives.

_Highlight 1: College life mentors._

Once on the college campus, Millennial students’ predilection for team environments and their comfort level with adults like their parents, make them likely to seek membership and genuine mentoring relationships with professional staff and volunteers (Howe & Strauss, 2000). The majority of students involved in this study have opportunities to engage in relationships with university professionals and chapter alumni volunteers who serve as advisors, mentors and friends.

Importantly, students involved in fraternal organizations develop a close connection to their alma mater as well as professional and volunteer advisors with whom they develop relationships (Thorsen, 1997). Several participants provide specific examples of campus professionals and alumni volunteers that guide them. At the suggestion of a sorority sister, Teena began her involvement with a campus organization that connects students and alumni to the institution that provides opportunities to interact with the advisors and alumni at her university. She states:

_I found that student involvement was more important to me than my studies. I still work hard in school and do well, but I feel I’ve gained more from my extracurricular activities than I have school itself. The advisors for [two particular campus organizations] have been huge supports as far as helping me to be the best I can be in my leadership and helping with graduate school ...letters of recommendation. They have encouraged me to do the best I can and congratulated me when I do good things.

As a student in a Greek leadership class, Buck developed a close relationship with one of the campus fraternity and sorority life professionals. As he describes what he has learned from
her; he is beginning to understand the complexity of leadership and recognizes it is not just a position, but also a process of relationship building:

She is one of those people that have helped me find other friendships and other meaning to being Greek. I was so caught up in the meaning of my own fraternity that I really didn’t think about the whole community. Talking with her has really given me an opportunity to have a broader view of the Greek community and the different challenges we face and different ways of solving those problems.

Ross developed close relationships with the advisors of the campus student government through his involvement there. He shares:

The advisors are awesome people and push me to be better and are there for you in every aspect of life. I guarantee you we put them in some awkward situations ...because sometimes we want to do some crazy things and we ask questions that they’ve never seen coming. They can totally tell if we are having an off day and they can prod us and do a good job of being our advisor rather than our friend. They are always more of an advisor than a friend. It might be easier to be just our friend, but that could be a dangerous situation. If I need to chat or have something going on emotionally, I’ll go to [advisor]...the other day, I fell asleep in her office on the floor.

As a sorority president, Beth describes the relationship she has with the campus fraternity and sorority life professional, “He is huge support system. It has been so great being able to discuss things with him. He is very understanding when things happen or mistakes are made.”

Fraternities and sororities provide the unique opportunity for multigenerational relationships as members of the same organization, as fraternity and sorority membership is a lifelong experience, therefore after college, many alumni volunteer as advisors for a chapter. These chapter advisors often play a pivotal role for chapter leaders. When asked who the important people in her college and sorority life are, Beth shares:

I would have to say our house corporation board members [the alumni board that own the chapter house] as well as my chapter advisor. To be able to work with someone who is actually a great advisor rather than just there for the name is important. Even when she is busy she is there for me and able to balance it all out. She is a core mentor for me regarding the sorority.
Ryan developed a close relationship with his chapter advisor, an older man that actually resides in the fraternity house with the students. He says:

Our chapter advisor definitely is somebody I look up to. For me he has been a godsend as an advisor for me as my success chapter president. He brings a lot to the table as far as vision for the chapter and he plays a huge role for us right now. He takes a very refreshing approach to things. I like to work with him when he comes to our chapter meetings.

The participants in this study seem like typical Millennials as described by Howe and Strauss (2000). They share common attributes of the American middle class and their generation. Afforded opportunities from a very young age to engage in organizations, the participants therefore experience multi-generational friendships as the norm. Parents and other adults provide support systems and serve as mentors for the participants in the study.

Resultant from membership in fraternal organizations, the participants found adults and peers that challenge and support them throughout their development (Stanford, 1967). Komives et al. (2006) discuss the importance of mentors throughout the process of leadership identity development. Adults and peers play a central role in helping the student progress through each stage of developing an identity as a leader. In addition, the relationships fraternity and sorority members build with one another during college are extraordinarily meaningful and impactful. Their peers encourage them, confront them when needed, support them through life’s challenges, and genuinely love and accept them. In the next section, I share the participants’ examples of the role their peers play in their development as a leader.

**Peers.**

The influence of peers in the participants’ leadership identity development emerges as the third area and most salient contribution within the theme of genuine and encouraging relationships. After joining a fraternal organization, numerous participants cite the encouragement or insistence of peers as a reason that to join a particular club or organization.
They describe their peers as friends and admirable role models, who encourage them to become involved, take on various roles, and seek out elected leadership positions.

Peers also teach them what it means to be a leader and a follower; first as they were encouraged to get involved (as a follower) and later to lead (when their older peers then became their followers). First, fraternity or sorority upperclassmen identify new members as potential leaders and encourage them to lead. As these ‘early identified’ students progress through college and gain experience in both formal leadership positions and informal membership roles, they eventually become among the ‘top’ leaders in their organization. In time, the upperclassmen transition out of leadership roles and subsequently follow the next generation of leaders within the chapter, those that they cultivated. This cyclical process also emerges as a major finding of the present study elaborated upon later in this dissertation.

Teena’s campus involvement began early, “right from day one, I joined a sorority after going through recruitment and a lot of women in my sorority were really involved on campus and they really encouraged me to get involved in other organizations at [university].” Like Teena, Ross believes his current success and connectedness as a student leader derives from an opportunity a fraternity brother shared with him two months into his first year of college:

My fraternity brother was on the senate and they had an open seat. He had interviewed me to join the fraternity and for a scholarship in our fraternity, so he thought I’d be a good candidate. I ran for and was elected in that position. Oh, what I learned in that position... Simple things that you think everyone knows, but they don’t. I made lots of connections... being on the 3rd floor of the Union, meeting students and advisors from Greek life, and from the RHA [residence hall association], who are all leaders in some aspect or another. I’ve had the chance to make so many connections and network, which will benefit me in the future, but it wasn’t my goal. I just wanted the connectedness that happens when you see the same people every day and you want to meet them and know them next time.

Melissa chapter’s president encouraged her to run for a leadership position on the Panhellenic Council when she was a sophomore. Once elected, she quickly realized she was a
part of something much bigger than herself and could contribute in an area about which she is passionate, hazing education.

Through the election process, I realized what a really profound group it really is and what a big impact it has on campus. During the summer I was on Panhellenic it started to sink in what a powerful process this was that I am a part of. But it isn’t all about me, it is about all of us together.

Melissa realizes leadership is a process of involving people, building organizations, and striving for meaningful social change. Her views epitomize that of a relational leader. These examples aptly illustrate the significance of upperclassmen encouraging younger students to do more than just be involved. Older fraternity brothers and sorority sisters challenge them to fully engage and lead. This iterative process appears throughout the data. The participants expect involvement and readily accept the enculturation processes that push them ‘onward and upward’ into leadership roles.

Identification as a leader by older members provides the confidence boost many of the students need to think of themselves as leaders. Younger members of fraternities and sororities look to the experienced students in the chapter as models of who they want to become. Ross describes his relationship with the student government president, a fraternity brother, as “the one I go to.” Elizabeth is a respected and confident leader in her own right, nonetheless, she admires her chapter president’s ability to develop and maintain relationships even in the midst of difficult circumstances. Molly recalls participating in recruitment and realizing a particular chapter president was an acquaintance she knew from church in high school. She described her admiration of the other woman in this way:

I remember thinking “wouldn’t it be cool if I could be president, like her?” I know that drew me to the Greek community. That opportunity for focus and family support. I didn’t know if I needed the individual support or the built in friendship, but it has allowed me to have closer friends.
Steven chooses his friends carefully and shares:

I look up to my friends. My best friends are typically people I look up to even though we are the same age… I look up to [a close friend] like no other. [My girlfriend] I look up to. [Another close friend] I look up to. I think that is how I choose people that are going to be around me. They are all people I admire in some way.

The importance of relationships among peers, particularly women, is not a surprising finding. The literature on women’s identity development overwhelmingly indicates that women develop and gain a sense of identity in a context of connections with others and that women’s sense of self centers around building and maintaining relationships (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Gilligan, 1982). Several of the sorority participants provide examples of this claim in action. Teena indicates she turns to “a good chunk of girls in my sorority when it comes to stress with school, relationships, and family issues.” Beth describes her sisters as women who “all love to laugh and have fun together.” Sarah believes the women in her chapter “will stay in my life...forever. In college, you need that support system and my sisters have literally been there through thick and thin with me and seen me at my best and my worst.”

Even more so, several women describe experiences with a sorority member or members that are so close they feel “like family.” Katie describes her closest friends in the sorority as “the most amazing family” and pivotal in helping her learn important relationship lessons. Andrea describes her bond with her sorority sisters as “the same as having a blood sister” indicating that sorority sisters connect with one another when they are down or need help. In addition, Andrea says:

Sisterhood is about hard work and being able to talk to each other. You can’t have a problem and be angry with each other like enemies. At the end of the day, that is your sister, so you should be able to work things out, no matter what.

Kendra describes her close friend in the sorority as “my other lung” and the rest of her sisters as rallying around her when her mother was diagnosed with cancer and she had to divide
her attention between college and caring for her mother. She recalls, “they were so kind and sent me letters, cards, flowers and stuff like that. I realized then, this is why you have a sisterhood. This is the kind of things we need to be doing for one another.”

The depth of relationship building extends outside the sorority for many women in this study. Anna developed close relationships with women from other sororities through her experience as a recruitment counselor [a guide for women going through sorority recruitment] and humorously describes her relationship with them, “I am like a bad boyfriend, I come over, hang out, sleep on their couch, and eat their food. In my closest circle of friends...we have become like a family.”

Several men in the study also describe their friendships with fraternity brothers as exceptionally unique and meaningful compared to other male friendships in their lives. Ryan considers his fraternity brothers as the “most influential” people in his life. As a member of a small fraternity, Steven describes his fraternity brothers as a “light in my life and in my heart.” He fondly shares:

I love the relationship that we have. We went through it together and we have an inseparable bond. I couldn't see [fraternity brother] for ten years and see him again and feel like it is the first day just because of all the things we have been through together and how well we know each other. It is kind of scary.

Like Andrea, Steven contends “there is no difference” between blood brothers and fraternity brothers and compares choosing his fraternity as a decision of the same importance and weighty consideration as choosing a wife, “the people are what make the fraternity. As long as I have that relationship with those guys, then I have made the right choice.”

All of the participants develop close familial relationships with their “brothers” or “sisters”, closeness with peers is a significant part of the Greek experience. Popular perceptions
of the friendships among women support the notion of developing this type of friendship group. The men in this study experience similarly close and genuine relationships with their brothers.

The fraternity and sorority leaders in this study overwhelmingly point to the impact of deep, meaningful, and genuine friendships with their peers, mentors, and family members at the core of their development as college students and as leaders. The creation of relationships outside the participants’ family, often developed from the organizations and spaces in with they found meaningful connections. Within the relationships in their organizations, the participants experience what Baxter Magolda (1992) describes as learning that occurs in communities through a cycle of “discussion, disagreement and consensus” (p. 223) over experiences and their meaning. The participants experience college life in their organizations, a place that ensures they are not alone. The participants explore their values, operate within structured hierarchies, develop unique perspectives on leadership, and reflect on all they learn in their formal and informal leadership roles.

As organizational kids, the participants in this study expertly build relationships, because they are accustomed to doing so. Although the relational leadership model contends leadership is a process and essentially anyone can lead, the structure and hierarchy inherent in fraternal organizations provides opportunities for leadership for some of the participants and challenges for others. The influences of group membership as described in the leadership identity development (LID) model (Komives, et al., 2006) and organizational culture theory (Schein, 1993) undergird the second theme. The next section focuses on the second theme that emerges from the data, fraternity and sorority hierarchy, structure and opportunities.

Fraternity and sorority hierarchy, structure and opportunities.

Fraternities and sororities are highly structured, values-based organizations (Anson & Marchesani, 1991). Examining these organizations from the perspective of the organizational
culture model advanced by Schein (1993) is beneficial as it allows me to conceptualize the impact of membership on each of the participants as individually developing college students. Students join these well-established organizations and older members of the organization share the artifacts and values with them immediately as part of the enculturation process. As fraternities and sororities graduate older members and recruit new members every year, these organizations expeditiously create and maintain practices and traditions. The adage used by fraternity and sorority life professionals, “if a chapter has done something once, it is a tradition” illustrates the rapid process of enculturation that occurs in fraternal organizations. One of the most visible artifacts of fraternities and sororities is the widely stated purpose of leadership development found in their mission statements, creeds, mottos or incorporating documents.

Through structure, hierarchy and processes in fraternal organizations, engagement opportunities abound for the participants. Unlike some other college student organizations, fraternities and sororities are well-established spaces in which new students socialize quickly with the aid of older student members as well as alumni. Through the artifacts of the organization, older members identify the values and deeper meaning of membership for the new members and the enculturation begins. They accept the direction of older members and alumni and find themselves fully immersed in the second and third levels of the organization's culture (Schein, 1993). Many of the participants describe aspects of their organization of which they were seemingly unaware before the reflection opportunity during their interview. Schein’s (1993) theory suggests enculturation processes occur over a greater length of time than I observe in fraternal organizations and perceive in the participants’ descriptions. Fraternal organizations perpetually move forward in developing as organizations. Several participants express the frustration they feel in other student organizations that lack structure and consistency. As
Millennials, the participants are familiar with “the way things work” in organizations and appreciate groups that function well. Katie shares:

I was treasurer for [a student organization] for a while but it was hard, because there was so much less structure than the sorority. It was terrible. Comparing it, I thought, “this isn’t how you do things”, so I decided to not be involved in that organization anymore.

Students serve in ‘entry level’ leadership roles, and later still, in highly visible and significant chapter and campus leadership positions. Older members of chapters introduce new fraternity and sorority members to leadership and encourage them to take on these responsibilities. From the onset of membership, the fraternal organization works to develop the leadership potential within each new member. As new members’ confidence grows and they find success in their leadership, their peers encourage them to assume more responsibility within the organization. As upperclassmen, fraternity and sorority members essentially participate in a reiterative cycle in which they engage, follow, lead, and then again return to a role as an encouraging follower before graduating from college. This process highlights how socializations in fraternal organizations takes place.

The process of socialization incorporates all levels of Schein’s (1993) organizational culture theory. Early and efficient enculturation of new fraternity /sorority members into the organization occurs when upperclassmen share the meaning, purpose, and goals of the organization. The process of sharing engenders commitment to the group, particularly for Millennials who value tradition and meaning as part of their involvement experiences (Twenge, 2006). Once they are part of the organization and journeying on the path of leadership, the participants express awareness of the values espoused by the organization. However, in several cases, the participants did not immediately connect their leadership practices with the expectations placed on them by their fraternal organization. In addition, the basic underlying
assumptions of their organizations, Schein’s third level of organizational culture, seemingly remain unrecognizable to them. However, as an experienced fraternity/sorority life professional, many of these basic underlying assumptions of fraternal organizations are apparent to me. Many of the developmental conversations I have with student leaders address the incongruence between many fraternal organizations’ underlying assumptions and their espoused values.

Structure is an established part of the fraternity or sorority experience. Hollander (1964) believes “effective leadership is a structural feature of the functional or task requirements presented to a group” (p. 9) and that these structures have a self-sustaining quality that supports and maintains leaders. An abundance of leadership roles exist in fraternities and sororities and upperclass leaders direct new members to entry level appointed and elected leadership positions in the chapter. To illustrate the hierarchy and structure within fraternal organizations, I provide two examples. First, Figure 5.2 provides an organizational leadership chart as a representation of the type of structure and hierarchy common to most fraternities and sororities. Likewise, Figure 5.3 is an example the hierarchy of a Panhellenic council, the governing council for all sororities on any campus with more than two sorority chapters (NPC, 2010). These organizational charts illustrate the pragmatic and hierarchical nature of fraternal organizations as a lens into the culture in which the participants practice their leadership.
Figure 5.2: Fraternity Organizational Chart

Delta Tau Delta Fraternity: Chapter Advisor’s Manual, (n.d.)
The confidence the students in the study gained from the positive network of relationships to which they belonged before college fortified their capacity to seek membership in a fraternal organization. The students in this study are familiar and comfortable with processes required to belong to organizations due to their experiences before college with clubs and teams. The participants naturally gravitated toward fraternities and sororities to pursue collegiate involvement as a first year student. College students gain exposure to and are involved in the hierarchy, structure and opportunities inherent within fraternities and sororities immediately after making the decision to seek membership in a chapter. On most campuses, in order to join fraternities or sororities, students must register or apply in advance and then participate in a structured process (recruitment) to join a chapter. This process of recruitment (i.e. rush) is managed by student leaders within fraternities and sororities. Registrants interact
with yet more student leaders as they are facilitated through the process, unique to each campus and type of fraternal organization, that will likely result in their acceptance into a chapter. Therefore, interested students experience repeated exposure to levels of leadership within fraternal organizations as they seek membership.

As a new member in a fraternal organization, students eagerly explore and experience many organizations and leadership roles perceived to be ‘entry level’ and manageable for new students. Komives et al. (2005) found younger college students in particular in a stage of exploration and engagement characterized by involvement in an increasing number of organizations and activities, however, to them leadership is still something others perform or possess. Several participants in the study describe their early experiences and support this notion.

Within fraternities and sororities, culture and leadership are “two sides of the same coin in that leaders first create cultures when they create groups and organizations. Once cultures exist, they determine the criteria for leadership and thus determine who will and will not be leaders” (Schein, 1993, p. 13). Within the structure and hierarchy of fraternal organizations, there exists an interesting dichotomy. On one hand, the structure provides opportunities for involvement and leadership for many students. The structures benefit fraternal organizations and many students thrive within them, however, all too easily, non-elected students complacently believe that leadership is the work of the elected leaders only. Conversely, not all students who would desire to lead receive encouragement to do so and some struggle to be elected within the structure of the organization. The majority of participants in this study find the structure a place to thrive and ably navigate through it garnering increasing responsibilities with each step of their leadership journey. For others, disappointment spurred them to develop their leadership skills and abilities elsewhere on campus.
For the participants in the study, older leaders within their own organizations directed their leadership foci into one of three areas: 1) leadership with the chapter and on campus, 2) leadership within the chapter only, or 3) leadership on campus only. Most of the participants are content with their leadership journey and feel successful, supported, and encouraged. However, the ‘team choosing’ activity is an intriguing finding. Seemingly, before the participants knew all of their options for involvement and engagement, older members of their chapters had identified them as a leader for specific arenas. Particularly on large college campuses like those represented in this study, students are compelled to choose their leadership path early on and stick to it. In addition, several students express some sadness over obvious rejection for internal chapter leadership, while others, seemingly never desire to hold leadership positions in their own chapter.

In the next section, I describe the manner in which the imbedded structure within the culture of each organization influences the leadership pathways of the participants in this study. I cluster the descriptions by focal arena of leadership to illuminate this phenomenon.

**Leadership within the chapter and on campus.**

Many of the participants practice their leadership in roles within and outside their chapter. The process of developing as a leader for these participants follows the reiterative cycle I described in the introduction to this theme. The participants acknowledge the notion that leadership is a process of engaging members of an organization in a process of change (Komives, et al, 1998). Nonetheless, many view themselves as leaders when they hold specific leadership positions. After experiencing success in chapter leadership, these participants were encouraged, by both peers and campus mentors or advisors, to assume more responsibility in organizations outside their chapter.
Teena was very involved in high school, but she recalls, “I always wanted to be a leader, but until I finally got into a position, I wasn’t as sure of myself as a leader.” However, in her chapter, she was encouraged to join another campus organization and assumed a small leadership role in her chapter the second week after joining the sorority. Her leadership journey began immediately. Likewise, the fraternity provided Matt structured leadership opportunities at several stages of his college career:

My first major involvement in my chapter was philanthropy chair, second semester of freshman year. I didn’t know what I was getting into, but one of the brothers said, “you’d do well at this.” That is how I got started and it progressed into the next year when I was the scholarship chair, then the vice president and the year after that I became the IFC president. Now I’ve taken on an internship with the student government and am taking on another internship next semester.

Katie’s leadership journey took a similar path:

I moved right into my sorority so I was able to be philanthropy chair. It was a good place for me to be a student leader, but I wasn’t very good at first. I didn’t realize the size of responsibility it was or what I was supposed to do. The other officers kept pushing me to succeed and I kept doing more. I ran for vice president of scholarship after that. I was selected to be a recruitment counselor and saw the Panhellenic side of things. Later that year, I was elected to the Panhellenic as public relations and felt I made something of the position. Then I also was a [student government intern] for a term. It was fun and good, but was really a large time commitment. Once I became Panhellenic president, I left that role.

As shown in these examples, many participants began their involvement in their chapters as new students and commenced a leadership journey that led them to roles both inside their chapter and in other organizations across campus. Many of the participants who practice their leadership inside their organization and on campus, express discontent with the status quo they find within their chapter. Within this subset of participants, I believe they recognize some of the basic underlying assumptions (Schein, 1993) of their organization as troublesome and frustrating. They subsequently decide to contribute their leadership to the “big picture” of
fraternity and sorority life or other student organizations in which they believe will make a difference.

For others, the majority of their leadership practice occurs within the chapter. In many ways, leadership within the chapter is a delicate balance of building relationships and leading. The chapter leaders in this study suggest successful leadership within their own chapter comes from savvy relationship building, patience, and compassion.

Leadership within chapter.

Hogg (2001) forwards the notion that group members develop a notion of the “collective self” (p. 184) and that “leaders exist because of followers and followers exist because of leaders” (p. 185). Whereas leader and follower are interdependent roles embedded within the social construct of an organization, if leaders are to emerge, maintain their position, and become effective, they must develop the “prototypical or normative characteristics of an ‘ingroup’ member” defined by the social processes within the organization” (p. 185).

Many of the participants in this study practice the majority of their leadership within their chapter. Navigating the internal politics and challenges of leadership within a fraternal organization are noteworthy. In other words, becoming the prototypical member with leadership aspirations requires perceptive relationship building and ‘ingroup’ status. Several participants’ experiences illustrate my assertion. During her sophomore year, Molly became the president of the chapter (a role usually held by a junior or senior). She remembers:

Some of the members said I was someone who wouldn’t get pushed around. They knew I would think logically and would know what I was doing. I was a confident in my abilities as an individual. I wasn’t emotional and hot-headed. After I became president, everyone realized they were right about me.
Molly’s sorority experienced a difficult upheaval during her term as chapter president and many officers vacated their positions before their terms were completed. She describes the process of replacing officers and reinventing the culture of her chapter as:

Exhausting because we totally reshaped and restructured our chapter. The accountability system, the standards, expectations and processes for everything. There is a lot more to restructuring an organization than meets the eye but it has been a rewarding semester and I am so proud to have been president.

The example of Molly’s organization is unusual, but represents the type of culture change many of the participants in this study desire for their own chapters. Making such change in their well-established organization is exceptionally challenging, subsequently many leaders essentially give up the pursuit and focus their leadership elsewhere.

Elizabeth attributes much of what she has learned as a leader about effectively running an organization to the structure of her chapter’s executive board:

People with the leadership positions take charge. But, I believe we have an amazing president and the way she has lead the chapter and how relational she is really embodies a leader. It has been interesting to see how women in my chapter become leaders and grow as well as the women on Panhellenic and how they lead and grow because of the structured opportunities.

Like the organizational kids described by Brooks (2001), several of the participants express feeling “burnt out” from high school leadership. Beth didn’t want to take on a leadership role in her sorority as a freshman. However, during her second semester she realized she “was bored” and needed to engage. She shares:

I took my first leadership position as a second semester freshmen and held that for a year then another was the new member educator and a [recruitment counselor] for Panhellenic and this year was president of the chapter. If you would have asked me five years ago where I would be, I never would have thought I would be leading a sorority.

The participants recognize challenges and differences inherent in leading a fraternity or sorority. Thomas joined his fraternity during a period of rebuilding and served as the recruitment chair and two one-year terms as chapter president, a rare occurrence in fraternal
organizations. As he transitions to a role on the IFC, he reflects on how elected leaders should present themselves:

A successful leader shouldn’t have to be boastful about what they do. It doesn’t make them real. It makes them someone who thinks they are superior to everyone. To be a true leader you need to be on the same level as everyone else.

Teena’s experiences as a leader include being the president of a large and very active campus organization the year before becoming chapter president. She describes these two roles as “very different things.” She says:

It challenged me in many different ways. I had to handle issues with people’s feelings, or people being mad at each other, and people not liking how something is working. Then you have to deal with alcohol issues and issues of people not wanting to follow rules and still having to follow headquarter’s policies and not understanding why. It can be a lot harder because your work and your home occur at the same place…that can be frustrating.

Comparing the experiences of relationships within her own chapter and the National Pan-Hellenic Council for which she serves as president, Andrea said:

NPHC is one of the better experiences I’ve had leading… there are only 25 of us, which is nothing for this size campus. I am close with a lot of them …that is how it should be. I felt that when I went to my national convention and saw all the national presidents of each organization and how they got along. I thought, “If they can get along, and show love to each other, why can’t we do the same thing?” Everybody is getting on the same page, and I feel this year will be a great success because we have people that really want to work and see the NPHC grow here.

The majority of the participants focus a portion of their leadership within their chapter and branch out to include involvement in campus organizations. However, a few of the leaders in this study focus their leadership exclusively outside the chapter. For the participants, their membership ultimately influences them in numerous ways, however they lead “informally” inside the chapter.
Leadership on campus.

The structured nature of leadership within a fraternity or sorority provides the launching pad for many new members of chapters. However, some students consciously choose to engage outside their chapter and others still experience disappointment by not winning an election for a desired position within the chapter. Several participants describe these experiences during the interviews.

Although elections populate most leadership positions within chapters, the perception of the leader/candidate and the relationships they have built with their peers, dramatically influence the outcome of elections, sometimes resulting in disappointment. Often at this point, these students seek leadership roles outside their chapter as the way to get involved and serve. Elizabeth describes her chapter as group of outgoing women who are experienced leaders. As a more quiet and reserved member, she believes others perceived her as not vocal enough to represent the chapter as the Panhellenic delegate. She served in a small leadership role in her chapter and then unsuccessfully ran for another more prominent position. It was then she moved toward leadership on the Panhellenic council:

Chapter elections can be hard. I wasn't really excited about what I was elected to hold. Then I ran for the executive board position on Panhellenic and was elected to the programming position. This year, I have been the president of Panhellenic. I feel like that has been my greatest involvement and I have developed relationships with student government presidents, vice presidents and senators and leaders in [student organization]. I have been involved in Campus Crusade for Christ and went on a mission trip to Haiti and Costa Rica. I've been more involved on campus than in my chapter.

Once elected to the Panhellenic positions, her chapter proudly supported her. She says, “they have seen who I am and how I’ve grown.”

Sarah assumed a small leadership role in her sorority early on because it seemed to her that few members “were willing to step up to the plate... so many people take a back seat and don’t want to take on responsibility because they want to have fun during college, and not have
anything to worry about besides school.” However, later she experienced disappointment when she lost a bid to a chapter leadership position she sought. Sarah describes the process of realizing chapter members “view [her] differently than [she] views herself.” She shares:

This experience pushed me to take on leadership roles for which I thought I was the most qualified, or had the most experience or maturity, outside my chapter. Even still I step up to the plate in my sorority and I like being the one that people come to and ask questions of or seek advice from.

Sarah instead found a role as a sorority recruitment counselor and through a mid-year vacancy on the Panhellenic council. Later, she won an election to serve as the Panhellenic president, a role she feels is more congruent with her leadership values than what she found in her own chapter. Elizabeth and Sarah’s examples provide insight into the challenges inherent in becoming part of the “ingroup” (Hogg, 2001, p. 185) within chapters. The expectations placed on leaders within the culture of fraternities and sororities often include a tacit assumption to maintain the status quo. Characteristic of many Millennials, the notion that one must ‘go along to get along’ reveals itself in the experiences of many of the participants. As an insider-outsider, I often witness the cycle of disappointment described by Sarah and Elizabeth.

Other participants were encouraged by older members to take a leadership path outside the chapter and willingly did so. Anna, Buck, John and Ross, each jumped into leadership roles in other campus organizations and realize the role they play in their chapter is that of an informal leader, a position they enjoy. This group of participants really typifies relational leaders within their chapters, those who do not hold leadership positions but play a significant role in moving their organization toward change. Anna describes her orientation to become involved on campus right. Her involvement in campus roles began as a first year student and continued through every year on campus, including two terms on the Panhellenic council:

After I joined my sorority as a freshman, I got really involved on campus. I wasn’t very interested in running for a position within our chapter or anything like that. I was
parliamentarian my first year, but that was kind of the extent of my leadership within the chapter. I decided that getting involved on campus would probably be the most beneficial for me so I joined organizations like the [student organization] and got involved in the homecoming committee; my sophomore year thought it would be fun to become a recruitment counselor. It ended up being a positive experience to come back from being gone a semester and jump back into being in the swing of things. That really helped me because I made really good friends from other chapters besides being friends with my pledge class and the other women in my chapter.

As a freshman, Buck struggled academically, which limited his opportunities to serve in official leadership roles in his residence hall. However, after joining a fraternity his sophomore year, he won a bid for a student government senate seat. Although Buck describes his role as a relational leader within his chapter, in his elected or appointed roles he feels he is truly a leader. This notion is consistent with students in stages two and three of the LID model. Buck shares:

Once I pledged my fraternity, I was involved in the [new member] committees, but in the spring I was elected to the [student government] senate of my Greek district. That is where I have been for the last two years. I was elected as the pro tempore for the senate and now supervise many different committees. I also serve on the university president's student advisory board.

John was actively involved in student government and community service in high school. He says:

When I came to [university], I started out by getting involved in my chapter with philanthropy, and soon became the philanthropy chair. Then I became the [student government] director of diversity and later a senator, on the IFC and a member of the [student organization] and [student organization]. I enjoy working in these other groups, and the dynamic of how we all work together.

Although Ross has not served in elected leadership roles in his chapter, he leads within student government and sees his responsibility to the fraternity in an interesting way:

Every year we bring in a better freshmen class that I want to build relationships with and have a positive impact. Leadership-wise, I was on senate for two years and am the chair of the [major committee of the student government] now, and am running for student government president next semester. The fraternity has been great, but I haven’t been involved in leadership positions within the fraternity because I’ve been so involved outside of it. But my goal is to still be an active member and contribute to the chapter and get something out of it. I want to help when people need it, and be a good role model for my little brother in the fraternity. Mentoring him has been a good experience.
Regardless of whether the leadership occurs inside the chapter, on campus, or both, these examples depict how fraternity and sorority structure provides the framework in which a student’s leadership journey can take root. Younger students are encouraged to assume leadership positions by older fraternity brothers and sorority sisters and if they are successful in smaller roles, are essentially ‘promoted’ to more significant roles. For many, being identified as a leader by older brothers or sisters was the nudge needed to take the next step into the structure that could propel them to additional leadership roles. Elizabeth remarks that “being in charge of something so big (Panhellenic) has helped [me] understand various forms of leadership and enabled [me] to interact with professional staff within the structure at [my] institution.”

While the structure within fraternities and sororities serves as a useful vehicle for many students that aspire to lead, a weakness exists with so much structure. Several participants in the study describe a culture in which the fraternity or sorority is managed exclusively by a group of elected and appointed group. Subsequently, other members often exploit the structure as their reason to not contribute, thus interrupting the possibility of relational leadership manifesting itself. The participants feel frustrated with the lack of engagement from some of the members. For example, Buck describes the method in which leaders handle issues affecting his fraternity:

If an issue affects the whole chapter then the whole chapter will vote on it. Usually the executive officers deal with the day-to-day management and responsibilities such as issues with IFC, Center for Fraternity and Sorority Life or alumni, they will deal with that. No one else really gets involved.

Matt shares that anyone can be a leader and he wishes non-elected students would “step up.” Instead, general members perceive it is the responsibility of only the leaders to properly manage and lead the fraternity. This concern, that not all members are or feel empowered to lead, is consistent with several key values the participants in this study hold with respect to the
role of leaders. The relational leadership model asserts leadership is a process dependent upon the relationships within an organization. However, in large fraternal organizations such as those from which the majority of the participants in this study hail, the notion that anyone and everyone can lead, and perhaps should, may be unrealistic. The size of organizations, coupled with the pragmatic structure, leads to perpetual challenges, frustrations, and for individual student leaders, serious disappointment.

Summary.

The findings from the interviews suggest that the participants in this study are quintessentially organizational kids. In addition, the participants deeply value the relationships built within their fraternal organizations. The influences of mentors and peers, along with the interactions among the participants within the structure of their fraternity or sorority, contribute to continual relationship building, as well as critical thinking, communication, self-awareness, and overall leadership development that the participants value and appreciate. This finding is consistent with contemporary research (Center for Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2009) which suggests the levels of culture Schein (1993) describes manifest in positive ways for fraternity and sorority members:

It is not the early adoption of an organization or activity that makes the difference, but the commitment specifically to a fraternity that creates the difference in leadership development, citizenship, diversity, and self-awareness.

Of particular distinction are the differences in areas of citizenship and community involvement, an area that resonates strongly with both the Millennials considering participation, as well as their parents. This differentiation emerges as a result of the empowerment provided by active participation within the fraternity and its leadership structure, a growing familiarity with the process of enacting change, the community involvement/responsibility ethic instilled as a part of the group, and by taking advantage of the leadership opportunities available to members of these specific organizations (NIC, 2011, The Case for Fraternity Rights: Fraternities Build Better Leaders and More Active Citizens, paragraph 2-3).
With the participants’ background in clubs, on teams, and within organizations, they are perceptive navigators of culture and of the nuances inherent in leading in well-established organizations. Although the participants express awareness of the culture of their fraternal organization akin to Schein’s (1993) three levels, most of them are still developing the skills or abilities to change the culture if or when needed. While, the participants are organizational kids through and through, they face challenges when leadership requires moving the entire organization in another direction.

For most of the participants, their fraternity or sorority membership complements the ways in which they develop an identity as a leader. Conversely, my findings raise a concern consistent with other scholars’ (e.g. Twenge, 2006) and the professional observations of many student affairs practitioners. Millennials’ considerable level of guidance from parents and other adults, coupled with their experiences as members in many organizations, seemingly diminishes individual decision-making skills, critical thinking ability, and personal independence. Organizations like fraternities and sororities, in which the culture is so distinctive, make my supposition particularly pronounced for Millennial students.

Nonetheless, with an orientation toward organizational membership, and experience in relationship building therein, the participants aim to practice relational leadership however difficult, in their fraternal organizations. While this chapter focuses on the themes as they relate to the participants as organizational kids, the next chapter describes the second dimension of themes, Practicing Relational Leadership. Three primary themes emerge and cluster together to provide insight into the developmental outcomes of fraternity and sorority membership experienced by participants.

The themes I describe in the next chapter include 1) the importance of values-congruent leadership, 2) the unique leadership perspectives of fraternity and sorority student leaders, and
3) opportunities for learning and reflection. The participants’ voices represent the role of their own personal values, as well as those of their fraternal organization, with respect to their leadership practice and development. The ways in which the participants’ perspectives derive from fraternal organization membership also contributes to development of an identity as a leader. In the next chapter, I identify key themes regarding how fraternity and sorority leaders practice leadership and demonstrate the connection to the leadership identity development process described by Komives, et al. (2005).
Chapter 5

Practicing Relational Leadership

Viewing leadership as a relational process provides the foundation for exploring the second dimension of findings in this study. Simply stated, relational leadership refers to a perspective on leadership that focuses on the idea that leadership is a process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change (Komives, et al., 1998). Relational leadership is purposeful, meaning there exists a commitment to a goal or activity. Leadership is also the ability to collaborate and to find common ground with others to facilitate positive change. Relational leadership is inclusive, understanding, values people, and actively engages diverse views, approaches, styles, and aspects of individuality that add multiple perspectives to a group’s activity. This view argues leadership is also empowering. Group members receive encouragement and rewards for actively participating in the governance, function, and purpose of the organization. Members’ views are valued and encouraged. Relational leadership is ethical, driven by values and standards, and is good or moral in nature. Finally, relational leadership is about the process of accomplishing the organization’s purposes. Individuals interact with leaders and other participants and in turn work together to accomplish change. The process creates energy, synergy, and momentum and intentionality.

The relational leadership perspective undergirds my study as I view leadership as process of social influence through which all members of an organization are involved in the creation, maintenance, and function of the organization.

Fraternity and Sorority Leaders.

For the purpose of this study, I sought student leaders who actually practice relational leadership. By providing nominators with a simple description of relational leadership, I limit
the participants to those students who understand leadership is a process among people, not merely a positionally situated activity.

As the participants develop overall as college students, similarly they develop an identity as a leader molded in part by their fraternal membership. The participants in this study value and aim to practice relational leadership as described by Komives et al., (1998). While many are successful in doing so, inclusive action and shared responsibility pose challenges in fraternal contexts. The findings suggest the ways in which the participants pragmatically enact their leadership is uniquely shaped by their orientation as organizational kids and their values, perspectives, and learning opportunities from fraternity or sorority membership dramatically influence them. The first finding connects to the relational leadership model at the ethical, inclusive, and empowering components.

The importance of values-congruent leadership.

Many fraternal organizations are a century or more old and hold explicit, espoused values that shape their existence and form the foundation of the contemporary purpose of each organization (Anson, & Marchesani, 1991). Originally intended to provide a timeless standard that would guide the beliefs and actions of members, these values still play an important organizational role in setting direction. In conjunction with the mission and vision, fraternal values help form the organization’s identity and provide the artifacts in the first level of culture (Schein, 1993). Although the stated values are accessible to all members, behavior that suggests a departure from these values appears to be at the heart of much of the criticism of modern fraternal organizations (Maisel, 1990). Perry (1968) was among the first to study the process of developing personal values. His theory has shaped a generation of scholars in this arena, yet understanding the influence of one arena of college students’ lives over another in the formation and development of values is a complex endeavor.
The leaders in this study describe the importance of identifying core values and living by them, although this is a difficult proposition. Some participants identify values derived from founders of their organization or the ritual, among those that guide their actions as a leader. The participants inhabit positions of social power and recognize the importance of leading in a manner that respects the rights and dignity of others. They describe leaders as ethical and those who demonstrate a level of integrity as important for inspiring a sense of leader reliability. In addition, the participants are people-oriented and keenly aware of how their decisions impact others. Therefore, they use their social power to serve the greater good instead of themselves. These leaders assist members in gaining a sense of personal competence that allows them to be self-sufficient by encouraging and empowering others.

The third theme found through the analysis, focuses on the espoused values of fraternal organizations and the practiced values of the participants. In this space between stated and lived values, the participants face challenges and find success in leading congruent with their own values and those of their organizations. This challenge is not unique to fraternity and sorority students; scholars describe the process of moral and cognitive development as challenged by various contexts and situations (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For many participants, their personal values derive from their upbringing, which included youth experiences such as the Boy Scouts, service organizations, and athletics. For others, a genuine commitment to their faith is foundational for their leadership.

For the majority of the participants in this study, the espoused values of their fraternal organization are complementary to their personal and leadership values; however, the lack of values congruence by general members is a source of consternation for them. For the participants, two ways to consider values emerge from the data: First, personal values derived through organizational membership and leadership practices are evident. Several of these values
specifically result from fraternity sorority membership, others primarily from faith and service organizations. Second, fraternal values play a significant role in fraternity and sorority leaders’ development.

**Core values derived from organizations and their influence on leadership practices.**

While one section of the interview protocol for this study explored student leaders’ primary core values, I was surprised to hear so many participants describe upbringings or current practices that involved a strong connection to organized religion. Twenge (2006) describes this generation as “less willing to follow the rules of organized religion” (p. 34) and notes declining church attendance since the 1950’s, and particularly low attendance percentages for 18 to 29 year olds. Arnett (2004) found that “only 23 percent of young people are ‘conservative [Christian] believers’; the remaining 77 percent were agnostic/atheist, deist, or liberal believers (who believe in a religion but question some aspects of it)” (p. 34). This highlights a shortcoming of some generational research. Critics argue that generational research focuses on middle class Americans and creates sweeping generalizations that are not representative of certain populations (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Jones (2008) concludes Christian students on campus believed they were in the minority and struggled to purposefully live out their faith’s values.

In contrast, many students in this study described the role faith, for most Christianity, plays in their life and subsequently their practices as a leader. Others did not specifically describe current faith practices in relation to their leadership, but indicate organized religion and faith played a significant role in their upbringing. After persistent invitations from a friend, Steven joined a Christian group at his high school and later, after more encouragement and insistence, began to lead a Bible study for other students:
One of my friends was the president [of the group] and my junior year in high school, he asked, “do you want to teach Bible study?” I said no. He must have asked me fifty times. Then I finally said okay and did it which is what lead me where I am and to my faith in God. I call him twice a year to thank him for inviting me to Bible study and letting me do it.

Steven attributes much of who he has become as a leader and a man to his faith. Without the insistence of his friend, he believes he would be a very different person. Similarly, Sarah describes her Jewish faith as significant in her upbringing and her interest in leadership. She describes herself as “an old soul” and says,

I’m religious...not super-crazy religious, but I’m into my faith and it has gotten me through a lot in my life. My faith tells me how to live my life. B’tzelem elohim...in Hebrew means “made in the image of God” and that guides how I live my life. It helps me remember that I am here for a reason, for a purpose, and understanding that has pushed me to take on the roles I have, and be a leader, and do good...for myself and for the people around me. My values aren’t necessarily the same as those of many people that are 21 and in college right now. I’m very old-fashioned.

Describing himself as a devout Christian, Ross shares that although college, the fraternity and life in general place him on a “moral rollercoaster”:

I value[s] my faith and my relationship with Christ, although in any day of the last 21 years, I don’t think I’ve always proven that with my actions. I wouldn’t say ever say I don’t want that to be my value anymore, but sometimes it just slips. In some ways the fraternity has been positive and encouraging in that manner and in other aspects when you have 119 brothers, you can always find someone who’ll do whatever you want to do, whether that is go to church, or drink, or talk about really positive things or talk about things that you probably shouldn’t be talking about. Recently, my fraternity brother and I had a conversation about how we want to be more intentional next year about belonging to a group that challenges us to live our faith.

Teena describes her behavior as more modest than many college students and her morals as different from some women in the Greek community. She explains that her mother pushed her to be a “good person” and focus on “living a positive and healthy lifestyle...one you won’t regret later.” Teena shares, “religion is ultimately what I’ve built my morals from.” Teena believes her sorority has fostered her faith in God:
There are many girls in my sorority that are Christians. We hang out together and we go to Campus Crusade for Christ together on Thursdays, and encourage each other in the hard times. There is no doubt in college you get pressed to do things you don’t always want to do, so this was a nice group of friends to stand together on what we believe in. So the sorority has helped me a lot and has deepened my relationships because they are always encouraging me to be strong.

Kendra regularly attends worship services with her best friend in the sorority. She says her faith is “definitely huge. It is a big part of [her] life.” A practicing Christian in high school, Courtney shares how she “flip-flopped...and was making poor choices and lost grasp of my values” when she came to college. Her sorority sisters lovingly confronted her about her choices and she returned to living more congruent with her values. In addition, several students participate in mission trips with a campus faith-based organization or work during summers as camp counselors for faith-based organizations with middle or high school youth.

The majority of fraternities and sororities developed in the United States on college campuses during a period of history in which Judeo-Christian values, principles and morals prevailed in society and higher education (Turk, 2004). Like society during the mid-1800s, early fraternal organizations expected members to possess or conform to the Judeo-Christian values, purposes, and statements inherent in the ritual and oaths of membership. These values contribute to the culture of the organizations that still underscore modern fraternal organizations, however members are rarely expected to adhere rigidly to the Judeo-Christian principles espoused in the ritual. Nonetheless, many of the current members and specifically the participants in this study accept these values with little challenge, and expect one another to live accordingly.

The majority of students participated in organized religious experiences during their upbringing by attending regular services with family, through community faith-based organizations, or attending private, faith-affiliated schools. Participation in faith-based
organizations provides yet another opportunity for enculturation as an organizational kid. Through these experiences, the participants prepare to take their place in organizations with dogmatic cultures and in the case of fraternities and sororities, artifacts (Schein, 1993) reminiscent of their upbringing and expected by the majority of participants.

Other students attribute their strongest core values to involvement in other types of organizations such as the Boy Scouts. Similar to organized religion, the Boy Scouts place heavy emphasis on adoption of specific values. Buck joined the Boy Scouts in third grade and credits many of his personal values to this organization. During our interview, Buck notes interesting similarities between the Boy Scouts and fraternities. Our dialogue depicts the point I make in this section; organizational kids derive values from belonging to organizations, particularly those organizations in which significant adults place importance (i.e. organized religion, Boy/Girl Scouts, etc).

Buck: I was a Boy Scout and an Eagle Scout. I adopted a lot of those values because they made sense. [Values like] respect for each other, for yourself, and honesty and truthfulness are big with me. Being responsible and accountable is important. A Scout is trustful, loyal, helpful, friendly, kind, and brave. The only difference between a Boy Scout and a fraternity member is the alcohol. Both give back to their communities. Both have very similar values. A lot of them are religious; they are both values-based organizations.

Anita: One is an organization for boys, the other is for men. Men can do things that boys cannot do. It is an interesting parallel. So your values were being shaped by the Boy Scouts then? Did joining the fraternity shift or shape your values or add to them?

Buck: High school is where I left Boy Scouts and college is where I picked up the fraternity. Honestly there is that transition period freshman year of college when I wasn't in a fraternity, where I wasn't sure what to do with my old values and how to shape my new values. So, being in a fraternity has not necessarily done away with everything in my old values but picked off what I didn't need and shapes what I do need. So where I am today [valuing] being truthful and honest and accountable. All that was taught in Boy Scouts, though.

Anita: So how does that match with being in a fraternity member now? Because you compared Boy Scouts and fraternity as similar, with drinking as the main difference.
Buck: Maybe I haven’t really done away with a lot of [the Boy Scouts’ values] because if I go down that list of everything that they do, a lot of them match up [to the fraternity]...You are being loyal to your brothers and not giving up on them when they are wrong. Being loyal to them is confronting them. You are being loyal to who they are not what they are doing.

The participants possess many characteristics of the Millennial generation, particularly a propensity for organizational membership and respect for authority. However, finding a connection to organized religion and similar values-based community organizations was unexpected. The leaders in this study join values-based organizations and derive a sense of purpose from the values of the group. However, these examples of a strong faith connection to values and leadership practices beget further critique. In order to become the author of one’s life (Baxter Magolda, 2001), students must formulate their own internal values and beliefs, rather than only permit the values of an organization to determine their own. As fraternity and sorority leaders, the participants seemingly adopt the values of organized religion and their fraternal organizations with little scrutiny and personal reflection. Therefore, I assert participant’s excess participation in organizations may inhibit certain aspects of their development.

The participants share many of the same values regarding leadership. In the next section, I illuminate these values as a way to demonstrate the prevailing values system in place among Millennial generation and fraternity or sorority members. This is important to outline as the participants place emphasis on certain values they contend are critical to successful leadership as a fraternity or sorority student.

Core values of participants.

Along with the strong linkage to values-based organizations, participants shared many of the same values and ideals. The values shared by the participants are indicative of not only the generation in which they have been raised (Twenge, 2006), but also contemporary notions of leadership (Komives, et al., 1998). In addition, successful membership and leadership in
contemporary organizations requires the participants to situate others before themselves and places a heavy emphasis on relationship building and maintenance. The participants hold values that illustrate their commitment to harmony within their organizations. The participants’ values most relevant to the findings of this study follow in the remainder of this section. Their values illustrate the connection to the conventional nature of Millennial students, as well as the connections they made to the values of their fraternal organization that resonate with many faith and community organization values. Table 6.2 succinctly illustrates these values.

Table 6.2: Participants’ Values

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<tr>
<th>Acceptance</th>
<th>Compassion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Focus on People</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hard Work</td>
<td>Honesty &amp; Integrity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>Listen &amp; Support Others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>Respect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Serve the Greater Good</td>
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<td>Teamwork</td>
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Acceptance.

The majority of participants describe experiences in which they feel accepted by their fraternity brothers or sorority sisters for who they are, what they bring to the organization, and their unique views. Concurrently, many of them learned to become more accepting of others as well. Anna believes she has grown more compassionate:

People do come from different backgrounds, not everybody’s parents are happily married, and not everybody’s parents are straight either. When I came to college I was such a strong, conservative Catholic, I sort of judged people for some of their actions. Now, I think, why waste my time? People are going to choose different things or different lifestyles too. That is completely acceptable. If everyone were same, it would be boring.

As a non-drinker, John describes his experience within his fraternity as an example of how he feels accepted for who he is as well as opening his eyes to the choices of others. He describes his brothers’ support of his choices as welcome albeit a little surprising:
I never liked to drink. I always thought if you drink you won’t do well in school. You will flunk out. These men have taught me you can have fun and school. But, they have never forced me to drink. They have never made me feel lame that I didn’t want to drink or criticize me for it. I realized there is a balance. It opened my eyes to a whole different view. I would see people drink and think why do that? Why not have a glass of water? Now I am like okay, there is nothing wrong with it. It is part of human life. [The fraternity] has opened my eyes [to different values].

Melissa described herself as “the mom” of her sorority, but feels accepted by her friends:

They also know everything about me and accept me for who I am and deal with my quirks and embrace them. I am more mature than many of my friends and they embrace that and don’t put me down. I think they also are the people that have the same frustrations of Greek life that I do. I spent a lot of time around people that just want to party and drink. To me there is so much more going on and my roommates and I can share that frustration.

Teena realizes not everyone thinks the way she does:

And that’s it’s important to respect people for who they are and what they believe in. My morals are a little stricter than others in the sorority and I just have to respect that and know that not everyone acts and speaks the way I do. And that is okay. Sometimes it is difficult because I see girls in the sorority saying certain things or acting a certain way, and I think, “you really shouldn’t be doing that.” But who am I to say that, because these are my beliefs. Being in the sorority has taught me to accept people for who they are regardless of what I think or believe.

As an engineering student, Sam admits it is not always easy to accept ambiguity, but membership in his fraternity taught him, “there is no single way to approach any situation or how to talk with people. It is important to go into any conversation or conflict with that mindset set in place.” Like Sam, Matt reflects on his understanding of other leaders now as an experienced leader:

Sometimes it is hard to do, but you have to accept all the things people bring to the table. There are 60-80 diverse men in the fraternity and everybody is different in their own way...everyone brings their own strengths to the table and understanding what those are versus your own weaknesses is important.

Kendra echoes the sentiments of the majority of the participants in the study when she says, “You know these women are here for you no matter what. They know the worst in you,
they know the best in you and they still like you.” The students in this study found acceptance in their organizations and in turn reciprocate with others.

Compassion.

The participants describe the ability to exhibit and value compassion in a variety of ways. Anna learned, “to not walk over people and to be kinder and more understanding of people’s situations and that not everybody can take on the same stress load as other people can...so never judge.” Melissa shares, “you need to be compassionate towards others. You need to be a good friend and a good sister when people need you even if you don’t agree with the reason they are in their situation.” John agrees:

I have learned you can never put yourself in [another’s] position. People have gone through many things in life and you can't know how they feel. With many people I try always to look at things through my way and then just understanding how they feel.

This sense of compassion for others transcends the leadership perspectives in the majority of the participants. Each had unique examples of receiving compassion from their sorority sisters or fraternity brothers and demonstrating compassion to their friends.

Commitment.

As leaders, the participants in this study are probably among the most loyal members of their chapters and the entire fraternity/sorority community. Despite many challenges, they value a serious commitment to the organization in themselves and others. As a student that joined a colony (a new start up group of a national fraternity/sorority), Ryan reflects on his enduring commitment to the chapter:

I have an investment of time and interest in the chapter. We have been a tight group of guys working hard for a goal- to call ourselves a fraternity that we helped restart. We eventually reached that goal and received our charter and then it was a completely new challenge to manage a successful fraternity. Even though we have lost some of the more intimate relationships because we have grown so much, I have stayed committed to it because it is something I helped build.
Courtney’s chapter went through a significant change in the last year with approximately eighty women choosing to resign from the membership. She remains committed to the organization, even though some of her closest friends chose not to do so. She shares:

The chapter is completely different now. People are really living the values of the sorority now and being good members because they feel that it is worth it. It is really so positive now and we are taking the time to know what is truly important.

Matt exemplifies commitment as a leader when he describes his role as “being willing to work with someone and not turn your back on them.” He believes the reward for remaining committed to the fraternity and the members is:

The “feel good” feeling when you know you’ve done something that really helps someone else out. That feeling pushes me to go farther...to set the bar up a little higher and go to the next step, and the next step, and not settling for anything less.

The participants commit to one another and the fraternity or sorority. As Millennials, they value loyalty and commitment in relationships and to organizations.

Focus on people.

As described extensively in the first theme, genuine and encouraging relationships, the importance of relationships with parents, mentors and particularly college-aged peers is evident. The value placed on people and relationships shows by the following examples. Melissa believes love forms the foundation of her relationships with her friends:

I enjoy having conversations with people who challenge what I believe. I think I have changed because of the relationships that I have had with people. Socioeconomic status or different religious beliefs don’t matter...just that you love one another.

Teena believes joining a sorority is all about bonding and forming friendships...it is the number one focus. This perspective has:

Impacted my views of leadership in the sense of personal relationships. In the sorority you shouldn’t only focus on your to-do list, but remember to focus on building personal friendships and relationships with my executive board and other friends. People enjoy their jobs more if they love one another and get along and are encouraged and are friends.
and can hang out. I have found personal relationships with people are extremely important.

Steven considers his relationship with his fraternity brothers very important:

Choosing a fraternity is like choosing your wife. That is how it was for me. Does she have all the qualities that I am looking for that I would love to be with her for the rest of my life and be happy with the choice that I made?

While numerous participants describe their sorority or fraternity as a family, Katie shares examples of how she has grown because of the relationships in her circle of friends within the sorority:

It is the most amazing family. I am not a very emotional person but they really taught me so much. I have experienced so much joy with them and connections to them. My friend’s anniversary of being cancer-free is the same date that my mom died; it is weird, we can share it. This is a joyous day for her and for me it is a day of mourning. Obviously, I don’t forget about her and she doesn’t forget about me. We are there for each other. Even though most of them graduated last May, we are still taking care of each other. Having these friendships is so worth it. We are so real to each other.

Through his fraternity, Thomas has found:

A core group of friends that are truly my friends. We know each other so well; they are people I can count on. People talk about lifelong friendships and it is more than that. We call each other brothers and I would expect most of them to be like a blood brother. That is something I really missed out on in high school and growing up because I was always so conscious about not upsetting another group and being politically correct in my student government.

Many participants suggested commitment, clear goals and hard work go hand in hand. In the next section, several examples depict the role of hard work and the reasons fraternity and sorority leaders place emphasis on this value.

*Hard work.*

Many of the participants parent’s raised them to understand the merits of hard work and they spent time developing good habits along-side their parents. In this section, I describe the ways in which they value hard work related to fraternity or sorority leadership. John mentions that although he is very involved on campus, if anyone needs assistance, he “steps up and does
what he can to help.” Rupert believes his fraternity instills in him the focus and work ethic to be successful later in life. A very hard working student, Katie, describes her method for motivating others to work hard as well:

I constantly lead by example. I never hide anything. I explain situations and I don’t work toward getting consensus but seek enough understanding and acceptance. I always try my hardest and always push for more. By doing all this, I can ask for more out of people and usually get them to work hard.

Matt has developed a stronger work ethic in college and through his fraternity. He shares:

In high school, I would do my homework, but really the bare minimum, but now if I do that, I’m kicking myself over it. I get a hard time from some people who say, “oh Matt is the kid doing way too many things”, but I find a lot of satisfaction in that, because I like learning how to do things and improving upon other things that I feel I did well. I like to take a lot o

Many of the participants arrived at college, or to their chapter valuing effort and commitment; nonetheless many of the participants realized their leadership roles in the chapter developed their work ethic.

Honesty and integrity.

The participants describe their perspectives as leaders regarding values congruence in both words and actions. Several gave specific examples that illustrate the importance of integrity in their lives. Elizabeth describes herself as someone who will “stand up for what is right” and believes:

Leaders are those people who go above and beyond what is expected of them. They encompass the core values, motivate others and are driven. Unfortunately, there are many poor leaders. People follow them and they are not making good decisions.

Anna shares Elizabeth’s perspectives:

My sorority’s core values of loyalty and love have really shaped me into who I am. I am able to stand up for what is right and understand the difference between right and wrong. I can be my own person and am responsible for my actions.
Thomas believes his fraternity brothers “look at me as someone they can count on” and he described himself as “real.” He cites the importance of “knowing what is right” and “understanding why we do what we do and then going the right direction” as critical in his decision making.

Anna’s commitment to maintaining confidentiality within the intersorority judicial process strengthened her as a mediator on the Panhellenic council. Courtney shares her way of being congruent to her sorority’s values:

By leading and showing with my actions. In all aspects of my life I know I need to be living my values and doing things to show people that I don’t preach to them and tell them to not do things I am not willing to give up. Because of this approach as a leader, people respect me.

Along with living and leading in a manner congruent with their personal and fraternal values, many of the participants in this study describe their roles as leaders as individuals who consistently empower others and share credit for accomplishments.

Humility.

The participants disapprovingly describe arrogant leaders who take credit for the work of others. Several of the participants provide their perspective on the role humility plays in effective leadership. As the dialogue with Thomas unfolds, he reluctantly admits he is a leader:

It comes back to being humble. I don’t like boasting about being a leader. I don’t think being a successful leader should have to do with you being cocky about what you do. It doesn’t make you real. It makes you someone who thinks they are superior to everyone. To be a true leader you need to be on the same level as everyone else.

Rupert describes himself and other leaders he admires:

As someone who empowers the people around them to be leaders themselves. Someone who is really humble but knows their subject well, and doesn't care about getting credit for it, but cares about the people around them and getting the job done. Leaders should be humble, yet strong.
Elizabeth considers being a leader “an honor” but finds the experience humbling as well.

I know I am a leader and I think of myself as a leader but I don’t ever want to think of myself as better than anyone. I want to think of myself as relatable to everyone. Everyone has something to offer. If you come in with the mindset that you are better than others or that you are this great leader, you will miss out on some amazing people that don’t have that title but have so much to offer. You have to find that in people. You are only going to find it if you connect with them and see what they have to offer.

Matt believes a lack of humility will undermine the team’s effectiveness:

It is really important to always maintain solid relationships with everyone. When you are in a leadership position, you need to check in with the other leaders and talk about what is going well, what isn’t, help them see the purpose of what they are doing, not just reporting to you and take all the credit for it.

Ross views leadership and the role of humility similarly. He shares a recent example to illustrate his point:

You just have to be real with yourself and with the other leaders and...admit that you don’t always have the answer. I recently screwed up and planned a team celebration on a night one of our team members had an event. [So I asked for suggestions] and we ended up making it work.... It was my fault, I had to own it and admit it right there. Saying you are sorry, that you made a mistake, or that something didn’t work and then asking the team to help you solve the problem is important.

Each of the participants are experienced leaders, and yet, their perspectives on leadership speak to that of a humble servant-leader. This connection is consistent with Komives et al. (1998) assertion that relational leaders realize anyone can lead and positional authority does not define respectable leaders.

Listen to and support others.

The orientation of the participants in this study to accept others, remain committed to the organization through, and humbly serve others, provides a backdrop for the value discussed in this section, listen and support others. Although many of these leaders are frustrated by many of the poor decisions made by their peers, their abiding care and compassion for them prevails.
Melissa shares how her perspective changed when she learned about the difficult life circumstances of one of her sorority sisters.

A woman in my sorority is one of those that parties hard and blacks out a lot and I have always thought, “what is the deal?” She is cheerful, loving, and caring when she is sober. But, I recently learned that her mom has months to live because of breast cancer and her dad is in the Middle East and she has no idea where he is...so she is dealing with a lot of things. Once you learn that, it makes you want to help her through that and not reprimand her. I don’t judge her. I worry for her and I want to help her through that.

While Melissa’s example speaks more to the care for a friend within the chapter,

Andrea’s perspective on listening, specifically as a leader, is similar to that of many other participants in the study. She shares:

A good leader can persuade but first and foremost must have the ability to listen. So many leaders don’t listen enough. You are working for your followers, they aren’t working for you. But it is also important to know how to follow and to step back and follow another person. Too many student leaders don’t understand that. They think because they are the president others should do things their way. I don’t feel that way at all. If you are just imposing your ideas on people, you miss out on good things.

Elizabeth shared others’ view of her as a leader:

As someone who deeply cares about what I do...and who cares about each president individually. Chapter presidents know me as someone who wants to know who they are, not just what they do. I want to hear if they are okay and what their struggles are. I am someone who is driven and motivated and but still cares about people.

Like Elizabeth, Steven cares very deeply about the people with whom he works and leads. He says, “you have to be able to hear what they are saying and take what they are saying and think critically and learn how to problem solve.” John describes one of his best qualities as a leader:

I like to listen, I am a good listener, and I like to be there for people. It is important to let people talk when they are ready to talk...I am not going to push them. I use my experience to understand how they see things as opposed to how I see it.
The participants in this study value the role of listening in not only developing compassion for others and creating genuine relationships, but also in becoming an effective leader.

*Respect.*

Fraternity and sorority leaders often live within their ‘work’ environment. This creates unique challenges in balancing respect with likability. Elizabeth describes her chapter’s president as a well-respected woman because she:

Is very relational and embodies a leader. She very much cares about each individual sister. She knows sometimes being the leader you have to do the greater good which isn’t always popular and making the decisions to keep your sisters safe. She is so respected because people know she honestly cares about every sister.

Likewise, Buck values members who are “respectful to each other. You get a lot more respect yourself and you get a lot more leeway when you are respectful about how you do things.” John believes living in his fraternity and getting to know his brothers has:

Helped me grow into myself and just become who I want to be. The fraternity has helped me be myself and feel confident in what I can or can't do and helped me to feel open to express my point of view and not be afraid to express it. The fraternity has taught me how to listen and respect different points of view. Not necessarily understand them but respect their lifestyle, respect people’s sexual orientation, views on religion or beliefs and views on life. Before I didn’t always even try to understand, but now I am okay with that. I can talk and engage in conversation without fighting.

The leaders in this study emphasize respect as a worthwhile pursuit over popularity even in situations when it would be easier to take another route.

*Responsibility.*

The participants in this study describe their experiences as a leader in the fraternal organization as a duty, a burden, challenging, fun, and rewarding. They recognize they have the opportunity to challenge, inspire, motivate, and hold accountable other students and leaders.
Overall, the participants share a belief that leading is an important responsibility. For Ryan leading changed his relationships with others. He laments:

It isn’t something that stops, when the leadership position is over. One of the things I hated when I was the chapter president was when I walked into a room specifically at a party and people would stiffen up and assume I was there in an enforcer role. You tell yourself it is because you had the position. Even now, if I go to a party I get the same response and it is because they realize I am invested in the organization. Sometimes, I don’t know if they worry they are in trouble for doing something wrong or they admire me.

One of the responsibilities of leaders is to empower others to learn from both successes and failures. Steven explains his approach to empowering others:

Steven: There have been times when people aren’t getting work done. You just stay on them. I am not afraid to let things fail. If we have an event and people aren’t doing their part I am willing to let it fall apart. That person will know it didn’t get done because I didn’t bail him out. Next time this happens he is going to care and he won’t be happy with me but this falls on my shoulders and this is how I can help him learn.

Anita: Why don’t you bail someone out?

Steven: You have to let people fail sometimes. When I was growing up to my dad always told me and my brother, the measure of a man is not how far he falls but how fast he gets back up. For us it isn’t about failing. Failure isn’t scary. It is something to be seen as okay that it happened. Now it is time to learn why I failed and succeed from it.

When describing the difference she sees between fraternity or sorority leadership and other leadership roles on campus, Anna suggests, “[a chapter leader] must be extremely devoted to the chapter and it’s ideals and love each member for who they are and their choices. [A chapter leader] takes on so much more responsibility for others.”

The fraternity and sorority leaders in this study agree that leadership is both rewarding and an enormous responsibility. One of the important aspects of leading in a fraternity and sorority to the participants is the opportunity and obligation to serve the greater good. This manifests for their own chapter (versus only a few members within the chapter), the entire Greek community, their campus, or in some cases the world.
Serve the greater good.

Running parallel to the belief that leadership equals responsibility, the participants in this study describe their reasons for involvement in their chapter as well as why they assume other leadership roles. With the intention of being part of something bigger than themselves and serving the greater good within their chapter, the Greek community, their campus, or the world, these leaders share many examples of their commitment. This finding is consistent with Pierson’s (2002) conclusion that Greek affiliation increased students’ likelihood of participation in service activities. Courtney believes “leadership is doing things and not expecting anything in return... there is something within yourself you just know you’re doing good for other people and that’s enough of a reward, you don’t need to be getting honored or noticed for it.” Teena concurs. She said:

Everything I’ve been involved in I joined to make a change or make it better, not just to be there. To be able to do those things, you take a leadership position to help foster that type of change that you want to make. I’m driven...I’m passionate about the things I do. Just being a member isn’t enough, I’ve always wanted to be the leader so I can really make things happen. It is sort of a natural instinct for me.

While Matt admits he is known to be hard working, and his peers chide him for “taking on too much” he believes they also know, “[he] cares about the relationships [he] has with everyone[he] is working with, and that [he] is in it for the right reasons. I really do want to develop people and organizations rather than do it for self-satisfaction.” Beth shares this perspective. She indicates it is important to focus on how she can better the sorority through her leadership. She asks herself, “how am I going to better everyone in this chapter to make it a better organization overall?” In addition, Beth cares a great deal about serving the community at large and shares that her sorority has “done huge things in the community and we have brought things back to the community. However, we need to keep asking ourselves, ‘how can we volunteer more?’ Like Matt and Beth, Melissa shares one of her primary core values is to:
Do good while doing well. I want to be successful and have a successful career...but everyone should spend their time making someone’s life better. Whether teaching or mentoring students and helping them become better leaders.

Ross’s perspective includes a “great leader” is “someone who you know will serve their group before themselves.” In addition to the value the participants place on serving others within their own organization, many emphasize caring for others less fortunate than themselves. Steven chose his fraternity because the members demonstrate they value serving the community. He asks, “What is the point of getting an education if I don’t use it for the greater good of humanity or to help out my own community or even people outside of my community?” John recently decided to participate in an alternative spring break service trip and following a humanitarian relief trip to aid Haitian earthquake victims, Elizabeth changed her graduate education plans from physical therapy to an emphasis on prosthetics and rehabilitation.

Serving others and the greater good for their own and other organizations is a central value of the participants in this study. With this focus on the power of organizations to serve the greater good, like most Millennials, the participants naturally value teamwork as well.

Teamwork.

The participants share Komives et al. (1998) view that creating positive relationships in an organization is critical to effective leadership. Steven maintains a leader must care about the team and constantly strive to work with others, “you [must listen to and absorb] what the [others] are saying, think critically and learn how to problem solve [as a group].” Elizabeth shares the challenges she experiences in her sorority, a chapter she describes as “full of alphas” (i.e. leaders), by saying, “sometimes we struggle with having enough followers.” Ryan emphasizes the importance of involving members of the organization, “if you just get things done by doing them yourself, that is only helpful for the short term. So engaging everyone in the organization is the right way because it has long term potential to run efficiently.”
Overall, the core values the participants hold with respect to leadership portray a like-minded group of Millennial students. While several participants indicate they were initially skeptical about joining a fraternity or sorority, the values they describe and their upbringing and membership in the Millennial generation arguably make them likely candidates for joining a fraternal organization in college. The participants describe values that are important to them, values that are enhanced or derived through organizational membership.

Through the second theme that emerges in the data, the experiences of the participants in this study suggest they desire culture change and work to create it. For example, Ross describes a new culture in fraternities and sororities on his campus around alcohol, hazing, and academics. He believes, “for the most part, Greek life is being pushed by students in a way that the bar is being set higher in positive areas.” Sam echoes Ross’ sentiment. His fraternity uses their core values of loyalty, duty, respect, honor, integrity, service and stewardship, and personal courage as a measuring stick when recruiting new members. His fraternity values and seeks men that hold these values as their own, not men who would require “retraining.” My professional experience with fraternity and sorority leaders like many of the participants provides frequent examples of this “new” attitude. Nevertheless, some readers will find this result unexpected.

As organizational kids, the participants experience structure and inherent organizational values as the norm, often without question. They are ‘belongers’ and realize in order to belong, it is important to find a ‘fit’ in the right organization. The following section describes the participants’ connection to the values of their fraternal organization specifically. The participants articulate those values and employ them through their leadership practices in specific ways.

Further, these themes suggests fraternity and sorority leaders wholeheartedly ascribe to messages they have heard since childhood regarding what it means to be part of a team.
Contemporary views of effective teams, driven by the Millennial mindset, include aspects such as listening and open mindedness, inclusive decision making, sharing responsibility for the group’s successes and challenges, and behaving humbly and with integrity (Edwards, 2005). The participants’ perspectives bear a strong resemblance to these views and follow in this section.

Enacting fraternal values through relational leadership.

Each of the participants are members of fraternal organizations that maintain specifically Judeo-Christian values at the core of their founding ideals, mission and purpose. However, in modern campus life, the role of these organizational values, is often underplayed, or overlooked completely. Conversations about faith, spirituality, and religion are perceived as taboo in higher education (Jones, 2008). However, in order to foster development in college students, discussions about values matter. The participants willingly engage in these discussions and many ground their current values with faith experiences. Many of the participants assert their values took shape and further definition by their fraternal membership. Within a fraternal community, the participants explore their own values further, commit to them through both challenging and rewarding experiences, and lead others.

The majority of the participants in this study have the opportunity to live with fraternity brothers or sorority sisters in residential chapter houses. The ‘laboratory of learning’ within a chapter house environment fosters development consistent with scholarship on learning communities that reports positive outcomes for student participants. Blackburn & Janosik’s (2009) conclusions paint a picture of the extent to which fraternity and sorority students feel actively engaged in learning, experience a sense of community, and shape their identity through their living community. In this environment, the values the participants brought to the college grow stronger and more refined through challenges and support within their fraternal organization.
Several participants articulate the connection they had with their values before college or joining a fraternal organization and how those values unite with their current fraternity or sorority experience. Recall, Buck provided this analogy:

A scout is trustful, loyal, helpful, friendly, kind, brave...I adopted those values. The main difference between a Boy Scout and a fraternity member is the alcohol. Both give back to their communities. Both have very similar values. A lot of them are religious. They are both values-based organizations.

Rupert describes his experiences this way:

The values of being Greek are instrumental [in developing people]. My fraternity has strengthened and reaffirmed my beliefs, and my courage of conviction to always do the right thing. It has opened my eyes to what can happen to those with little or no values, and it serves as a powerful motivation to stay true to who I am. It has also instilled in me new values, ones I have adopted into my beliefs because I truly believe in them and they are part of who I am now. My values have never been so clear and that is because of my fraternity. I will always stay true to my values and beliefs after college, and I owe that much to my fraternity.

The symphony (i.e. poem) of Kendra’s sorority provides her with clarification about the type of woman she aspires to be:

The values in it are so great. To be womanly always. To be discouraged never. To be loveable rather than popular. There are so many bigger things out there than to be just constantly worried about yourself. I feel like you need to be more giving and just open to other people and ideas. My sorority definitely opened my eyes to these things.

Molly is a member of the same sorority on another campus and describes a connection to the symphony fostered by a recent service event of her chapter:

When we presented it to the chapter, we said this is a great opportunity and explained the purpose of the project. Everyone was very excited to reinforce our purposes. Just seeing our chapter refocus into aligning personal values with our chapter values has hit home, this is what I believe too. It has made me even more passionate about my sisterhood and my chapter because my personal values align with them.

Thomas and Sam, members of the same fraternity on different campuses, each share the core purposes of their fraternity as central to the manner in which they live their lives and serve as leaders. Thomas declares “Service and stewardship and duty...and showing people what it
means to do the right thing” is the most important part of leading. Likewise, Sam passionately describes the seven purposes of his fraternity, “Loyalty, duty, respect, honor, integrity, service and stewardship, and personal courage” and relates these values to the practices of his fraternity in everyday situations. Elizabeth believes the “Greek system does instill morals. All chapters possess important morals upon which they were founded. The members that rise to leadership positions have so much power to either build up their chapter or bring it down.” As a freshman, Teena wanted to get involved, make friends, and she:

Likely the idea of tradition. That the sorority goes way back. But when I first joined, I didn't realize then that sororities are based on a values system that you are supposed to live up to. This is one of the things I love most about my sorority now.

Portions of the fraternal organization’s values are known only to members and not available to the public. These rites of passage, ceremonies and vows, known as ‘the ritual’ carry extraordinary meaning for many of the participants in the study. Andrea shares how she recently reconnected to her sorority ritual:

It [the ritual] has also increased my faith. We are founded on Christian principles but I didn't take that to heart until recently and I read through my rituals and I realized I needed to get back to my faith and that helped me grow. It has helped me learn to trust and call on people when I need help. My sorors (term for sorority sister commonly used in NPHC chapters) have helped me and have exposed me to people that can encourage me to grow.

The ritual of Katie’s sorority “really speaks to [her]. It hits every single facet of life.” She describes what she learned as a new member about the values of the sorority, “[the new member program] is about wisdom, trying your hardest, contributing to the worlds work and fostering relationships with people. All of those values in the sorority help me; it has become my own personal ritual.”

The participants in this study hold the values of their fraternal organizations in high regard and strive to live accordingly, particularly in their roles as leaders. However, several
participants share concern and frustration that not all members of their chapters treat the values of the sorority or fraternity with the same regard. Melissa says, “The most difficult feeling I have is the resentment towards some people that don’t get it or don’t uphold those values. I get mad and sad. I just wonder about those things. That is the worst part of being in a sorority for me.”

Rupert, who never thought he would join a fraternity, shares, “we [Greeks] are constantly battling image problems and stereotypes due to the behavior of some members of our community and it makes it all the more important for us to stay true to our ideals...and ensure Greek life is portrayed positively.” Finally, Katie reflects on how her sorority membership developed her:

The emphasis on basic leadership, sisterhood, service and academics have really shaped me. Why would I be in college if it wasn’t for my academics? If I don’t appreciate this activity or donate to this cause who is going to? It has also helped me realize how blessed I am. There are people who don’t realize it and that infuriates me. People really do need to count their blessings.

Consistent with middle class values, the majority of participants in this study grew up within a system of organized standards through sports teams, religious organizations, schools, or community values-based organizations. Although the overtone of faith-based values directing their lives and leadership is somewhat surprising, this theme fits with the portrait of the organizational kid drawn in the previous chapter. It is noteworthy that although the participants in this study come from various cultural, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds, showing diversity in unlimited ways, the majority share a history of organizational level involvement and families in which they learn values such as commitment to one another, responsibility, morality, and service to others.

The participants in this study contend leaders must align themselves to a set of values by which they will carry out their leadership. As Schein (1993) suggests, organizational leaders must be acutely aware of how they demonstrate the organization’s values and reinforce them in
their daily interactions with people. The next section specifically describes the fourth theme in my study. The leadership perspectives of fraternity and sorority student leaders become normative models for members of the ‗ingroup' and others in their organization to emulate.

**Leadership perspectives of fraternity and sorority student leaders.**

Scholars have struggled to reach a consensus on the definition of effective leadership (Northouse, 2007). The concept of leadership and what it means to be a leader has changed dramatically over the course of the last century. Theories that describe leadership as a set of attributes or characteristics, commonly known as the ‗great man' theory once dominated the landscape in every sector of society. Other commonly held perspectives on leadership include a derivation of the great man theory, the leader-follower exchange (Northouse, 2007). This perspective contends certain attributes of natural leaders are respected and admired and thus others will follow such persons (Northouse, 2007).

However, as I have described throughout this dissertation, emerging perspectives contend leadership is a process in which people engage in leadership together (Klenke, 1996; Komives, et al, 1998; Uhl-Biehn, 2006). Rather than focus on the attributes of a leader, the relational leadership perspective focuses on the socially constructed processes by which understandings of leadership derive and gain privilege over others.

Through their fraternity and sorority experiences, the leaders engaged in this study validate the perspective that leadership has been, and continues to be, a socially constructed opportunity as depicted by renowned scholars in the study of leadership (Komives, et al., 1998; Komives, et al., 2005 & 2006). The fraternity and sorority leaders in this study develop a perspective of leadership that is a unique hybrid, clearly influenced by traditional views of leadership and alternatively consistent with emerging paradigms of leadership such as the relational leadership model (Komives, et al. 1998).
Whereas, relational leadership perspectives contend anyone can serve as a leader, within fraternal organizations, the opportunity to lead avails itself through an election process closely wed to the ability to build positive relationships with others. For the participants in this study, leadership is contingent upon relationship building and the context. Paradoxically, to the degree students succeed in building relationships; they receive acknowledgement, and subsequently are appointed or elected as leaders. The process of election by their peers serves as an enormously validating experience for many of the participants in this study. Peers also taught them what it means to be a leader and a follower, first as they were encouraged to get involved (as a follower) and later to lead (when their older peers then became their followers).

As the participants in this study reflect on how and when they first began to get involved in leadership within their chapters, Beth shares, “the sorority provided the support system that I started out with. Once I [was] encouraged to step in as a leader it [gave] me the confidence to do it.” Ryan remembers how it felt to be identified and groomed to be the president of the chapter:

Having that responsibility vested in me by the older guys really got everything started. It was an honor to be asked and respected by the older guys. It made me realize, “this is a role that needs to be filled.” They helped me to envision myself as possibly being successful at it.

Similarly, Elizabeth’s confidence as a young leader grew when she was one of the few first year students in her chapter that was selected for a leadership role and invited to attend a regional conference of the sorority. Kendra was unable to attend an elections ‘speech night’ for a position on the Panhellenic council, nevertheless, her confidence received a boost when:

They selected me without me being there to speak. It was then that I was realized people obviously see something in me...that I can be contributing not only to Panhellenic but also to Greek life as a whole.

Melissa did not feel like a leader in her sorority as a freshman, but she describes her experience on the Panhellenic Council as a sophomore as significant to her development:
The Panhellenic experience was the first time I had the opportunity to have the people that know me support me and encourage me to seek out a leadership opportunity and then for me to realize I am good at it. That is why it has been valuable to me. If I weren’t Greek, I wouldn’t be doing any leadership.

Sam was a manager of a fast-food restaurant as a high school student and later, in college, a resident advisor in an engineering residence hall. However, it was not until elected as the chapter president that it clicked for him. Sam describes an epiphany experience at the first meeting he led in that role when he noticed how well his brothers were responding to him. It was then that he really believed he was a leader.

The participants’ confidence in their leadership grows through validation by their peers and service in leadership roles within the chapter or other campus organizations. Through experience leading, the participants in this study develop specific perspectives regarding the attitudes, skills and abilities necessary to be a leader within a fraternity or sorority context.

Consistent with Millennial generation scholarship, the participants hold strong opinions regarding ‘what works’ in organizations and expect leaders to practice their leadership in specific ways. The participants’ core values described in the first theme of this chapter contribute to these unique perspectives. The participants contend fraternity and sorority leaders must exhibit passion for the purpose of the group, emphasize people above projects, and contribute to the group’s effectiveness. Through the challenges of leading large peer organizations, the participants enact the values of the fraternal organization through their leadership. The perspectives described in the next section are the type that manifest in the last stage of the leadership identity development model (Komives, et al., 2006).

This theme identifies leadership perspectives of the participants and suggests fraternity and sorority membership provides student leaders an environment that cultivates an identity as a leader. In the following section, I describe several salient perspectives on leadership that the
participants hold as fraternity and sorority leaders and Millennial generation members. Thematically, some of these perspectives align with notions about Millennials. However, within fraternal organizations, an environment exists wherein the participants develop unique perspectives about leading and ‘what it takes' to be a successful leader within fraternal contexts.

**Leaders must be passionate.**

First, the majority of participants expect leaders to be passionate about their endeavors. Elizabeth and John aptly describe this perspective during their interview. Elizabeth believes she gained the respect of others because she is motivated, relationship-driven, personable, and cares deeply about what she does. She says, “I am going to try to influence who those around me and value them. I will be myself but care about others along the way. I am willing stick up for what is right.” John believes, “leaders are the people who have a passion for what they do. They enjoy it and they don’t need to have a title. They make things fun and engaging.”

**Anyone can lead.**

As juniors and seniors, the participants’ perspectives have developed to include the emerging paradigm that anyone can learn to lead; that people are leaders in various contexts (Komives, et al., 1998; Komives, et al., 2006; Uhl-Bein, 2006). This view of leadership is consistent with stage four in the LID model, *leadership differentiated*. Some of the participants struggled with seeing themselves as a leader at first. Allegria shares:

My years in the sorority have helped me see myself as a leader. I remember an activity when there some people standing and some sitting and whoever was sitting had to close their eyes. Our instructor would say descriptive words and we were supposed to go over and touch a person that you thought would portray that word. Whenever she said leadership, I felt hands on me. At first, I didn’t really see myself as a leader, I thought you needed a title. I just saw myself out there helping others. That is when I realized people saw me as a leader and you don’t need to be president or have a title. I was kind of freaking out at first.
Consistently, the participants describe leaders as people who take initiative and build relationships. Elizabeth provides an example of a sorority sister that leads although she is not an elected leader. She shares:

I think some of the best leaders can also be followers. They are humble enough to say I am going to follow someone else and make it happen. My sorority sister Veronica is the best example of a leader; she is very committed, but has never had a big title. She is nonetheless someone who is always dependable and willing to give 100 percent no matter what time of day or night.

Katie realizes:

A good leader knows who the real leaders in a group are and can influence them onto their team. It is important to realize the relationship dynamics and to get the positional leader and non-positional leader to walk along side each other and become allies. When positional leaders behave in a respectful manner, they will be respected, because ultimately you are on the same team.

During his sophomore year, Rupert recognized anyone could be a leader:

A leader isn't just the president, recruitment chair or any position...it is anyone that takes something on and makes it better. Once I realized that, I took on [leadership roles] and ran with [them]. It inspired me to get more involved and get into more leadership roles.

Molly agrees and describes her way of encouraging others to believe this as well:

I really believe leadership is a responsibility for everyone. If someone said “I want to be a leader,” my response would be “go lead.” I think holding a position can give you power, but only true leadership can give you respect and you don’t need a position to be a true leader. This is one thing that our chapter focuses on.

Ryan contends the role of a leader is to utilize all of the members in some way to benefit the entire organization. Thomas concurs:

There is opportunity for every type of leader to be in a fraternity. You don’t have to be the outgoing always involved in an officer position. You can still be the type of leader that is going to sit back and enjoy the road but you are still there to add to the experience.

Finally, Andrea believes:

Everyone is a leader in their own way. I’m not into titles. There are several people in my chapter that could be president just as well as I can. The only difference is that they saw something in me, like all my experience I’ve had and chose me. But there is still so much
talent in my organization; there are the women who are better leaders in the things they do, so they are no less than me. We are all leaders, some of us just have different titles.

The notion that anyone can lead surfaces as the most widely shared assumption about fraternity and sorority leadership. Every participant expresses this perspective in some way through the interview.

**Leaders encourage others.**

Consistent with Komives et al. (1998) assertion, the participants in this study now recognize that anyone can be a leader. In addition, they reflect and realize that it took the encouragement of others to build their leadership confidence, an attitude consistent with Burns’ (1978) foundational work on transformational leadership. The participants now pay it forward and encourage others to step up and lead. Matt shares from his journey:

When I was elected to IFC, it was the first really big step I took and made me realize what I had accomplished and what I could accomplish in leadership. The fraternity helped to build my confidence and that is the root of my path as a leader. It all started there with small things and one person believing in me and then several saying “you are doing well at this” and encouraging me to take the next step and seeing that people are happy with what you’re doing.

John believes:

[Fraternities] develop leaders through the support they provide. There is always positive encouragement that people need. You are encouraged to believe in yourself. When people aren’t confident or unsure of a position they have that support of brothers and sisters there to back them up. We always look for our member’s strengths and weaknesses and encourage people to seek positions and have confidence in their abilities. Then they feel confident.

Teena agrees:

Many students come to college and they don’t have people to help them out and it takes them a lot longer to figure out how to get involved or meet their potential. But when you join a fraternity or sorority you have people helping you and guiding you and giving you suggestion. So the role of our organizations is to take people who have potential and push them to their limit...to meet their potential because they have that encouragement.
Molly describes true leaders as those who build leaders and give everyone else credit. She asserts:

That people follow leaders not for what they do, but because they are interested in who they are. Leadership is something you are always working on. You can’t ever be the best leader. We all have strengths and weaknesses that eventually make us into better leaders through developing them. I think we can always improve and leaders help others to improve also. There isn’t a ceiling to leadership. Life experience gives you opportunities to develop other as aspects of leading as well.

Encouraging others and the perspective that fraternity/sorority leaders serve others go hand in hand. The participants describe leadership as a responsibility to serve and encourage others.

*Leaders serve selflessly.*

The participants assert in order to encourage others and assist them in their own leadership journey, leaders have a responsibility to serve selflessly and commit to something bigger than themselves. However, more than simply valuing this ability, they expect it as what makes someone a leader. Sarah says, “That is leadership to me...putting yourself aside and making it so much more about other people.” Molly agrees:

Leaders must be completely selfless. I think the most inspiring leaders are women and men that truly care about what they are working toward. You might not be the most popular person but many leaders are respected. They respect other people and they gain respect through their actions.

This perspective is consistent with contemporary scholarship that focuses on servant leadership and reflects the societal influences on the participants regarding leaders. The importance of this perspective is significant for the participants as college students that build relationships in large fraternal groups.

*Leadership is a responsibility.*

The majority of participants in this study describe leadership as a responsibility. In particular, it is the responsibility of leaders to hold others accountable but also to invite member
participation in the accountability process. Steven shares, “A lot of our fraternity is just keeping each other accountable. We need to be asking, how can I hold my brother accountable with his grades, how he treats other people, and how he represents the fraternity?” Katie believes the sorority was:

A good place for me to be a student leader. I wasn’t very good at first. I didn’t realize how big of a responsibility it was or what I was supposed to do. Our president chastised me and said, “if you want this position you have to do it but if not we will replace you. They kept pushing me to succeed and I eventually got it. From that experience, I learned how much responsibility people place on college students. There is nowhere else in the world you will find a twenty-year old woman running an organization of 100 people. She has been given the responsibility to do so because the people voted her in.

The participants’ perspective, that peer accountability is part of leadership, is in some ways a surprising finding. In my experience, many Millennials expect the adults in their lives to hold them and their peers accountable. The view that peers must hold one another accountable is seemingly facilitated through the culture of fraternities and sororities.

Leaders recognize and value diversity.

The participants hail from similar institutions; each is a predominantly white institution in an isolated area. Nonetheless, these leaders recognize and value diversity akin to Twenge’s (2006) description of the complexity apparent in Millennial’s approach diversity and equality.

[They] may have left behind some of the good social rules about politeness, but, following in the footsteps of the Boomers, we have also left behind some of the bad social rules about everyone living life in the same way, and minorities and women staying in their ‘place’. [They] are less likely to believe in moral absolutes, so they are tolerant and accept diversity in all its forms (p. 181).

Ryan realizes:

Unfortunately, there isn’t as much debate or intellectual conversation here compared to being in a big city where there is more diversity. I surrounded myself with other middle class white males by going to college here; it is less diverse. But, there has definitely been some good conversations with some of my good friends who have different views.
Membership in organizations with rich racial and ethnic diversity is not a significant part of the college experience for most students attending the institutions in this study. Nonetheless, the participants describe diversity as an important ingredient of effective leadership within organizations. Melissa shares:

I love having different people in my life and experiencing different things with them. I think that is rare in college students. I enjoy being friends with people that are older. I don’t mind having dinner with my parents’ friends. I have a hard time with people who won’t speak to someone because of x, y or z.

Thomas values:

My brothers come from a wide variety of people from different backgrounds, different socioeconomic classes, different races and backgrounds and through that, I have learned effective ways to relate to different situations. It has helped me for my future as a teacher and other involvement areas here at [university]. It helps me relate to other students by knowing their backgrounds and who they are and why they are the way they are. Leaders need to understand that that not everybody thinks the way they do and in a leadership position you must be able to convey your ideas and still honor others.

The participants in this study, each members of racially homogeneous fraternal organizations, share the view of most Millennials that diversity refers to more than a person’s race. The participants capitalize on opportunities within the organizations to understand difference and experience diversity in other ways.

**Leaders must be confident.**

Finally, a pervasive perspective of the participants in this study finds that fraternity and sorority leaders must be confident in their leadership. Through rich description presented in other themes in the previous chapter, it is clear that parents, mentors and peers play a significant role in cultivating confidence in the leaders in this study. This perspective comes full circle for the participants’ view when, after being encouraged by peers, they develop confidence in their leadership, and then pay it forward to others. Katie says, “What really made me believe I was a leader was how many people want my opinion, advice or want to get my feedback on
something.” Molly describes herself as, “someone who doesn’t get pushed around. I think logically and I know what I am doing. I am a confident in my leadership abilities.”

Confidence plays a role in one of the central tasks of leaders, decision making. Sarah believes, “Being a leader is making difficult decisions. Being a leader requires really looking at the broader picture and being able to do what is right.” Courtney led the campus’ sorority community through a difficult decision making process when she was on the Panhellenic council. She reflects:

I knew this was going to have a positive impact on the community so I had to deal with the criticism and stick with what I knew was right. If people in leadership positions are part of the plan but don’t actually believe in it, you have to work to get them involved in the decision, not just looking at it like a bystander. That whole process is really important and gave me greater confidence as a leader.

Steven credits God and his fraternity brothers with the confidence he has in his leadership. He describes himself as “very hard to influence unless I want to do something already. You can only influence me if I already want to do it a little bit. He is confident in his “desire to be different.”

The participants in this study share similar values and unique perspectives about leadership and membership. Twenge (2006) suggests, as a part of the Millennial generation, today’s leaders believe in equality, acceptance, shared power, and the importance of organizations and memberships in serving and belonging to something bigger than themselves. The importance of relationships and the opportunities and challenges inherent in fraternity and sorority structure and hierarchy form the first two themes and undergird my finding regarding fraternity and sorority leaders as Millennials. As organizational kids, the participants practice relationship leadership. As relational leaders, they develop specific values and unique perspectives regarding leadership; together these comprise the first four themes. The fifth and final theme, opportunities for learning and reflection follows in the last section of this chapter.
Opportunities for learning and reflection.

Scholars (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Kuh, et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) point to the significance of opportunities for learning and reflection to foster development of college students. Kuh (2003) ardently calls for institutions to provide opportunities for engagement (which requires reflection). Komives et al. (2005) assert development of a leadership identity requires not only meaningful involvement in organizations and positive influences from adults, but also opportunities to participate in structured reflection and learning activities. Particularly important are learning opportunities in supportive environments with peers. Throughout this dissertation, I assert fraternal organizations foster a space in which student development occurs.

Finally, Baxter Magolda (1992) suggests learning occurs in communities through a cycle of “discussion, disagreement and consensus” (p. 223) over what has been experienced and what it means. This process challenges students’ values and beliefs, presents new ideas, and provides possibilities and consequences that are new to students. For many college students, the struggle to understand and deal with these new experiences creates the impetus to construct a self-authored sense of identity rather than a self that merely reflects the beliefs of the group. Fraternity and sorority leaders seemingly experience this process differently. As members of largely homogeneous organizations, the participants in this study describe opportunities for learning and reflection through educational programs and conferences unique to fraternities and sororities. However, as Millennials and organizational kids, the participants emphasize harmony, values congruence, and deference to the greater good, rather than lively debate and dissention.

In the final major theme, I illustrate the manner in which the participants believe their fraternity or sorority experience influences their learning, sense of support and belonging. These are important influences for the development of an identity as a leader (Komives, et al., 2005).
Fraternity and sorority leaders find opportunities to learn and reflect in two specific ways. First, learning is an activity that takes place in a socially constructed site. For the participants in this study, the socially constructed sites of their various leadership opportunities derived from their membership serve as a fertile ground of learning. Second, the participants learn specific lessons about leadership through membership in a fraternity or sorority. I describe these two broad areas in the remainder of this chapter.

The site of learning.

For the participants, the location and process of reflection and learning assumes various forms. Several participants in this study find opportunities to link reflections from leading within other organizations, a job, or simply through processing and critical thinking with peers or advisors. Steven says of says his fraternity “is about the learning.” For Melissa, learning opportunities came when she attended a regional Greek leadership conference:

I participated in a professional conference of intelligent adults coming together to share our ideas about fraternity/sorority life. It made me realize this is not a club, or an extracurricular, but also a legitimate thing to be spending your time doing. Since then I see so many examples of people and events that prove that when we come together and share values we do amazing things. I have also been really proud to be Greek.

Several of the participants describe themselves as “old souls” and the member of their organization that engages others in critical thinking and dialogue about important issues. Melissa, the self-described “mom of [her] sorority” says, “I don’t mind being the mature one and talking to people about their values or asking the critical questions. It is important to talk to each other about these things.” Through similar critical discourse with members of her sorority, Sarah believes she has:

Played a huge role in opening a lot of ignorant and naive people’s eyes, being Jewish. Half of the women in my sorority had never even met a Jewish person, so they had misconceptions of the world and of people that come from different backgrounds. This is of huge importance in a chapter...opening people’s eyes to each other....so they experience more than just their own ideas. They can learn about and value those beliefs
of another person. That is why I love being part of a sorority...I have had the opportunity to learn from other people. The interpersonal connections will affect my life a lot more than doing community service hours. These are the reasons fraternities and sororities are so important...for the intangibles.

Sam credits his fraternity for his development as a leader:

I have grown as a leader and as a manager of people. My people skills have improved, particularly conflict resolution, running meetings, and generally working with and motivating people. Specifically in my field, engineering, those aren’t really skills they teach you, so I am thankful I could acquire these attributes before going out to the working world. I believe I will be leaps and bounds ahead of my peers.

The participants find an environment in their fraternal organization that is readily available for learning and growth. Through late night discussions with peers, mentoring meetings with advisors on campus, and opportunities to travel to conferences for structured leadership education, fraternity and sorority leaders gain insight, develop skills, and are challenged to grow and develop. In addition, specific skills and abilities develop from fraternity or sorority leadership and membership. The participants provide examples to describe what they have learned from their fraternity/sorority membership in the following section.

*The content of learning.*

The University Learning Outcomes Assessment (UniLOA) project is a nationally-normed, highly reliable and valid measure of the student growth, learning, and development. UniLOA measures growth, learning and development along the domains of: critical thinking, self-awareness, communication, diversity, citizenship, membership and leadership, and relationships (Center for Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2009). These critical outcomes comprise the goals of a college education that interest both academic affairs and student affairs within higher education. Chickering and Reisser (1993), Baxter Magolda (1992) and Kegan (1984) each suggest, albeit in differing terms, similar outcomes as the goal of college student development. The UniLOA (2009) findings show fraternity and sorority students score higher in
the seven measure domains and experience a greater magnitude of growth over their college career. The findings presented in this section provide qualitative examples that support these statistics.

Through the socially constructed fraternity/sorority site for learning, the opportunities to learn abound in fraternities and sororities. The content of the learning is valuable for college students in their developmental journey. Many of the participants learn practical skills that will assist them in their transition to the professional world after college. For example, the participants gain practical experience regarding how to manage organizations and lead people. Fraternity or sorority membership also creates linkages to learning in the classroom. Steven describes learning the history of his fraternity and its connection the history of the civil rights movement in the United States. In addition, he feels the workshops his chapter hosts provide valuable learning about running effective business meetings, dressing professionally, and about leadership in general. He says the workshops were “always fun for [him] and easy to apply.” Within their chapters, they learn to build relationships, communicate clearly, lead effectively, practice compassion and develop patience. Specifically, I turn now to highlight five specific lessons (or skills) learned by the participants through fraternity or sorority membership.

Communication skills.

As Millennials, the participants are experienced relationship builders. In her best-selling leadership book, Fierce Conversations, Scott (2002) contends, “The conversation is the relationship” (p. 22). The participants echo Scott’s notion and provide countless examples of not only the importance of clear, open communication, but describe situations that contribute to their development in this area. Steven states, “Over communicating is key” and Ryan realizes in order to serve his chapter he must be:
A charismatic leader who motivates others and is a good communicator. Only then can you move people or motivate them and command a situation or meeting and gain everyone’s respect. Greek leaders have to play a certain role in order to get buy in from their peers.

Like Ryan, Kendra describes the importance of communication between the elected leaders and the rest of the sorority.

Honestly sometimes [the members] feel out of the loop because the executive board does know more ‘things’ and there are some issues they must keep confidential. But, sharing as much as they can will set things straight. As long as there is open communication is managing the organization goes much better.

Katie believes that organizations fail to implement or lead change when the leaders communicate ineffectively. She shares the importance of leaders using “sharing [their] perspective with people. Then appealing to people’s wants, needs and reasoning with them is more effective for any sort of change. It helps if you explain why and the process.” Sarah has learned:

To deal with many different personalities and communication styles...what works and what doesn't work. How you view and interact with people, your tone, method of communication... these are huge things that are crucial in being a chapter leader, and something that it took me a while to learn.

While the participants describe clear and open communication as a skill developed through leadership in their fraternal organization, some research suggests Millennials’ ability to communicate orally trails behind that of previous generations (Twenge, 2006).

Patience.

Living in a fraternity or sorority environment with dozens of other college students fosters patience and acceptance of others. Courtney realizes her sorority experience taught her, “How to have relationships with every kind of person and even though some people are frustrating to me it’s taught the patience to accept there are differences in people but we can still be sisters and friends.” Melissa says, “I've learned to put up with a lot of day to day stupid
girl stuff. That is why I don’t think I was a particularly good leader in my chapter…arguing over trivial things is not important to me.” Ross learned patience and how to manage groups from his fraternity. He shares:

You cannot let minute things bug you. Actually, it can bug you, that’s not the problem, but how you react to it is the important thing. Greek life teaches you these things because it puts you in real life experiences. In the residence hall where you have one roommate, versus in the fraternity you have 50 roommates…you must learn how you do different things, how to keep people happy, the house clean, how to manage so many things.

Managing organizations.

The participants in the study share views on the differences between management and leadership. While most agree there is a difference; they also realize some situations require them to manage their organization, even though they would prefer to lead. Steven shares his perspectives on communication and managing a team. He says leaders must:

Show other people [they] are passionate. You definitely want to have a team that is passionate as well. That is hard when you find a teammate that isn’t passionate, you have to push them. You have to challenge them. People continue to do nothing or the wrong things because no one is challenging them! You have to encourage and challenge people beyond what they have been challenged before to be an effective team.

Likewise, Teena shares, “in the sorority, it is our job to help people be the best they can, and it doesn’t help people if we do their job for them.” She went on to describe the importance of leaders using their passion for leadership to motivate the organization. Rupert shares, “I’ve matured a lot faster [and am] more prepared for the real world. There are many similarities in running a fraternity and running a business. I feel ready to step up after college now.”

The role of their own and others’ gender in leadership provides the backdrop for learning and development for college students. As members of single-gender organizations, the participants hold varied views on the role gender plays in their own leadership and that of their peers.
Gender matters.

Although Twenge (2006) contends Millennial generation students are very accepting of all manner of human differences, the intersection of leadership and gender in this study provides an opportunity to examine the unique perspectives of a subculture on the college campus. The participants learn their are differences in expectations and opportunities related to gender in leadership settings. Komives et al. (2006) found the influence of gender had an impact on the leadership identity development of the women in their grounded theory study.

Some participants in this study hold perspectives reminiscent of the ‘great man’ theory; others have little awareness of the role of gender in their leadership. Many of the participants realize they lack critical thinking about the role their gender plays in their own leadership practices as they shared their developing perspectives with me. Others had opinions about gender and leadership. In Teena’s experience,

I’ve dealt with a lot of really lazy guys. Maybe I think that because I’m surrounded by so many more powerful woman than I am guys, and I do know some strong leaders that are guys. But I do usually think guys aren’t going to remember things as well, are really relaxed and laid back. I assume I’ll have to remind them more often, or really follow up with them more often. But, maybe it depends on the person.

But overall, I don’t think gender plays a huge role for me. In sororities, women can become a bit feminist because they are really pushing for women to be leaders and women having rights, which of course we should have, but sometimes... it drives me a little crazy. I don’t think much about gender in leadership. But I do think about specific people and their styles and their work ethic and I cater to that.

Ross realizes “it is toughest for the person with the advantage to know they have an advantage” and described his perceptions of masculine and feminine leadership:

Men’s perceived strengths are that they are strong and can handle things and that sometimes...women are perceived to not handle things as well. However, it is also perceived that the women in any organization are more organized and know what’s up and what’s going on. Sometimes, you have to live up to the perceptions. I must come across as strong.
Like Ross, Melissa recognizes the dichotomous perceptions of masculine and feminine leadership and says,

I relate to men a lot easier and am fairly masculine in my leadership style. I don't see a reason to hold grudges, I'm not a jealous person. I get straight to the point. I am that way about a lot of things. I am a very realistic person to the point where some women say do you have a heart? But some women perceive me as very strong, realistic and not overly sensitive about things.

The majority of the participants’ imply gender plays little role in their leadership style, but describe widely held gender role assumptions about leading. The influence of membership in exclusively single-gender organizations or teams and college students’ perspectives on gender and leadership provides an intriguing area of further study.

With respect to opportunities for learning and reflection, the participants enjoy the opportunity to learn from others’ mistakes and successes. The participants’ fraternity or sorority chapters provide chances for learning that differ from other memberships in that many of the organizations provide a living and learning laboratory within the chapter house. Those participants not residing in large chapter houses still find their frequency of interaction with brothers or sisters dramatically affects their leadership.

*Learn from mistakes.*

The participants in this study describe a culture in their fraternity or sorority that provides both challenge and support as important to them. In their lives as chapter and campus leaders, they challenge themselves and others to take risks, learn from mistakes, ask difficult questions, and think for themselves, all within a safe, encouraging community. They follow the example of respected peers that “have their heads on straight.” Most of the participants have lived in residential fraternity or sorority houses and found that environment provides many opportunities to change and grow. Ross says the residential environment:
Also provides you with examples of what not to do. Some people won’t make it more than this semester in the fraternity. You usually see those people at 4 a.m., and that person did ‘that thing’ and now they are no longer here. Having the bad examples sometimes works just as well as having the good examples.

Elizabeth describes a leader as “someone who might make mistakes along the way but recover from those mistakes, move on, and learn from them. Everyone makes mistakes.” Beth believes part of being a good leader is listening to others, and being supportive of one another. Within that context, she describes learning from each other through careful questioning and reframing situations.

Whether learning occurred in the formal setting of workshops, training, conferences, or late at night in the living room, the participants in this study provide many examples of the opportunities they found to learn and reflect upon the experiences fraternity or sorority membership provides.

Summary.

In the previous chapter, I examined the role of genuine relationships and the structure of fraternal organizations as influences on the leadership identity development of fraternity and sorority students. Subsequently, the themes I present in this chapter; the importance of values-based leadership, leadership perspectives of fraternity and sorority students, and learning and reflection, illustrate the interconnectedness fraternity and sorority student leaders experience in their roles. It is difficult, if not impossible, to isolate the influence of fraternity or sorority membership from other aspects of development and identity when considering how college students develop. However, the participants’ membership in a fraternal organization affords rich life experiences that contribute to development in meaningful ways.

In the next chapter, the perspective offered by the theoretical framework augments further discussion regarding the findings. The themes derived from the data and presented in the
previous two chapters substantiate several connections to the understandings from which I approach this study. First, at the level of understanding organizations, culture influences members within fraternities and sororities. The impact of fraternity/sorority culture is particularly distinct and reproduces perspectives about leadership unique to these organizations. Second, I consider the college years as a exceptional period of growth and learning for students as they journey toward self-authorship and identity maturation. Finally, organizational memberships enhance student development, particularly the process of leadership identity development.
Chapter 6
Understanding Organizations, Students, and Leadership: Sense Making and Next Steps

The dominant discourse in the academy regarding fraternities and sororities includes concerns that fraternal organizations hinder college student development. The intent of this study is to understand how the culture of fraternal organizations influences student development and specifically leadership identity development among college students.

The goal of this chapter is to focus on the key findings of the study and to analyze how the findings relate to the theoretical framework. Through data collection and analysis, the findings suggest what the participants in this study value, how they develop, and how they practice leadership within fraternal organizations. The key findings of this study are:

1) The culture of fraternities and sororities are clearly delineated and shape the development of leaders.

2) The fraternity and sorority leaders in this study embody popular characterizations of Millennial college students.

3) Fraternity and sorority leaders develop an identity as a leader through the socially constructed site of learning and meaning making within fraternal organizations.

Following is a brief discussion of the findings and how they connect to the theoretical framework. In addition, I discuss influences on college students not directly addressed by this study that suggest implications for their identity development as a leader. Finally, I utilize the research questions to summarize the discussion.
Findings

The culture of fraternities and sororities are clearly delineated and shape the development of leaders.

A walk through “Greek row” on any college campus or into a fraternity or sorority house signals the culture of fraternal organizations. Fraternity and sorority students literally wear, speak and gesture the artifacts of their organization to one another. With more than a century of history, ritual and tradition, even in modern society, fraternity and sorority culture is the result of a complex group learning process that leaders only partially influence. Fraternal organizations are imbued with values and opportunities that attract students who will participate in and co-construct a culture that emphasizes relationships and leadership.

Fraternities and sororities epitomize three levels of organizational culture; artifacts, espoused values, and underlying basic assumptions (Schein, 1993). First, the participants describe traditions, processes and the ritual (i.e. the artifacts) of their organization as grounding elements of their fraternal experience. The findings suggest the participants readily adapt to the framework of the espoused values of their fraternal organizations and incorporate them in their lives as leaders. Finally, as ‘ingroup’ (Hogg, 2001) members, the participants co-construct and perpetuate the established norms (i.e. underlying basic assumptions) of their organizations.

The findings also suggest that the participants have been “joiners” of organizations throughout their lives. The participants in the study have histories of participation in Boy/Girl Scouts, sports teams, service groups, and youth activities in faith organizations. Brooks (2001) calls such students “organizational kids” a characterization that is quite descriptive. As organizational kids, the participants’ familiarity with structures, organizations, and leadership is significant. The participants joined a fraternity or sorority with exposure to the goals, purposes, and functions of organizations and with knowledge of “how things work”. With this
background, the participants arrive with some idea about what it means to be a member as well as to lead. They adapt to the culture within their chapter with eagerness and willingness to engage.

As organizational kids, the participants have been told what to believe, how to behave, and when to act their entire lives. The findings suggest their fraternal organization now serves in loco parentis and shapes the identity and behavior of the participants. Nevertheless, the participants indifferently expect their fraternal organization to function in this way. As a member of another generation, the participants’ wholesale acceptance of the groups’ norms and expectations feels passive to me, but they describe socially constructive experiences within culture of their fraternal organizations that they believe develop them in positive ways, particularly with respect to leadership identity development.

The themes and findings in this study demonstrate fraternity/sorority culture fosters a sense of belonging, cultivates relationships, and provides opportunities for members to engage with one another. Arguably, membership in a fraternal organization provides one of the most intentional means for college students to discover and refine their leadership.

The fraternity and sorority leaders in this study embody popular characterizations of Millennial college students.

Howe and Strauss (2000) coined the term “Millennial” to characterize the generation of college students born after 1982 that began arriving on college campuses at the turn of the century. Although many have criticized Howe and Strauss’ process of collecting data (or lack thereof) to create their characterizations of Millennials, the findings of this study suggest the participants embody Howe and Strauss’ characterization of Millennial generation members. Following are seven characteristics of Millennials with examples connecting to the data and findings from this study:
1) **Millennials are special.** The participants' parents and other adults in their lives have inculcated in them the sense that they are special. Most of the participants maintain a close relationship with the parents, advisors, and mentors.

2) **Millennials are sheltered.** The participants were raised with an emphasis on physical, emotional, and intellectual safety; they are sheltered and protected. However, the surprising majority of participants’ parents supported their decision to join a fraternity/sorority even in light of many well-known safety concerns regarding fraternal organizations (i.e. alcohol abuse, hazing, etc.).

3) **Millennials are confident.** The participants possess high levels of confidence, trust, and optimism. The participants in this study contend leaders must be confident in order to be effective in fraternal organizations.

4) **Millennials are team-oriented.** All of the participants had youth experiences working in groups, where they formed strong team instincts and tight peer bonds. They focus on groups or activities they believe are worthwhile. The participants sought membership in a fraternal organization and with confidence and optimism delved into leadership early in their college experience.

5) **Millennials are achieving.** Overall, the participants describe values and experiences that suggest they plan to serve others but achieve great things as well. Many of the participants describe their role in leading a change movement toward a ‘new’ type of fraternity or sorority, organizations that create an values-congruent environment in which all members reach their potential.

6) **Millennials are pressured.** The participants have been raised in a competitive world where they were pushed to study, avoid personal risks, and take advantage of the opportunities offered to them. Several participants provide examples that indicate they
feel responsible for their peers, their organizations, and believe if they don't “step up”, no one else will.

7) Millennials are conventional. The participants are comfortable with their parents, much like other Millennials. Major themes derived from the findings indicate most of the participants idolize their parents and subscribe to the values they instilled in them through their upbringing in organizations, particularly organized religion. The participants believe that social rules derived from values assist leaders in being effective and successful.

The Millennial generation contributes to the collective identity of the participants. In addition, the findings in this study underscore the participants’ orientation toward membership in organizations they believe are worthwhile. As Millennials, the majority of the participants bring years of experience in organizations and on teams with them to college and to their fraternity or sorority. Repeated exposure to clubs and organizations laid the groundwork for understanding ‘the way things work’ for the participants. Upon entry into a fraternal organization, the participants do not question the enculturation processes within their fraternity or sorority.

Although organizational membership is a common characteristic of the Millennial generation experience, challenges associated with being a lifelong joiner and member arise regarding certain aspects of maturation expected of young adults. The capacity of the participants, like other fraternity and sorority students with whom I interact professionally, to make decisions and set goals for themselves, independent of others’ direction or influence, appears diminished, perhaps in part due to the over abundant influence of organizational memberships. As organizational kids, the participants engage in the social construction of leadership in ways that may advantage as well as limit them.
The participants’ identity as a member of their fraternity or sorority dominates many aspects of their self-perception. This high-level of identification paired with the fraternal peer group poses potentially detrimental effects. Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggest a necessary developmental process for college students is the ability to function with “emotional independence or without the need for reassurance, affection, or approval.” The process of enculturation into organizations gives little opportunity for members to critically examine the levels of culture inherent in all groups, and thus the participants, like many Millennials, will continue to ‘go along to get along’.

Another common critique of the Millennial generation centers on their delay in reaching certain milestones associated with adulthood. Arnett (2004) describes this phenomenon as emerging adulthood. Circling the notion of defining adulthood is the role of Millennial parents in the lives of their children. Wartman and Savage (2008) suggest parental involvement with college-aged children is dependent upon more than generational norms; demographics such as socioeconomic status and race play a role as well. The majority of Millennials report their parents are involved in their lives at a level they appreciate (HERI, 2008). Many Millennials, particularly middle to upper class Caucasian college students, stay connected to their parents longer; an arrangement from which both parties receive benefit.

The majority of the participants experience the type of parent involvement that mirrors the trend highlighted by the dominant discourse about Millennials. The participants’ life-long experiences in organizations, closely sheparded by parents and other adults, may have a lasting impact on their future development as autonomous young adults. In many ways, the fraternal organization, assumes a parent-like role in the lives of fraternity and sorority students. The highly structured fraternal environment complete with values, expectations, and processes mirrors the nearly constant advice-stream provided by parents.
Fraternal organizations need members who will participate in the perpetuation of the culture, and Millennial students need to belong, thus a perfect match occurs. In addition, as organizational kids, the participants evidence compliance and deference to authority unlike previous generations and describe their relationships with authority figures (e.g. parents, teachers, advisors, etc.) and peers of paramount importance to them.

Being an organizational kid has benefits and limitations. First, throughout their lifetime, the participants develop as members and navigators of organizations. The participants believe in order to be successful in organizations, one must build relationships and learn to compromise. They contend that people in positions of leadership hold the power in an organization. After college, the participants’ experiences in organizations will provide them with skills and inclinations applicable to work environments and community organizations. The findings suggest the participants believe success in organizations means they should follow the rules, serve others, and be rewarded by advancement in responsibilities and leadership.

Fraternity and sorority leaders develop an identity as a leader through the socially constructed site of learning and meaning making within fraternal organizations. The third finding in my study identifies the social construction of leadership as important to fraternity and sorority students. The strong, existing culture of the fraternal organization serves as a shaping influence for the participants as they pursue leadership within the organization. However, neither culture nor leadership can be explained or understood independently of one another; leaders first create cultures when they create groups and organizations and once cultures exist, “they determine the criteria for leadership and thus determine who will and will not be leaders” (Shafritz, et al., 2005, p. 366).

The mutually beneficial aspects of the relationship between fraternal organizations that need leaders and student leaders that need to belong manifests in various ways for the
participants. The participants build relationships, receive encouragement to seek out opportunities for involvement and leadership, and actively participate in the reproduction of leadership within their organization. The participants developed skills and confidence as a leader in the socially constructed site of development and meaning making in their fraternity or sorority.

Within each fraternal organization, members have the opportunity to assume a wide spectrum of leadership roles. Fraternity and sorority members transition into their organizations with a heavy emphasis on mentoring, and encouragement to lead. The majority of participants assumed leadership positions in their first weeks of membership, which cultivated their own and others’ leadership. In addition, opportunities to learn and practice leadership stretch beyond chapters, into system-wide leadership roles in umbrella governing organizations. Beyond the fraternity and sorority community, the participants in this study engage in many student groups on campus while investing deeply in their own organization.

Within the highly relational culture of fraternities and sororities, those leaders that display extraverted personalities, agreeableness, confidence, and social influence, are identified early by older members and subsequently obtain positions of power and respect as leaders. Essentially, those participants identified early on as leaders, became “insiders” within their own fraternal organization, part of the elite ingroup who have opportunities for development available to them and not to others in the organization. Some of the participants succeed in the complex interpersonal culture of their fraternal organization; while others aspire to lead in ways not afforded to them by their chapter. In the complex and interconnected web of relationships within large fraternity and sorority chapters, it stands to reason not all students would “fit the mold” of leaders in their chapter as dictated by the culture. For the participants, the process of
encouragement, selection, and leading within a chapter is exceptionally validating for some and disappointing for others.

The participants have been involved in a cycle of leadership, not just in their fraternal organization, but in other contexts as well. With their abundant experience on teams and in organizations, they have been exposed to and involved in leadership in many manifestations with each membership. This cycle, what I have labeled, the *leadership cycle of life*, provides a gateway to leadership for the participants in their fraternity or sorority. In many cases, the encouragement to get involved or lead occurred within the student’s first few weeks on campus. The interconnectedness within membership in a fraternity or sorority perpetuates the cycle of leadership. Leaders and members of fraternal organizations participate in the construction and continuation of the culture by reinforcing some aspects of the culture and not challenging others.

The majority of participants experience a pattern of advancement in the *leadership cycle of life* through the encouragement of fraternity and sorority peers. The cycle of encouragement, successful leading, and empowerment is instrumental in developing a leadership identity for the participants. Once the participants are on a path to belonging, the cycle self-perpetuates for them. Model 6.1 depicts the phenomenon of the *leadership cycle of life* in fraternal organizations.
The challenge with leadership involvement in organizations is that it is inherently exclusive. Many organizations, and fraternities and sororities in particular, exclusively select members with the inclination and means to become part of such organizations. In other words, pre-college memberships such as those enjoyed by the participants exist for families with the financial means to offer such opportunities to their children. Later in this chapter, I address the implications of such practices. Nonetheless, most of the participants feel included in leadership within their organizations.

Overall, the findings point to three key areas: the culture of organizations, the development of students, and the process of leadership identity development in a fraternity or sorority. I now turn to a discussion of these findings and how they relate to the theoretical framework.

Connections to the Theoretical Framework

At the outset of this study, my intent was to identify the ways in which the culture of fraternal organizations fosters development among college students. In addition, I aimed to learn
more about Komives et al. (2005) emerging leadership identity development theory as it relates to membership in a fraternity or sorority. The theoretical framework for this study utilizes three elements; organizational culture, student development (specifically self-authorship), and leadership identity development. The findings from the study similarly suggest overall student development and leadership identity development are influenced by the well-established cultures of fraternities and sororities. Following, I discuss the ways in which the findings connect to the theoretical framework.

**Understanding organizations.**

Fraternities and sororities are imbued with culture cultivated and perpetuated by collegiate members. Schein’s (1993) organizational culture theory is a helpful tool for understanding the culture of fraternities and sororities. Fraternities and sororities express their values through the artifacts of the organization (i.e. traditions, colors, signs, unique language, and ceremonial rites of passage), and signal to the public that an identifiable culture exists. In addition, fraternal organizations widely espouse values that specifically perpetuate the culture. For example, fraternal organizations maintain leadership is a priority; therefore when students join they expect to be and are cultivated as leaders. Finally, the basic underlying assumptions, or what I describe as the personality and practices of the chapter, are evident only with concerted observation or examination.

Using Schein’s organizational culture theory led me to a new understanding of fraternal organizations and their appeal to Millennials. In addition, this theory is well suited for scholarly examination of fraternities and sororities; it is as if the theory was designed with fraternal organizations in mind. Schein (1993) describes three levels of culture (artifacts, values, and basic underlying assumptions) and allows me to make sense of what I found as a result of studying student leadership within fraternal organizations. The findings suggest older members of the
fraternity or sorority provided the artifacts of the organization to the participants upon entry to the organization. The participants then connect to the espoused values of their fraternal organization through the enculturation process they experience as new members.

Later, as members of the organization, the participants perpetuate and further construct the culture (i.e. basic underlying assumptions) in their fraternity or sorority by serving in official and informal leadership roles. The participants describe ways in which they work to cultivate the existing culture of their organizations as well as lead change within it. The findings suggest the participants build relationships with younger members with the intention of ensuring their organization continues on a course guided by its values. In addition, the process described by the participants in which older members identify younger members for leadership in the chapter suggest an underlying assumption that leadership and involvement is important and fraternity/sorority leaders should be engaged on campus.

Understanding college student development.

The concept of self authorship, “the capacity to author, or invent, one’s own beliefs, values, sense of self, and relationships with others” (Baxter Magolda, 2002, p. 3), undergirds my perspective on college student development. As becoming self-authored is not a solitary pursuit, I sought to make a connection to the process of becoming the author of one’s life and fraternity/sorority membership through the theoretical framework.

At the outset of this study, I considered self-authorship as a theoretical tool because I believed the difficult and challenging leadership situations faced by fraternity/sorority leaders could serve as provocative or marginalizing moments that would propel the participants toward self-authorship. For the participants, challenges arise from taking a stance on unethical or illegal behaviors, leading their organization through a period of reconstruction, or simply through the difficulty of leading one’s peers. The findings of this study suggest fraternities and sororities
provide a context in which the participants encounter challenges that could prompt development of self-authorship in college. However, overall the fraternity/sorority environment provides substantially more support than challenge thereby inhibiting self-authorship for the participants.

In addition, self-authorship requires opportunities for critical reflection on the shared learning experiences between individuals. However, the concept of reflection is incongruent with the fast-paced lifestyle of the participants. Ideally, fraternal organizations provide a venue for reflection for students, however, the participants’ reliance on mentors and advisors for guidance and direction creates a peer environment in which they flounder and lack meaningful reflection. For many of the participants, the interview conducted as part of this study, became a unique site of reflection and meaning making. I consider their willingness to dialogue with me during the interview as a great privilege. Although most of the participants maintain relationships with adult mentors in college I believe they were eager to share and reflect with me as another interested adult because the majority of their reflection opportunities arise in their relationships with peers who offer a different level of skill in reflective ability than they have with adults in their life.

Overall, steps in the journey to becoming self-authored present themselves to student leaders in fraternities and sororities. However, the participants wholeheartedly subscribe to the messages about leadership, values, behavior, and priorities derived from the culture in fraternities and sororities, therefore, opportunities for critical self-reflection are underutilized or overlooked completely. Fraternity and sorority students develop in important and identifiable ways, however, with regard to self-authorship; membership inhibits the participants’ development. After college and outside of acculturating organizations advised and guided by
adults, the participants will unavoidably engage in the important work of becoming the author of their own life.

**Understanding leadership identity development.**

Historically, scholars define leadership as a set of inborn or developed traits, skills and abilities (Northouse, 2007). However, emerging perspectives contend that leadership is a process of engagement between people described as relational leadership (Komives, et al., 1998). Viewing leadership as a relational process allowed me to identify the ‘type’ of fraternity/sorority leaders to include in this study.

While the literature describing leadership characteristics, attributes, and practices is vast, little is known about the process of developing an identity as a leader, particularly for college students. Komives et al. (2006) describe developmental and group influences that contribute to the development of an identity as a leader. The resulting leadership identity development (LID) model forms the third element of my theoretical framework and guides my discussion in this section. As organizational kids, the participants engage in the social construction of leadership in ways that may advantage as well as limit them. Viewing the development of an identity as a leader through the conceptual lens of organizational culture highlights the symbiotic relationship between organizations that need leaders and college students who desire to lead.

The findings suggest fraternity and sorority membership fosters the process described in the six-stage LID process (Komives, et al., 2006). This process is influenced by adults, peers, meaningful involvement and reflective learning. As students develop through the first three stages, they are aware leaders exist, explore and engage in groups, and believe there are leaders and followers. In the stages four and five, students realize leadership is a process between people in which anyone can lead, and that the role of leaders is to not only lead, but to empower the
next generation of leaders in their organization. Finally, in stage six, students develop a fully integrated identity as a confident and values congruent leader.

The participants describe the role important adults and peer mentors play in helping them progress through each stage, a specific finding consistent with Komives et al.’s (2005) conclusions. Like many Millennials, the participants sought similar relationships with adults in the form of organization advisors. They connect deeply and invest heavily in relationships with their peers. All of these elements are crucial to the leadership identity development process (Komives, et al., 2005).

The most important finding of this study is that membership within a fraternity or sorority provides considerable leadership identity development opportunities. Without exception the participants in this study reflect positively on their membership experiences and describe ways in which their fraternity/sorority facilitated meaningful involvement. The participants find easy access to engage in groups, hold an official leadership position, learn from their membership development program and from older members or advisors, later become the sage teachers of others, and grow in their understanding of group dynamics and organizational culture. Membership in a fraternity or sorority also provides the participants with informal opportunities for self-development and reflective learning with peers. Participants describe all of these experiences as opportunities that helped them grow in self-confidence, enhance their skills, motivate others, and develop interpersonal relationships.

*Developing a leadership identity within a fraternity or sorority.*

The participants describe their development as a leader in a way that resonates closely with the leadership identity development (LID) model (Komives, et al., 2006). The context of fraternity/sorority membership shapes the participants’ progression through the stages through relationships they build and maintain. Although the majority of the participants were very
involved as members and leaders in high school, leadership is based on the context (Wheatley, 1992) and for the participants, the leadership life cycle and process toward a leadership identity began anew upon starting college.

When the participants first joined their chapter, they were once again aware that others were leaders, particularly the older members of their chapter, and they explored and engaged in other organizations or small leadership roles within their own chapter. A supportive membership experience, coupled with the encouragement of peers, provided the initial propulsion the participants in this study needed to engage in leadership. Many participants describe the push from peers into entry-level leadership roles, later realizing they could be successful as a leader. In these entry level roles, the participants describe stages three (leader identified) and four of (leadership differentiated) the LID, realizing that leaders and followers engage in process together to accomplish the goals of an organization.

The participants in this study exemplify stages five (generativity) and six (integration and synthesis) of the leadership identity development model in several ways. In these stages of the LID model, many participants lead congruent with their values and realize their role as a leader is to cultivate relationships, empower others to lead, and recognize how their organization relates to other groups in the larger community. The themes illustrated in chapter four and five depict how the participants no longer only ‘receive’ leadership responsibility; they also extend opportunities to lead to younger members of their organization. Marshalling others into leadership occurs efficiently through the hierarchy and structure in fraternal organizations when new members are identified for small leadership roles and developed by the participants who practice leadership with the stage five mentality of generativity. Finally, the participants humbly describe their roles, skills, and abilities and maintain a fully integrated and synthesized
view of themselves as leaders, consistent with stage six (integration and synthesis) depicted in the leadership identity development model. They are confident and comfortable with their leadership no matter the role.

The leadership identity development process seemingly occurs in all types of fraternal organizations. The participants who are members of small, culturally based fraternal organizations, describe the same process of being identified as a leader by older members of the group, earnestly learning the ropes in their organization, and later empowering others to do likewise, as do members of large fraternal organizations. However, two differences are worth mentioning. First, in smaller organizations, the relational leadership as a process functions very well, and secondly, the leaders in these groups stay engaged in the process of relational leadership until graduation. However, in larger organizations, there are more members to participate in leadership, but not all members aspire to lead. The participants receive encouragement from older members upon joining their chapters that prompts the first step in their leadership journey. Subsequently, the participants utilized opportunities placed before them to take full advantage of all that membership in their organization could provide. However, in large fraternal organizations, not all new members that aspire to lead are identified and they face disillusionment or disengage altogether.

Contrary to Alsop’s (2008) claim that Millennials do not excel at leadership, the participants in this study seemingly tap into the resources available to them through organizational memberships and earnestly work to develop as a student and as a leader. These student leaders realize within relationships they will reach their leadership potential and several specifically joined a fraternity or sorority with the intention of leading.

Within fraternities and sororities, unique attributes of each organization and the web of relationships within, suggest slight variations to the leadership identity development model
pertain to fraternity and sorority members. Recall in chapters four and five, the themes point to pronounced influences of peers, hierarchy and structure, and the role of organizational values in the leadership identity development of the participants. The findings from my study suggest more importance on these influences is relevant to fraternity/sorority leaders than the students in Komives’ study.

Overall, the findings of the present study suggest fraternity and sorority leaders’ development parallels the leadership identity development process advanced by Komives et al. (2005). There could be several alternate explanations for this similarity, including the influence of institution type, relatively homogeneous participants, and the overarching influence of generational membership.

Summary of the Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework effectively guides my thinking as I consider the role of fraternity and sorority membership on leadership identity development among college students. As members of highly structured, well-established, organizations, the participants navigate the levels of culture and develop as students in various ways.

The original aim of this study was simply to examine the leadership identity development process for fraternity and sorority student leaders through the lens of the leadership identity development model. The analysis of themes and findings lend additional credibility to the model and provide specific additional influences experienced by fraternity and sorority student leaders that include genuine and encouraging relationships with peers, the structured nature of fraternal organizations, and the importance of leading congruent to values. The leadership experiences available to students in fraternities and sororities provide fertile ground for the participants to explore campus organizations, engage in leadership, cultivate the next generation of leaders, and develop an identity as a mature, confident leader.
The analysis of data also points to findings that are the result of looking more deeply and critically at the data. From the participants’ perspective, membership in a fraternity or sorority has had a major impact on their development. However, when I further examine the findings, I grapple with what is missing and how the culture of fraternal organizations shapes who belongs, who leads, and who is successful.

The participants describe how they must participate in the construction of the culture in order to belong. Being savvy members of organizations and consumers of the benefits therein develops interpersonal connections that place fraternity and sorority members at an advantage in society. In the fraternity/sorority ‘world’, few degrees of separation exist between members and alumni. This interconnectedness bars non-members of fraternities and sororities and perpetuates the cycle of exclusion. Even in the best circumstances, when exclusion is not advanced intentionally because of race, gender, or class, outsiders often experience rejection.

At a macro level, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) suggest membership groups can mediate institutional level influences and that interpersonal interactions are a primary contributor to overall development in college. I further contend as membership groups with entrenched cultures, fraternities and sororities share a set of norms developed over time through interpersonal interactions that specifically mediate the effects of other aspects of identity development as well. So strong are the processes of enculturation into a fraternity or sorority, that indeed, the participants describe experiences that suggest being a member of a fraternal organization becomes a prevailing portion of their identity, perhaps equal to race, gender, and class. In the next section, I discuss additional considerations derived from critical analysis of the data.
Additional considerations.

The findings of this study suggest two areas in need of additional consideration. First, the leadership identity development model is predicated on the emerging relational leadership perspective. At the outset of this study, based on professional observation and review of the literature, I expected to find relational leadership processes to be the norm among fraternal organizations. The findings suggest otherwise. Second, the emerging leadership identity development theory comes from grounded theory research conducted with a limited demographic of students on a single campus. As leadership identity does not develop in a vacuum, it is important to examine the confluence of race, gender, socioeconomic background and unique to this study, type of fraternal organization, on the participants’ development.

My discussion in this section focuses on two arenas that require additional consideration: 1) the relevance of relational leadership theory to practice in fraternal organizations, and 2) the influence of identity factors such as race, gender, socioeconomic background, and size/type of fraternal organization on leadership identity development for fraternity/sorority students.

Relational leadership and fraternal organizations.

The findings in this study suggest that while the participants indeed perform and value relational leadership, practicing leadership from this perspective suits organizations smaller than most of the fraternities and sororities represented in this study. The participants describe chapter members’ levels of interest in participatory leadership as varied. Therefore the notion that relational leadership processes involve all members of large organization is unrealistic. In addition, the opportunity to lead (typically through positions of power) in large fraternal organizations avails itself through an election process closely wed to the ability to build positive relationships with others.
My professional observation cynically fosters the perspective that fraternities and sororities permit different levels of participation. However, these levels are not always chosen by members based on individual interest or with the intention to add value to their college experience, for personal connection, or to improve skills. Rather, expectations regarding different levels of participation often relate to seniority or status within the organization. The newest members face expectations from older members to commit much of their time and energy toward the activities of the chapter without question. Their opinions and contributions to potential change in the organization are not expected and at times impermissible. The group expects older members of the organization to lead the organization from their experience and with the good of the group in mind. Ironically, in many organizations, sophomores and juniors are in these roles, sandwiched by freshmen whose opinion is less valued, and by seniors who, because of their experienced status, believe they are not responsible for following the leadership of younger officers.

Relational leadership asserts as members gain their own insights from discussions and observations all members should be engaged to put those insights to good use, regardless of status within a chapter. The participants appreciate and value the idea of relational leadership and suggest it is the role of leaders to empower others to lead as well. Nonetheless, relational leadership exists at the margins of most fraternal organizations and occasionally in well-developed leadership councils that receive voluminous input and involvement from skilled advisors and mentors. The majority of the participants served on chapter officer councils or in Greek community umbrella organizations in which such advising exists.

Additional identity influences and fraternity and sorority leaders.

While a great deal of research exists that examines the identity development of various college student populations, few scholars have studied the influences of gender, class, and race
specifically as relates to the leadership identity development process described by Komives et al.'s (2005) grounded theory study. Their research did not address issues of race, gender and class, and subsequently the LID model receives criticism. My research did not focus on these issues as a central focus of analysis, but I do grapple with these dimensions of identity in my findings.

Previous research shows that the identity constructs associated with race, gender, and class shape what it means to be a college student and leader (and how followers respond to leaders). In addition, some research suggests what it means to operate in an organization, especially fraternal organizations that have historically been the enclave of the white, the masculine, and the upper class (Syrett, 2009). With the knowledge that race, class, and gender influences overall student development, and presumably leadership identity as well, I paid careful attention to the participant make up in this study to address possible omissions in the participant group. In addition, given my assertion that the culture of organizations shapes leadership, it is necessary to analyze how race, class, and gender also shape the leadership experience.

The findings of the study suggest membership in a fraternal organization creates a homogenizing effect on the participants. In other words, the experiences the participants describe and the influences of their organization on their development are similar despite other aspects of their identity. Nonetheless, it is important to examine class, gender, race, and size/type of organization as some differences arise in these areas. First, the participants are largely privileged with supportive parents who possess the necessary financial means to provide involvement opportunities for their children. Second, the participants develop and reproduce gendered perspectives on leadership. Third, although fraternities and sororities no longer maintain segregation policies, the membership of most fraternal organizations comprise one
primary racial group. Finally, it is important to note and discuss the residential nature and large chapter size of most of the participants’ organizations compared to the much smaller, non-residential chapters of a few participants as this issue is historically tied to race and socioeconomic status. These aspects of identity development warrant my consideration, even if there is not enough data from this study to conduct deep analysis.

*Socioeconomic considerations.*

The data suggest that the fraternities and sororities in my study are open with regard to allowing anyone who wants to participate the opportunity to lead. The majority of the participants describe their responsibility as an experienced leader to find a place for younger members to be involved and develop as a leader. They realize the importance of empowering the next generation of students in their organizations. The findings also suggest lifelong involvement in organizations has groomed the participants to seek fraternity or sorority membership. Many of the leadership organizations these students have been involved in throughout their life inherently require parent involvement (e.g., you need parents to take you to Boy Scout meetings when you are a child) and financial means (e.g. fees are associated with participation in sports and other organizations).

Similar expectations about resource availability undergird fraternal organizations. There are costs associated with joining a fraternity or sorority, students come back to school early in the fall (reducing time spent at summer jobs), and there is continued parent involvement (through parent weekends and parents’ clubs). Many of the participants come from two parent households, multi-generation college educated families, and a have history of involvement in organizations. Because of their socioeconomic background, the participants have had opportunities to experience organizations and leadership in ways that other college students with fewer resources and less parental support do not.
The participants hail from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds, and although fraternities and sororities are more accessible and affordable than they once were, many participants describe socioeconomic status as one area of ‘diversity’ within their chapters. Nonetheless, this aspect of their identity apparently matters little to the participants in the study with respect to leadership in college, they believe anyone can lead. Although pre-college involvement opportunities varied for the participants (presumably based on interest level and accessibility), what seemingly matters most for the participants in college as it relates to the leadership identity development process, is the ability to build relationships within their fraternal organizations.

**Gender.**

The participants’ sense of belonging, attitudes, and values associated with their gender came up during the interview conversation, but we only scratched the surface of gender in leadership. The participants in this study largely define themselves through their relationships with others, particularly their fraternity/sorority peers. This finding supports the notion that lifelong organizational memberships, common to the participants in this study and most Millennials, further cultivate the historically female-oriented value of interconnectedness process-orientation, and ethos of care and concern. The feminine approach transforms leaders into facilitators and devalues dominance or power in leadership (Eagly & Johnson, 1991; Gilligan, 1982). Consistent with the scholarship related to women in leadership, the sorority participants describe democratic leadership processes grounded in a strong interpersonal approach with their peers.

When asked, many of the participants initially suggest the role of gender in their leadership is minimal or non-existent, but the majority of students provide examples that indicate they subscribe to widely held gendered notions of leadership. The women in the study
emphasize the importance of interconnectivity, relationship building, and intimacy within a team of leaders. In them, I hear an ethos of care and concern as part of leadership; it is clear they feel a sense of responsibility to for other people.

As members of exclusively women’s organizations, the sorority participants find opportunities to grow and strengthen their leadership and generally feel each member of the team is doing her part. Concurrently, the women in this study air frustration with the lack of cohesiveness they experience on co-ed teams. They describe their roles as the organizer of the team, a harmonizer in relationships, and the leader that must follow up with others to ensure the “work is getting done.” Through their voices, I recognize divisions of labor in leadership that fall into traditional gender roles; they believe women are the safety net for men at home, in the work environment, on teams, and in the Greek community.

Conversely, the male participants define leadership by describing aspects of ‘the great man theory’, the notion that highly influential men who, due to their personal charisma, intelligence, or wisdom, utilize their power and lead decisively. A few of the fraternity participants specifically suggest physical attributes matter in leadership. Several of them provide examples of communication and interactions within leadership that are oriented toward justice and independence. In addition, many of the male participants describe men’s leadership as essentially, calm, cool, and collected, and women in leadership as “stressed out” and “overreacting to things.” Like many members of the Millennial generation, the fraternity participants in this study experience relationships within organizations and many of them describe the close nature of their friendships with other men and women. They describe many traditionally feminine leadership practices such as cohesiveness and democratic decision making learned through teams and organizations, but default to identify leaders as assertive, task-oriented men with certain characteristics or physical traits. Although the fraternity participants
experience an orientation toward relationships through organizations, their notions of leading do not surpass long held views of masculine leadership.

While gender is not a specific focus of this study, aspects of traditional gender roles come to light through the analysis of the findings. My curiosity is piqued in this regard, as Komives, et al. (1998) suggest leadership is a process of inclusivity and relationship building, a typically feminine orientation toward organizations. Millennial generation value relationships and inclusivity, however the hegemonic expectations of leadership within fraternities or sororities may limit progress through the leadership identity development stages. The fraternity participants are more accepting of the hierarchy in their organizations, and therefore less effectively progress through the relationally oriented processes in the leadership identity development model.

In the security of their own organization, the politics of gender play a lesser role and each participant freely expresses their leadership as a developing student. Accordingly, although the participants grow and develop as leaders through membership in their fraternity or sorority, many of them are inexperienced in cross-gender leadership.

**Race/ethnicity.**

The history of fraternities is one of exclusivity; these organizations began during a time when elite, white Christian men comprised the college student body (Syrett, 2009). Today, all types of fraternities and sororities have foregone racial and religious discrimination policies; nonetheless, race remains a visible and functional category of fraternities and sororities.

As Antonio (2004) suggests, there is “messiness” in discussing, studying, and understanding diversity. Some research suggests students of color experience greater developmental gains than white students through interracial friendships (Antonio, 2001), while others contend college students self-segregate along racial lines despite efforts of institutions
that encourage otherwise (Hurtado, Dey, & Trevino, 1994). Fox (1987) acknowledges controversy within the African American community regarding whether Black students benefit most by joining historically African American fraternities/sororities or find a route to greater advancement through membership in a historically white fraternity/sorority.

Indeed, this is a “messy” discussion, as all conversations about race tend to be especially in predominantly white campus environments. All of the participants in this study describe joining their fraternal organization with similar intentions, to build relationships, lead, and give back to the community. For several of the participants, the community is defined as their racial or ethnic group, for others, their chapter or the campus as a whole. For each of the participants, little dialogue about their race or ethnicity developed through the interview.

While the data does not lend itself to substantial discussion regarding the differences between the fraternity/sorority experience of the students of color who are members of small, multicultural chapters and the participants who are members of large residential (historically white) fraternal organizations, I grapple with some noteworthy issues. Membership in large fraternities and sororities inherently privileges certain students and not others. These large organizations, historically the place for white, Christian, upper class men to convene, network, and later obtain power in society, remain vestiges of privilege and entitlement in society. In addition, most of the participants, experience few opportunities to interrogate their whiteness as a member of a large, homogeneous chapter on a predominantly white campus. Conversely, members of small, historically African American or Latina/o fraternal organizations possess fewer human and financial resources, a trend for students of color on many predominantly white campuses rooted in historic manifestations of segregation.

Untangling the intersection of race and class for the participants is more than can be done in this study. The abundance of research about the influence of race and ethnicity on
student development suggests students of color and white students experience organizations and their processes differently (e.g. experience with leadership, mentors, etc). Finally, the intersection of race and class has historical connotations and modern manifestations evidenced by the size and type of fraternities and sororities.

**Size and type of organization.**

The participants in this study represent the largest and most recognizable types of social fraternities and sororities; all of the residential sororities fall under the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) umbrella, while the residential fraternities, are part of the North-American Interfraternity Conference (NIC). These two large umbrella organizations comprise more than 100 fraternities and sororities often described as historically white fraternal organizations. These organizations maintain large memberships of more than 60 men/women on each of the respective campuses in my study. The participants from historically culturally-based fraternities/sororities (i.e. African American and Latino/a) average chapter memberships of less than twenty members, do not operate chapter houses, and fall under the umbrella organizations of the National Pan-Hellenic Conference (NPHC) and the National Association of Latino/a Fraternal Organizations (NALFO).

For most of the participants, the opportunity to live with fraternity brothers or sorority sisters, particularly in a chapter house, contributes to their learning, values, meaning making, and perspectives. However, not all of the participants’ fraternity or sorority experiences include large groups and chapter houses. Managing large residential facilities requires financial resources only possible with large memberships and the history and tradition to provide stability and grounding on a college campus. In other words, most of NIC fraternities and NPC sororities were established on campuses, and subsequently built mansion-like chapter houses.
before the civil rights movement when fraternities and sororities were exclusively available to
upper class, white, Christian college students.

Even today in the post-civil rights era, historic differences in size and purpose between
various types of fraternities and sororities define modern practices and processes as well as
shape the culture and context of the experience for the participants. The composition of the
fraternal organizations in this study mirrors the campus’ demographics. Nevertheless, the
participants describe intentionality in their choice of fraternal organization type. Some enter
membership with the desire to give back to their community; particularly the participants who
joined culturally based fraternal organizations. Other participants joined (historically white)
organizations to make friends, “find a home”, and find opportunities to lead.

What matters to the participants is simple; fraternity or sorority membership provides a
place for them that foster opportunities to belong, get involved, and to lead. Fraternity or
sorority membership offers these opportunities regardless of gender, race, class or
socioeconomic status. However, within fraternity/sorority membership, students participate in
some degree of self-segregating particularly with respect to race and gender.

Summarizing the Study through the Research Questions

As a means of bringing this study full circle and honoring the original purpose of the
inquiry, I summarize this chapter by recalling the research questions. To understand the
contribution of fraternity or sorority membership in developing students, particularly with
regard to an identity as a leader, the following research questions guided and now help
summarize the study:

1) How does the cultural milieu of fraternities and sororities shape the leadership
identity development of undergraduate members?
2) How are enculturation processes and fraternity/sorority membership utilized by students to develop an identity as a leader?

3) What processes help students to create meaning from their fraternity or sorority experience?

Research question 1.

The first research question seeks to understand the culture within fraternities and sororities and the role it plays in shaping students. Specifically, how does the cultural milieu of fraternities and sororities shape the leadership identity development of undergraduate members?

Throughout this study, I depict fraternities and sororities as highly relational, well-established, structured organizations imbued with clearly defined and practiced cultures. Fraternal organizations provide enhancing opportunities for leadership, but may inhibit development toward self authorship. The findings suggest aspects of fraternity and sorority culture reproduce leadership opportunities for the participants through the artifacts, values and underlying assumptions of the organization, however not all students who desire to lead have the opportunity to do so. Those students chosen for leadership enter the leadership cycle of life and seemingly experience greater benefit from their fraternity/sorority membership than other students. Finally, many of the participants, like other Millennials, subscribe to the values and practices of their fraternal organization with little scrutiny or reflection. The long-term impact of wholesale adoption of an organization’s culture limits students’ ability to ensure they develop as an autonomous but interdependent adult.
Research question 2.

The second research question seeks to understand how the participants utilize their fraternity or sorority experience to develop as a leader. Specifically, how are enculturation processes of fraternity or sorority membership utilized by students to develop an identity as a leader?

The participants in this study are organizational kids who were involved in community groups or structured teams before college. Supporting the notion that leadership is socially constructed, the participants engage in their fraternal organizations and quickly realize the importance of the relational component needed to become involved in leadership. As they describe their first leadership experiences in the chapter or on campus, it is clear the participants developed quickly and soon exemplified the latter stages of the leadership identity development model. The participants each describe leadership as the opportunity and responsibility of all group members, a sentiment consistent with the relational leadership model.

The findings in this study suggest Komives et al. (2006) model is consistent with the process of leadership identity development cultivated within fraternity and sorority membership. The influences of relationships and the structure within fraternal organizations propel college students through these stages in ways and a rate less likely to occur in other student organizations. Fraternity and sorority students reside in a full immersion leadership environment whereby opportunities to engage, explore, follow, lead and empower others are readily available, encouraged, and developed.

Research question 3.

The final research question considers the meaning that fraternity and sorority students create from their experiences in fraternal organizations. Specifically, what processes help students to create meaning from of their fraternal experience?
For the participants in this study, meaning is created within their fraternity or sorority as they reflect and learn from their experiences. Through leadership opportunities, the participants encounter situations in their organizations that encourage them to engage in a process of soul-searching, self-reflection, and redefining relationships. Instead of accepting peers as the definitive authority, the participants chose opportunities to take perspectives that that sometimes are at odds with those of their peers and learn to reconcile opposing or contradictory viewpoints.

The result of this process for the participants is they are able to create, manipulate, and construct their values, beliefs, and feelings instead of being determined by them. Their ability to author their own identity increases. This capacity to rely on one’s own ideas and feelings instead of those of others would seem to be one result of the capacity for self-authorship, in which one’s values are determined and manipulated within oneself rather than being a co-construction of peers’ ideas and input. Several participants describe challenging situations they encountered as leaders and how the process of “going it alone” provides a site of learning and growth for them.

In addition, the role and function of the organization’s ritual (the ceremony that reveals the meaning and values of the organization) in guiding students as they develop through college is important to the participants. Although the ritual’s values prescriptively guide the participants, several of them cite examples of the impact of their organization’s ritual on them at a deep and spiritual level. The participants’ description of the meaning the ritual assumes in their life supports the notion that the values of fraternal organizations provide the participants with a framework to ground their own adult values and a launching point for making meaning of their experiences.
Summary

Collectively, the findings point to many positive influences, developmental opportunities, and challenges available for leaders in fraternal organizations. The culture within fraternities and sororities is attractive to the participants as Millennial students and organizational kids. They are accustomed to leadership and team membership, hence fraternal organizations provide the structure, traditions, values, and purpose many of them deem important and that feels familiar. The participants value the ability to continue pre-college activities, involvement and leadership through membership in an organization that affords opportunities for meaningful relationships with others and provides a place to practice leadership.

Through the socialization processes inherent in fraternities and sororities new students are invited into membership, encouraged to get involved, praised for their successes, and challenged in their growth areas. The participants in this study thrive in this environment and consider membership a vehicle for making the most of their college experience. Through circumstances that challenge their values and resolve, the participants describe ways they believe their leadership roles prompted growth and development. However, a lifetime of involvement in organizations may limit the ability to become self-authored for the participants in this study.

In the final chapter, I turn my attention to overall conclusions and recommendations based on the examination and analysis of the findings. While this study provides explanations and answers for some of my professional ponderings, I am left with additional questions about the role of fraternity and sorority membership in the development of college students. Therefore, I call for areas of further study and delineate implications for practice in the next chapter.
Chapter 7

Conclusions and Recommendations for Research and Practice

Developing an identity as a leader is a highly nuanced endeavor, one that is not a simple cause and effect proposition. The present study joins with few others that examine the process of leadership identity development among college students and is perhaps the only one that considers and identifies the influence of fraternity/sorority membership on this process. The influence and implications of environment (family of origin and organizational membership in college), gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and psychosocial development convolute the influence of any one factor over another. The literature sets the stage to understand key aspects of growth in college students. Foundational theories of student development frame my perspectives on identity formation and specifically leadership identity development among fraternity and sorority leaders. Nonetheless, the complexity of representing this data lies in the ability to share it in a manner that is easy to understand and yet contributes to the scholarly discourse.

Overall Summary and Conclusions

Engagement in highly organized activities over the collegiate lifespan seems to influence the overall growth, learning, and development of students engaged in those activities. In particular, engagement in ongoing and organized memberships such as fraternities and sororities impact students in profound ways less likely to be experienced by other college students (The Center for Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2009). Based on my overall findings, I contend the structure of fraternities and sororities contributes to relationship building, critical thinking, communication, self-awareness, and overall leadership development that the participants value and appreciate.
As organizational kids, the fraternity and sorority participants in this study gravitate toward group participation and the intergenerational relationships that result. Important adults, such as parents, coaches, teachers, and mentors, as well as their peers, provide a network of support that contributes holistically to student development as well as leadership identity cultivation.

The participants in this study arrive with a clear sense of their own core values and how their values direct their leadership. These values, not surprisingly, are often derived from the influences of their family of origin and the structured opportunities in which they were involved as a youth. Community and service organizations such as the Boy Scouts and organized religion provide a strong foundation from which to continue building confidence in their own values. Although several of the participants describe experiences in which they are disappointed by the lack of values congruence among some of their chapter members, the majority live and lead in a manner congruent to their own values. For many, the ritual of the fraternity or sorority served as a guidepost for development of additional values or validation of their existing beliefs. The majority of the participants describe ways in which their chapter or the overall fraternity/sorority community supports or even cultivates their values, rather than detract from them.

Fraternity and sorority leaders utilize the well-established and expected structures within their organizations to advance in leadership. Leading within a pragmatically structured organization contributes to unique perspectives on leadership such as; the participation of everyone is important, values congruence should guide decision-making, and that leaders must exhibit a passion for their role and understand the purpose of the organization. These perspectives resonate with Millennial generation scholarship (Howe & Strauss, 2001) in some
ways, and differ in others. I attribute many of the differences to the influence of fraternity or sorority membership.

The Millennial students in this study overwhelmingly believe their fraternal organization membership fosters the most important aspects of their development in college, particularly as a leader. The participants cite examples of mentoring relationships with campus professionals, volunteers, and their peers that strengthen and define their leadership.

Finding that meaningful involvement as a fraternity or sorority member contributes to student development is not unique (Center for Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2009; Hayek, et al., 2002). However, this study adds to the knowledge community by demonstrating the full immersion environment within fraternal organization membership contributes to students’ development of an identity as a leader in specific ways consistent with the leadership identity development model (Komives, et al., 2005). Like the Komives et al. (2005) work, this study provides greater understanding of a specific demographic of college students’ leadership identity development.

Through this study, I realize the number of questions about fraternity and sorority membership far outweighs the answers found in research. Although fraternity and sorority students comprise significant percentages of the undergraduate population on many college campuses, limited scholarship regarding the fraternity and sorority leadership experience exists. Recognizing I could focus a lifelong research agenda on this population of students employing different theoretical frameworks and perspectives, I define several areas for future research.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Overall, the academic discourse associated with fraternities and sororities is limited in its nature, scope, and depth. As a result, it is important to call upon the academy to broaden the research agenda in specific ways. Without a significant expansion of research, student affairs
professionals working with fraternities and sororities possess inadequate information to ground their work and their ability to guide fraternal organizations in a positive direction is limited.

Although much of the literature primarily paints the broad picture of the existence, role and function of fraternities and sororities as a problem in higher education, there exists a positive message about student engagement, service, moral development and greater alumni engagement associated with fraternal organization experiences. Through Gruenewald (2004), Foucault (1988) reminds us that “all discourse, practices, and traditions, especially as they are embedded in institutions, must constantly be open to critique” (pp. 154-55). Foucault (1988) said, “a critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest...the work of deep transformation can only be carried out in a free atmosphere, one constantly agitated by a permanent criticism” (pp. 154-55).

The findings of this study suggest the experience of today’s fraternity and sorority leaders is dramatically different than that transmitted by the dominant discourse, that which is portrayed in popular films and television programs and sometimes advanced by the academy. Additionally, despite the promising results of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) when applied to fraternity and sorority students, and the University Learning Outcomes Assessment (UniLOA) National Report of Means that suggest the impact of fraternity and sorority affiliation on college students is beneficial and enduring, the dominant discourse remains firmly lodged in the American psyche and within higher education.

Therefore, systematic examination of the educational experience of fraternity and sorority members is warranted (Dungy, 1999). Higher education needs research that addresses the negative aspects of fraternity and sorority membership, accentuates, and expands the
understanding of positive influences of fraternity or sorority affiliation (Molasso, 2005). I advance and describe several areas for further research in this section; leadership development, relationships and student development, communities of practice, residential learning communities, retention and graduation, academic performance, values-based organizations, spiritual development, and the influence of gendered student organizations on the development of members. My recommendations for future research follow.

**Leadership development.**

The preponderance of existing research on the subject of leadership focuses on the development of skills or inherited attributes and not the leader as a developing person. Fraternities and sororities assert a primary focus of membership as the development of leaders (Beta Theta Pi, 2010; Pi Beta Phi, 2010). Some research supports this claim (Center for Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2009; Harms, et al, 2006) but understandings of the impact of fraternal organizations on leadership development is largely anecdotal.

Komives et al.’s (2005, 2006) research provides a compelling place to commence the present study to examine the impact of membership on the leadership identity development for fraternity and sorority students. Considering the expanse of scholarship that exists expounding upon understandings of leadership traits, characteristics, dynamics, and skill development, the overwhelming lack of literature regarding the process of developing a leadership identity is noteworthy. Further research with fraternity and sorority students using this model is warranted. In addition, implications exist for use of the leadership identity development (LID) model with other student populations.

Studies conducted with college alumni provide valuable reflective information regarding fraternity and sorority membership and leadership. For example, Kelly (2008) examined the influence of serving as a fraternity chapter president ten years after college and found significant
reflective meaning making occurred for his participants. Additional studies that examine the influence of serving in specific leadership roles within student organizations, particularly in fraternities and sororities, could center on the continuing leadership identity development process for young alumni.

**Relationships and student development.**

For nearly two centuries, fraternities and sororities have provided a place for fellowship and genuine relationships to form and within each organization, student development and identity are conceivably shaped. However, examining the potential for “development, critical thinking, and decision-making based on personal and organizational values is an area in dire need of research” (Bureau, 2007). Ethnographic studies, particularly by researchers with time and access, could examine issues of pluralism such as diverse views on religion, inclusion of different ethnicities and attention to sexual orientation and identity. These areas of study offer unexplored territory for research on fraternal organization membership.

Finally, as I contend, fraternity/sorority leaders may have diminished capacity for self-authorship due to the over abundant organizational memberships they enjoy. Studying these students through their twenties, could provide useful insight into the longitudinal perspectives of fraternity/sorority membership on the ability to become the author of one’s life.

**Communities of practice.**

Lave and Wenger (1998) have advanced the idea that a community of practice is a group of individuals participating in communal activity, and experiencing and continuously creating their shared identity through engaging in and contributing to the practices of their communities. Communicating with others in a community of practice involves creating social presence. In the early stages of conceptualizing this project, I considered the theoretical application of community of practice scholarship to fraternities and sororities. Some research
suggests that fraternities and sororities provide solid ground for learning through active participation in the practices of social communities, and in the construction of student identity through these communities (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Literature regarding communities of practices is widely applied in the business arena. Further research is merited regarding how fraternity and sorority experiences could be cultivated as communities of practice and the processes required for acquiring social presence, such that a college student would seek out a fraternity or sorority and later engage in leadership within the organization.

Residential learning communities.

The residential nature of fraternities and sororities on many campuses has significantly influenced not only the experience of the resident members, but shaped the culture of the campus as a whole. A residential community can facilitate a community of practice, and at its best, it is a vibrant hub of academic, social, philanthropic and mentoring activity. The literature is overwhelmingly supportive of living learning communities as a positive influence on student learning and engagement (Kester Pomerantz, 2006). Hayek, et al. (2002) found “the overall favorable Greek engagement effect generally applied to all segments of the Greek membership—men and women, [freshmen and seniors], and to a lesser extent those who lived in the fraternity or sorority house or elsewhere” (p. 657). Hayek’s finding that students who lived in a fraternity or sorority house experienced less growth is surprising in light of other scholarship about residential learning communities. Residential fraternities and sororities obviously provide a living environment; yet, there is a lack of documented intentionality for the learning component in the fraternity and sorority environment that would be essential for optimal student engagement and relationship building (Blackburn, & Janosik, 2009). I call for further research that specifically examines the residential learning environment of fraternal organizations.
Retention and graduation rates.

Institutional data and other studies (Tinto, 1988; Washington State University, 2008) confirm that fraternity and sorority students are more like to persist in college and ultimately attain a college degree. Fraternity and sorority alumni comprise the most involved in members of alumni organizations and are generous donors to colleges and universities (National Panhellenic Conference, 2001). These engaged, loyal students and alumni are at the heart of the ‘campus spirit’ and have fostered that sense for generations (Sperber, 2000). While campus-specific data exists, collection and analysis of additional representative data should be part of the future research agenda.

Academic performance.

More than 50 percent of campuses across the nation report the collective fraternity or sorority grade point average is consistently above the all campus grade point average (NIC, 2010). Updated research is needed to link fraternity and sorority affiliation to academic practices and performance as measured by grading indices. In addition, the academic success of fraternity and sorority students relative to living environment and timing of affiliation are important aspects of further study.

Values-based organizations.

Fraternity and sorority communities are responding and providing today’s Millennial generation student a values-based and value-added experience. Fraternities and sororities provide inter-generational mentoring and networking (both in life and career), an activity sought and embraced by Millennials (Twenge, 2006). As Anderson (2008) and Mathiasen (2005) contend, the potential for advanced moral development and the cultivation of inclusive communities in fraternities and sororities is readily accessible with additional research and subsequent practical applications.
Spiritual development.

Astin (2004) suggests addressing the spiritual development of college students is critical as “spirituality touches directly on our sense of community” (p. 8). The research of Webb and Mueller (2009) and Kuh and Gonyea (2006) is germane to further research as fraternal organizations are values-based, fundamentally Judeo-Christian, and can offer spiritual growth opportunities to students. Although the expression of religion is often a hotly debated topic at public universities, further analysis of the difference between fraternity/sorority students and non-member students in this arena would offer beneficial exploration and enhance the practice of student affairs professionals.

Student engagement.

Of central importance to the academy in the last decade is the issue of college student engagement in educationally effective practices. Hayek et al. (2002) concludes, “fraternity and sorority members appear to be equally or more engaged in academically challenging tasks, active learning, student-faculty interaction, community service, diversity, satisfaction, and on learning and personal development gains” (p. 643). Hayek et al.’s (2002) study was conducted in the early years of the NSSE data collection; therefore, updated data is needed to determine if this finding has remained consistent regarding impact of fraternity and sorority affiliation on student engagement. Many campuses possess several years of NSSE data that could offer a longitudinal examination of engagement. As campuses are currently dominated by Millennial generation students, a demographic of organizational kids, additional examination of NSSE data would provide valuable information that could further illuminate the fraternity and sorority experience as well as guide institutional practice.
Identity issues.

Like Komives et al. (2005), I refer to gender as an aspect of the participants’ self that led them to view leadership contexts differently; but I do not address gender as a specific influence in the leadership identity development process. Indeed, few studies using the Komives’ model as a part of the theoretical framework, consider gender as a defining characteristic. Onorato (2010) suggests gender plays a pivotal role in the leadership identity development of Hispanic female students. Renn and Bilodeau (2004) utilize the LID in their examination of the leadership identity development process for gay, lesbian, and transgender students. Research exploring the ways these and other components of identity, such as race, ability, and socioeconomic status, influence leadership identity development would supply rich data to the arena of understanding leadership identity development among college students.

Additional examination of the data from the present study through the lens of gender is warranted. Each of the participants in this study sought membership in a single-gender organization. As single-gendered organizations, fraternities and sororities arguably provide a unique learning environment and culture in modern society. In few other arenas, do single gender groups of college students lead together and in many cases reside together for the majority of their college experience. Still, while the participants in this study are members of single gender student organizations, understanding the role of gender in leadership identity development was not the focus of this project.

Certainly, many opportunities exist for further scholarly examination with respect to the experiences of fraternity and sorority students. Unfortunately, this particular arena of study is underdeveloped and the scholars most inclined toward research in this area are primarily student affairs practitioners with little preparation in academic endeavors such as research.
Implications for Practice

The findings and conclusions of the present study suggest several implications for practice. Fraternity and sorority life programs designed to contribute to student development serve students best when viewing the development of identity as a leader as part of an emerging overall identity. Augmenting student affairs practice in the areas of character building, leadership development, and providing intentionally focused institutional support for fraternities and sororities is critical. While the recommendations I present in this section are proposed resultant to this study, student affairs practitioners working within leadership development and/or fraternity and sorority life programs, as well as faculty teaching leadership in their curriculum, may utilize these recommendations.

Character building.

Student development is best accomplished when the whole student is considered and mentored. This necessitates entering into dialogue around the origins of the student leader’s values, how their values connect to their experiences in college, and how they can become values-congruent leaders, particularly within fraternities and sororities.

Student affairs practitioners must set aside their disposition toward political correctness and courageously, yet respectfully, discuss important issues such as spirituality, values development, and life’s purpose with college students. In my professional experience, many Millennial student members readily engage in these discussions and actually long for such dialogue.

Institutional Support.

Many institutions maintain a distant relationship with fraternities and sororities. This overt neglect of the potential that exists for enhancing student development is irresponsible in the very least. Rather than continue to marginalize fraternal organizations as a problem,
institutions of higher education should embrace their fraternity and sorority community as a place in which student development flourishes in many regards and greater retention of college students takes place. The findings in this study suggest institutional support for fraternities and sororities could be channeled into several key areas that impact the leadership of fraternities and sororities.

First, student affairs practitioners have focused programming attention and regulatory power on the problems in fraternal organizations over the last twenty years. Certainly, addressing alcohol abuse, sexual assault, hazing and academic performance is important, but it should not preclude focus on other aspects of fraternity or sorority membership. Fraternity and sorority students frenetically schedule programs, events, and activities, but neglect opportunities for reflection on learning experiences. We must specifically design programs that will foster and enhance reflection, critical thinking, develop leadership, foster self-authorship, and prepare Millennial students for life after college.

Second, institutions must focus on alumni of fraternities and sororities that serve in advising or management capacities to increase their awareness of the role they play in guiding Millennial students. As members of other generations, alumni are often unaware of Millennial students' need for building relationships with key adults. In addition, programs for alumni advisors that focus on building advising skills would benefit college students. Finally, colleges should give attention to intentionally structuring the residential living environment of many fraternal organizations as communities of practice or residential learning communities to provide Millennial students with enhanced opportunities for development.

Leadership Development.

Although fraternities and sororities are steeped in culture, tradition, hierarchy and structure, Millennials recognize the development of leadership as a relational process is
advantageous. Student affairs programs best serve Millennial students when the discourse rises to the level of incorporating values, purpose, and meaning making into the everyday notions of leadership. Programs that primarily engage fraternal organizations and individual leaders and members of them, as well as programs that facilitate leadership learning for the entire campus, each share this responsibility.

This implication for practice is connected to the previous two recommendations in that engaging alumni members of fraternities and sororities, and courageously fostering dialogue regarding character building, values, and even spirituality, is critical in truly cultivating leadership development for the fraternity/sorority sub-culture of students.

Conclusion.

Many research projects have endeavored to measure the net (negative) effects of fraternal organization membership, but few seek to understand the experiences of fraternity and sorority students. In addition, few other studies utilize the LID model to scaffold research on the process of developing an identity as a leader among college students. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of fraternity and sorority leaders attending four-year colleges with residential fraternity/sorority communities. The present study further aims to develop insight and in depth understanding regarding how fraternity and sorority leaders develop a leadership identity and the influence of their fraternity or sorority membership on that process.

Through data collected from semi-structured interviews with more than twenty experienced student leaders from three campuses, themes emerge that suggest five influences on the leadership identity development of fraternity and sorority leaders. The thematic influences include: 1) the importance of genuine and encouraging relationships, 2) the role of fraternity and sorority structure, hierarchy and opportunities, 3) the importance of values-based leadership, 4) leadership perspectives of fraternity and sorority student leaders, and 5) learning and reflection.
These themes connect to one another and contribute three major findings: 1) fraternities and sororities are imbued with clear, strong cultures that cultivate leaders, 2) the participants in this study are stereotypical Millennial generation members through and through, and 3) leadership is a socially constructed site of development and meaning making for the participants. Specifically, these findings imply many fraternity and sorority students develop an identity as a leader akin to the leadership identity development model.

In addition, my findings and professional experience suggest developmental challenges exist for Millennial generation students. As organizational kids, the participants predilection for group membership in college, lead them to continue as over involved, busy fraternity and sorority student leaders. Little time or opportunity exists in their packed schedule for reflection. In addition, the very nature of fraternal organizations as structured, well-established groups with clear and identifiable cultures may hinder Millennial student members’ ability to become the author of their own life. In essence, the fraternity or sorority assumes the role of directing their life and determining their values for some student leaders. After college, the participants in this study, like other Millennials, may struggle to find their own voice and make decisions outside of structured opportunities for engagement.

Although the literature reviewed primarily paints the broad picture of the existence, role and function of fraternities and sororities as a problem in higher education, there also exists a positive message about student engagement, service, moral development, greater alumni engagement, and now leadership identity development, associated with fraternity and sorority experiences. Fraternities and sororities are different from other campus student organizations in measurable and intrinsic ways. An abundance of additional areas of study with fraternity and sorority students exists and could shape the practice of student affairs professionals.
One of the primary goals of higher education and the majority of fraternities and sororities is to develop future leaders. Institutional and fraternal organization mission and purpose statements provide evidence for this claim, as does the proliferation of curricular and co-curricular leadership programs within both settings. Likewise, the central mission of student affairs is to develop students by connecting curricular and co-curricular initiatives on campus. Institutions of higher education are uniquely situated to educate tomorrow’s leaders and initiate change regarding how and when leaders within particular sub-cultures develop.

Through this work, I aim to not only understand and give voice to the experiences of fraternity and sorority leaders, but also, pragmatically speaking, “to make true” (Kvale, 1996, p. 248) the nature of developing an identity as a leader within a fraternity or sorority. The ‘truths’ found through this research advance the perspective that membership in a fraternal organization assists students in taking actions that cultivate leadership identity and contribute positively to their development as students. I summarize the findings and recommendations from the present study in this chapter for administrative and academic members of the higher education institutions. It is my hope that this knowledge will become action for other student affairs professionals, rather than be just a simple observation. Optimistically, this scholarship will enable those who work with contemporary college student leaders to develop a better understanding of the influence of culture within fraternal organizations as well as how fraternity or sorority membership cultivates student development and shapes leadership identity development.
APPENDIX A
Fraternity and sorority Professional Request for Nominations Letter

Date

Dear (insert fraternity and sorority professional’s name):

This letter is an invitation to nominate fraternity and sorority student leaders for participation in a study I am conducting for my dissertation in the Higher Education Administration doctoral program at Washington State University.

The project will help me learn more about the influence of fraternity and sorority affiliation on leadership identity development for college student leaders. As an alumnus member of my own sorority and twenty year veteran to fraternity and sorority advising, I am excited to learn about the fraternity and sorority experience of college students on several campuses through this project.

Participants will be asked to participate in an interview of approximately 60-90 minutes in length to take place at a mutually agreed upon location and time. Students may decline to answer any of the interview questions or withdraw from the study at any time by informing me. With their permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to facilitate collection of information and later transcribed for analysis. All information provided by participants will be considered completely confidential. Any personal identifying information will not appear in the final dissertation resulting from this study; however, with their permission anonymous quotations may be used. Notes and/or recordings collected during this study will be retained for ten years in a secure location and then destroyed. Even though I may present the study findings to colleagues for their feedback, only my committee chair and I will have access to the data.

There are no known or anticipated risks to participants in this study.

Would you consider nominating between 8-10 fraternity and sorority affiliated student leaders at (institution) for me to invite to participate? Specifically, I am most interested in dialoguing with fraternity and sorority affiliated student leaders that practice their leadership in a relational orientation. By this, I mean the student exhibits participatory (vs. hierarchical) leadership, recognizes leading is a process of involving others in decision making, and is confident and comfortable in their role as a leader. While the participants must be fraternity and sorority affiliated, they can be leading in any variety of roles at (institution). I need only their name, email address, and phone number to invite them to be part of the study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact me by email at cory@wsu.edu. You can also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Kelly Ward at kaward@wsu.edu. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Institutional Review Board at Washington State University. If you have any comments or concerns regarding this study, please contact me at 509-592-0118 or cory@wsu.edu.

I will follow up with you this week and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Interfraternally Yours,

Anita Cory
Doctoral Candidate
Washington State University
Dear (insert participant’s name),

This letter is an invitation to participate in a study I am conducting for my dissertation in the Higher Education Administration doctoral program at Washington State University. You were nominated by (insert F/S professional’s name here). Below is more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

The project will help me learn more about the influence of fraternity and sorority affiliation on leadership identity development for college student leaders. As an alumna member of my own sorority, and twenty year veteran to fraternity and sorority advising, I am excited to learn about the fraternity and sorority experience of college students on several campuses through this project.

Your involvement in this study is voluntary. It will involve participating in an interview of approximately 60-90 minutes in length to take place at a mutually agreed upon location and time. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so choose. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time by informing me. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name or any other personal identifying information will not appear in the final dissertation resulting from this study; however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Notes and/or recordings collected during this study will be retained for ten years in a secure location and then destroyed. Even though I may present the study findings to colleagues for their feedback, only my committee chair and I will have access to the data. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me by email at cory@wsu.edu. You can also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Kelly Ward at kaward@wsu.edu. I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Institutional Review Board at the Washington State University. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact me at 509-592-0118 or cory@wsu.edu.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Sincerely Yours,

Anita Cory
Doctoral Candidate
Washington State University
APPENDIX C
Research Study Informed Consent Form

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
College of Education, Educational Leadership and Counseling Psychology

Research Study Consent Form

Study Title: Leader identity development of fraternity and sorority affiliated students
Researcher: Anita Cory, Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership and Counseling Psychology, 509-335-1849 or 509-592-0118

You are being asked to take part in a research study carried out by Anita Cory. This form explains the research study and your part in it if you decide to join the study. Please read the form carefully, taking as much time as you need and ask me to explain anything you don't understand. You can decide not to join the study. If you join the study, you can change your mind later or quit at any time. There will be no consequences if you decide to not take part in the study or quit later. This study has been approved for human subject participation by the Washington State University Institutional Review Board.

What is this study about?

This research study is being conducted to develop an understanding of the process that Greek-affiliated student leaders experience in developing an identity as a leader. This study's intent is to better understand the characteristics successful Greek students possess, to what they attribute their successes as a student leader, and how Greek affiliation has influenced the leader identity development of participants.

You are being asked to take part in this study because the fraternity and sorority life professional on your campus nominated you as a Greek-affiliated student leader who exemplifies and practices relational leadership.

What will I be asked to do if I am in this study?

If you take part in the study, you will be asked to:

- Arrange a mutually convenient interview time.
- Engage in an audio recorded interview for 60-90 minutes regarding your experiences as a student leader in the Greek Community. The questions will pertain only to my primary research questions; what are the characteristics successful Greek student leaders possess, to what they attribute their successes as a student leader, and how Greek affiliation has influenced your identity as a leader. You will not be required to answer any question that you so choose.
- Review the transcription of the interviews which may take up to 30 minutes.
Are there any benefits to me if I am in this study?

The potential benefits to you for taking part in this study will include sharing your story and providing useful information for fraternity and sorority life professionals in mentoring and advising future student leaders.

Are there any risks to me if I am in this study?

The potential risks from taking part in this study are quite limited. The nature of the questions pertain only to your perceptions of factors leading to your success as a student leader. Questions about personal (social, legal, physical) matters will not be a part of this study.

Will my information be kept private?

The data for this study will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by federal and state law. No published results will identify you, and your name will not be associated with the findings. Under certain circumstances, information that identifies you may be released for internal and external reviews of this project.

- We will engage in a private dialogue at a mutually pre-determined location (such as an office or small conference room).
- Only I and hired transcriptionists (who have signed a confidentiality agreement) will have access to the actual interview data. All other data will be coded and pseudonyms assigned to protect your identity.
- Data will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home for a minimum of 3 years (required by Washington State University policy).
- Our dialogue/interviews will be recorded, as a transcript of the data is necessary for this project.
- The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants will remain anonymous.

Are there any costs or payments for being in this study?

There will be no costs to you for taking part in this study. You will not receive money or any other form of compensation for taking part in this study.

Who can I talk to if I have questions?

If you have questions about this study or the information in this form, please contact me Anita Cory, doctoral student, Educational Leadership and Counseling Psychology, 509-335-1849 or 509-592-0118 and at cory@wsu.edu or my dissertation chair, Dr. Kelly Ward, at 509-335-9117 or kaward@wsu.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or would like to report a concern or complaint about this study, please contact the Washington State University Institutional Review Board at (509) 335-3668, or e-mail irb@wsu.edu, or regular mail at: Albrook 205, PO Box 643005, Pullman, WA 99164-3005.
What are my rights as a research study volunteer?

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to be a part of this study. There will be no penalty to you if you choose not to take part. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

What does my signature on this consent form mean?

Your signature on this form means that:
- You understand the information given to you in this form.
- You have been able to ask the researcher questions and state any concerns.
- The researcher has responded to your questions and concerns.
- You believe you understand the research study and the potential benefits and risks that are involved.

Statement of Consent

I give my voluntary consent to take part in this study. I will be given a copy of this consent document for my records.

__________________________________
Signature of Participant

_____________________
Date

__________________________________
Printed Name of Participant

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect.

I certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he or she understands the purpose, procedures, potential benefits, and potential risks of participation.

I also certify that he or she:
- Speaks the language used to explain this research.
- Reads well enough to understand this form or, if not, this person is able to hear and understand when the form is read to him or her.
- Does not have any problems that could make it hard to understand what it means to take part in this research.

__________________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

_____________________
Date

__________________________________
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Role in the Research Study
Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this interview. We have gone over the consent form. Are there any other questions you would like to ask before we begin?

Date/Time: __________________________ Location: _________________________________

Demographics

Name: __________________________________________________________________________
Psuedonym: ______________________________________________________________________
Birthday or Current Age: __________________________________________ Gender: ________
Hometown: ______________________________________________________________________
High School: __________________________ Class size: __________
Chapter: __________________________ Class Standing: ________

Interview Highlights:
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

Quotable Quotes:
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

For Follow Up:
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________
Semi-structured interview guide: Greek-affiliated student leadership development

Background:

1. Tell me a little about yourself — about your background and what brought you to [institution] as well as about your involvement here at [institution]?
   - Activities during High School:
     - Leadership Roles in High School:
     - anything at younger ages?

2. Tell me about your family of origin - parents, siblings, living situation, etc.
   - Matriarchal or patriarchal?
   - What effect do you believe this has had on your development?

3. Who served as significant role models for you before coming to college and why?

Organizational Level Development

Involvement in Organizations:

1. What organizations are you involved in at (institution)?
   - When and why did you decide to join a fraternity/sorority? What influenced these decisions

2. Tell me about your leadership roles on campus/in the community.
   - chapter leadership roles?
     - leadership roles in the Greek Community?

3. Describe some of the fulfilling experiences you have had in your sorority/fraternity.
   - Why do you think this is the case?

4. Think back to a time when you had a challenging experience in your sorority/fraternity.
   - What happened?
   - How did you handle it?

5. What have you learned about relating to other people from your sorority/fraternity experience?

6. How have you changed since joining your chapter?
Support Systems:
1. What kind of support systems do you have? What role have they played in your college experience thus far?

2. How would you describe your relationships with closest circle of friends/peers. (Are these people part of your F/S or Greek Community?)

3. Do you have or have you had a mentor? If so, describe your relationship with this person.

4. What is the relationship between change (within an organization) and leadership?

Individual Development

Values:
1. Describe your primary core values.

2. How do you think your fraternity and sorority experience has affected your beliefs or values?
   - your college experience here?

Leadership:
1. How would you define leadership?
   - What is the role of a leader?

2. What makes someone a leader?

3. Do you consider yourself a leader?
   - why?
   - When did you first perceive/believe you were a leader?

4. What is the relationship between the “official” leader (officer) and members/followers?

5. How do your values manifest in your practice as a leader?

6. What do you believe is the role of F/S at (institution) in developing student leaders?

7. Tell me about a time when you had to face difficult decisions as a leader?
   - What was that like?
   - How did you handle it?

Leadership Identity Development:
1. What role do you believe your gender plays in your leadership style?

2. What are the most important skills and/or attributes of a leader?
3. What do you believe has contributed to your identity as a leader at (institution).

Wrap up
1. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your experiences as a fraternity and sorority leader?

2. Is there anything that you'd like me to explain about the purpose of this interview or my research study?

Thank you very much for your participation. Review timeline from here (participants will be invited to review the transcript).
APPENDIX E
Participant Profiles

The Participant’s Background

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the influence of fraternity or sorority membership on the leadership identity development of student leaders. The participants are current students at three separate public, four-year institutions in the western United States. Each institution is similar in size, type, and hosts a significantly large and long-standing residentially based fraternity and sorority community. In this appendix, I have included a brief profile of each of the participants to guide understanding of their experiences in a fraternity or sorority.

Allegria.

Allegria, is the oldest of three daughters of Mexican immigrant parents. Education is highly valued in her family, and Allegria took this to heart. She decided to attend Flagship University after visiting campus and “fell in love with the place.” She has been very involved in the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) and students and administrators alike seek her out to represent the views and voices of students of color on her campus. Allegria describes what it takes to be a leader:

Leaders must have confidence in knowing what they stand for, and confidence in knowing that if they are ‘correct’ about something that their belief should be pushed forward to make it happen. Followers don’t have as much confidence in themselves; they are more self-conscious. Maybe they believe in the value or issue at hand but they don’t know how to push it or make it happen so they want to follow instead.

Allegria joined a historically Latina sorority her second semester and immediately immersed herself in learning about the organization as she aspired to serve in leadership roles. She said, “I’ve never really held a small position, I became president of the sorority as a sophomore.” Now, as a senior, she decided she has been “too involved and put myself last all the
time and realized I needed to take a step back from the sorority and become more ‘selfish’ and put myself first for awhile.” Allegria is now more involved in mentoring the younger members of her chapters as an informal leader and describes the organization as “a family away from home.”

Andrea.

Andrea is a well-known and highly involved African-American woman and member of a National Pan-Hellenic Conference (NPHC) sorority at Sunny Flagship University. She describes her family as “all-American”, but is acutely aware of the challenges that face members of the African-American community. She grew up in an urban area about two hours from SFU and although her school district has many struggles, she describes teachers, coaches, extended family members and older friends that played an integral role in mentoring and supporting her in her journey toward higher education. In fact, she participated in a program designed to encourage middle school youth to attend college. She later discovered this program is an outreach of her own sorority.

Andrea serves as the president of her chapter as well as the president of the campus NPHC. These roles have challenged her to grow and manage loyalties and relationships in significant ways. She describes the responsibilities of sororities and fraternities on campus as:

Others should see us as good people and good work. Our work should be so influential that others want to do it too. They should see us in community service, and helping people, and our GPAs are high and we still do all this. It should encourage others to want to do the same...to be that good too. I'm saying should, but it doesn't necessarily happen that way. In fraternities and sororities, a leader is in everybody, but it just takes a little while to come out sometimes. So, our role is to create more or better leaders on campus and help people who didn't see themselves as leaders to get out there and do it. Even if it isn't in an organization, but in a group of close friends. We should be encouraging them.

Andrea feels grateful to have the “bonds of sisterhood” with so many successful and intelligent women across the country. Andrea is genuinely a servant leader, as a future
elementary education teacher, she plans to go back to her own neighborhood and influence the lives of younger people just as others did for her.

Anna

Anna, a second year senior, grew up in a small town and is the youngest of four children and the only daughter. She describes her relationship with her parents as “close and supportive” and views her mother as an excellent female role model and her father as the “strong silent type.” Raised in a devout Catholic home, she greatly values practicing her faith. Anna is the third generation of people in her family that have attended Flagship University and as alumni members of fraternal organizations, her parents played an important role in her choice of college and sorority affiliation.

High school provided Anna with opportunities to be involved in many clubs and organizations and serve in leadership roles. She remarked, “I’ve always been a leader” so getting involved at Flagship University was “a given.” Anna focused on involvement outside her own sorority in campus organizations that connect students with alumni as well as the Panhellenic Council. She describes many of her closest friends as students from outside her sorority. Rather, she built relationships through with these friends through her varied campus experiences. Anna presents as a friendly extrovert and described herself as “stubborn”, an aspect of her leadership that came out through the interview in several examples. Anna shared, “being on the Panhellenic Council has really taught me to live out my values…it showed me it is better to be patient with people than to get upset.” In addition, Anna realizes that anyone can be a leader.

Being in college and in several different leadership positions and not always as a leader with an official position, taught me that a leader is someone who doesn’t need a title. I never served on the executive board of my sorority but I decided that I could be an influential leader by following our core values. I befriended the freshmen, sophomores and even the people who were older than me and was a person there for support. A leader is somebody who can lead and can step back and let other people lead too. It is
really important to empower others, and help other people expand their own leadership skills.

Beth.

Beth, grew up in a small town near Flagship University with her younger sister and mother, spending some weekends with her father. She is close to both parents and grew up knowing “family comes first.”

Beth was involved in cheerleading and yearbook in high school, but didn’t hold a leadership position until her senior year when a club advisor basically “signed [her] up.” Several teachers and coaches, all Greek alumni of Flagship University, persuaded her to attend the University and join a sorority. She remembers feeling “burnt out” from high school and didn’t want to take on any leadership responsibilities, until her second semester in college, when she decided “that’s crazy...I’m really bored” and took on a leadership role in her chapter. Each subsequent year, she was elected to progressively higher ranking positions and at the time of the interview was the outgoing chapter president, as well as the vice president of human relations of a student run marketing solutions ‘company’ at Flagship University.

Another participant in the study described Beth as a friendly and cheery student and as a leader that is caring, kind and a good communicator. Beth’s approach to leading is to work with and nurture people not “show power” over them. She said, “I like to make people laugh and make things as enjoyable as possible, but I’m also a hard rule follower. I can lead a group just by my personality.” Beth credits her sorority membership for:

Encouraging me to do what I believe in or what I was a little hesitant to do myself. Now, I know that I can lead a mini corporation or something along those lines. It gives me more confidence in going into the work force. All that I have learned in classes I have been able to use in my sorority. The sorority has helped me grow and learn more about myself.
After graduation next spring, Beth plans to move “to the big city” with several sorority sisters with whom she has become close friends to start her career in a business related field.

Buck

Buck is a senior whose parents both attended State University. Although they are alumni, they did not push Buck to choose their alma mater, but now that he is here, it has rekindled their school spirit. Buck has an older sister and described himself as the “weird and annoying little brother” during their childhood. Nonetheless, his family is close; he and his father were very involved with the Boy Scouts and Buck eventually became an Eagle Scout.

Buck has served in student government roles ever since being elected as the sophomore class president at his high school. Although he didn’t join a fraternity until after his first year of college, Buck became involved in the student government at State University as a way to connect to the campus and make friends. After a difficult and depressing first year, Buck said:

As a non-Greek freshman looking at the Greek community from the outside, I was envious. I saw how much fun they had. How involved they were with the school. The commitment they had to their community. That was something I really wanted to do. Living in the residence halls you just saw a bunch of people living there. They didn’t take pride in it... didn’t care. It [fraternity] is what I was looking for.

Once Buck joined a fraternity, he made friends, found a support system, was encouraged to lead in small roles in the chapter, and soon thereafter he ran for a student government senate seat. He has made his leadership ‘home’ in the student government at State University and plans to run for student body president in the spring.

Buck’s orientation to lead through service was evident during the interview. Buck became a peer facilitator for the “Greek 101” class for new fraternity and sorority members. This opportunity exposed him to the bigger picture of fraternity and sorority life than only that of his chapter. Buck adopted the values of the Boy Scouts as his own “because they make sense” and has utilized these values in his leadership roles. He believes leaders must:
Respect each other and [themselves]. Honesty and truthfulness is really important to me. Be responsible and accountable. As a senator, accountability is huge. Leaders get a lot more respect and more latitude when they are respectful in their actions.

Courtney.

Courtney spent an hour of her last day on campus at State University engaged in this study. She is the middle of three children in her family and after her parents’ divorce remains very close to her father. She grew up less than two hours away from SU in a part of town that “was rough” and although she had originally planned to attend college out-of-state, realized SU was “the right place” for her. Courtney described herself as “the black sheep of my family” for not going along with the crowd or her family, rather branching out and immersing herself in sports and church activities, the later was not supported by her family. Courtney first realized she was a leader in elementary school when classmates and teachers “kept coming back to me to get things done” and she continued as a very involved student leader until graduation.

Although Courtney nonchalantly participated in sorority recruitment, she joined a chapter and said, “that [it] made all the difference” to her. As a first year student, she became “sort of lost from my values” and was on a course to leave school, but her sorority sisters that confronted and redirected her. Courtney was encouraged to get involved and served in several chapter and eventually Panhellenic leadership roles. Last year, her sorority went through a major upheaval and internal conflict. Courtney remained committed to the organization. She believes leaders should:

Lead but not expect anything in return. If is important that you know you’re doing good for other people and that’s enough of a reward, you don’t need to be getting honored for that, because later you will. Leadership is about benefiting other people, doing more than is expected of you. Leaders need to be motivated, willing to take action, plan and have goals.

Elizabeth.
Elizabeth comes from a long line of Greeks and alumni from Flagship University. She was valedictorian of her high school class and her soccer team’s captain. However, she was disappointed to lose elections for other leadership roles during high school and shared, “there is a dominant religion in that area, and my family isn’t part of it...that really plays a role.” In addition, Elizabeth describes herself as more introverted than others in the fraternity/sorority community, although after joining her sorority, she has become more confident and skilled in interpersonal situations. Her sisters “saw my potential as a leader and invested in me right away.” For Elizabeth, sorority membership was expected but also worthwhile. She shares, “I tell people I was raised Greek. I heard about everyone’s stories and saw the successful women that have had amazing experiences in their sisterhood. I love having all these friends, being involved in school, and getting good grades...it makes the whole the college experience. My passion for community service has grown and it is great seeing people really flourish and very supportive of it and very passionate about it.

Elizabeth describes the role her faith in God plays in her purpose for leadership and as she immersed herself in community service activities during college, one particular trip “changed [her] life.” She views leadership as an “opportunity to serve others” and that leaders are:

Not only people who can direct others but also give them free reign and the power to do what they want and support them and guide them in the right direction. A leader is someone who cares about other people and cares about doing what is right for the campus and watching it grow. Pushing boundaries and making changes in positive ways. A leader is passionate about what they are doing, motivated, driven and honest. Leaders might make mistakes along the way but recover from those mistakes, move on and learn from them.

At the time of the interview, Elizabeth was just concluding her second term on the Panhellenic Council as the president.

John.

John is the oldest of four boys in his first generation American family. He describes his mother as his “best friend” and is appreciative of the sacrifices she has made to support his college education. He feels responsible to encourage his younger brothers to follow his example
in education, as their father (his stepfather) does not have the same views about education. John received mentoring and encouragement in his small town high school; many teachers and coaches saw his potential. In addition, he served as the student body president for three years in high school.

John has great compassion for non-native English speakers and “translates anytime and anywhere.” John credits several fraternity alumni from Flagship University with whom he developed close relationships at the senior living center where he volunteered in high school, for his decision to join a fraternity. Once in the fraternity, John wanted to “take a break” from leadership but his peers could see his leadership potential, and encouraged him to take on small roles in the fraternity. John realized he could not “stay away” from leadership and held roles in his own chapter, on the Interfraternity Council, and the student government senate (where he received a record number of votes for a senate seat). John describes himself as an “old soul” and not into partying like some of his friends. The fraternity has:

Helped me grow into myself and become who I want to be...feeling comfortable with my personality, and to feel confident in what I do. I feel open to express my point of view and not be afraid to do so. The fraternity has taught me how to listen and respect different points of view. Not necessarily understand them but respect their lifestyle, respect people’s sexual orientation, views on religion or beliefs and views on life. Even though I don’t always agree or understand, I can talk and engage in conversation without fighting.

Katie.

Katie’s interview took place on one of her last days at State University. As a graduating senior, she readily shared her reflections. Before Katie came to college, she was a very outgoing, driven and involved student. While her school system “didn’t believe in titles”, teachers and peers identified her as a leader very early on in elementary school. After her mother passed away during her senior year of high school, Katie and her father developed a much closer relationship.
She describes herself as very similar to him in work ethic and personal drive. Katie’s work ethic and commitment to her endeavors are her defining attributes:

I lead by example…it is that simple. I never hide anything. I explain situations and don't necessarily work toward consensus but enough understanding and acceptance to move everyone forward. I always try my hardest...always push for more. As a leader, I ask more out of people and try to get them to work hard.

Katie joined a sorority and moved into the chapter house during the first week of her freshman year. She developed very close relationships with several women in her sorority and describes them “as [my] other family.” As a freshman, Katie was quickly appointed to a small leadership role; however, she now realizes she wasn’t quite ready for it. Nonetheless, she continued holding leadership positions in her own chapter, became a recruitment counselor, student government intern, and later a two-term Panhellenic officer. Katie concluded our interview with this:

When people ask me, “why in the world would anyone want to be Panhellenic president?” I respond, “Are you kidding? Why wouldn’t I want to serve in this way? Being Greek has changed my entire life and made me who I am. It has been what I needed through college. It provided the structure, guidance, resources and expectations that I needed to succeed.

Kendra.

Kendra grew up with her mother and younger brother in an urban area near Sunny Flagship University. Kendra had a small group of close friends in high school and was involved in band, but not many other activities. She chose to attend SFU because it is “close to home and [ she is] a homebody” and decided to “join a sorority because [she] didn’t have many girlfriends attending here...joining the sorority was honestly the best thing ever...[she is] thankful for it.” Kendra describes the close and genuine friendships she has with several sorority sisters and characterizes her closest friend in the chapter as “my other lung.”
Being near home proved necessary when her mother became ill and Kendra had to spend time caring for her. Kendra’s sorority sisters rallied around her and provided needed support during that difficult time. This hampered Kendra’s ability to become more involved in leadership in the chapter and Panhellenic, so she turned her attention to Mortar Board and other honoraries. She shared what she learned:

A leader must be able to let other people lead too. A leader shouldn’t just take charge and do everything. If someone else has a great idea, encourage them to talk about it and execute it. Leaders definitely need to be able to listen...and do something about the concerns other people have or utilized their ideas. People need to take initiative and be encouraged to get it done by the leaders. Leaders should get people coming and having fun.

Matt.

Matt is an only child and attended a large high school several hours away from Flagship University. He was involved in some sports in high school and had a “big group of friends”, but once he joined his fraternity he “found a new side of [himself]... [he] has a knack for leading others” and developed a “tight group of friends...that [he knows] at a deep level.” Matt describes himself as a “go getter” and a hard worker, an attribute he has developed in college and through his roles in the fraternity. Some of his friends chide him for taking on so many leadership roles in the fraternity and on campus, but he believes being a leader in college allows him to “[become] more of a risk taker” than he had been in high school. Although Matt held several leadership positions in his chapter, the IFC, and with the student government, he describes leaders as:

They aren’t always people in positions. Leaders are the ones that go the extra mile and take time out of their life for other people. Anybody that you look up to in one way or another is a leader for you, because they're shaping your views on something. My basic view is that anyone is capable of leading.

During Matt’s term as the IFC president, the fraternity community embarked upon a major change initiative. From that experience, he learned to develop and maintain positive relationships, as well as to communicate clearly and stay focused on the big picture. Finally,
Matt describes the role of confidence and relationship building in being a change-oriented leader:

Knowing that deep down that we had done the research, seen the results, and decided this was the right thing. We had a little encouragement...but at times, we felt like no one was buying into it. So, having confidence was important to staying true to what we had decided to do. That is what I've really noticed, in all my leadership roles, is the role that confidence plays. If I believe I can do something, regardless of roadblocks, I will get it done. It is also important to build relationships with everyone I'm working with, and be in it for the right reasons. I really do want to develop people and organizations rather than do it for self-satisfaction.

Melissa.

Melissa's family moved from one state to another when she was in high school and she became involved in theatre, made new friends, and helped her parents adjust to their new “retired lifestyle.” With Greek parents and sister, Melissa always knew she would join a sorority, when she chose to attend State University. Melissa developed a passion for philanthropy and service through her family and continued service in college of her sorority.

Melissa is the youngest participant in this study, having turned 20 just a month before the interview. Nonetheless, she is described by her friends as “the mom” of the sorority, but she prefers the term, “old soul.” Melissa found her niche in leadership positions outside of her chapter when was elected to the Panhellenic Council as a sophomore, which is rare at her campus. She is frustrated by the “minutia of situations and likes to focus on the big picture.” For example, Melissa sees the chapter president as a manager. She shared:

I don't think the chapter president is a leader. They are a patroller and they have to deal with so many things that I don't believe I would be a good chapter president. I would try to lead...change things and work on things I believe in, rather than just help us function as a group and get things done and solve problems within the chapter.

Melissa lives her life by the golden rule, which fueled her passion to address hazing on her campus, and she convened a campus-wide committee to plan and implement a well-attended National Hazing Prevention Week. She recently received national recognition as one of
a small handful of college students with an Anti-Hazing Hero Award. Melissa describes her experience on the Panhellenic as one that “made a huge impact” because:

I was around people that are like me in the sense that they want to lead. But they are so different from me in many other ways, we supported each other. We had [the advisors] helping us to grow.

Molly.

Molly is the oldest of three siblings and described her family as very close. In high school, she was very involved in music, student government, and was the drum major for three years. Molly said “this is normal for me” in reference to being involved and leading. In addition, Molly has a large extended family, nearly all of whom are fraternity or sorority alumni; she always knew she would join a chapter.

Molly sets goals and has high aspirations. As she spoke, it became clear she is mature, values-driven, and confident in her leadership skills and abilities. Sorority membership was attractive to Molly because:

I wanted a built in structure where I could get involved in leadership roles that would lead to something bigger. I wanted the opportunity to be social and to have my grades contribute to something overall. I was proud of my academics. I wanted to be a part of something better. I am competitive when it comes to doing something more and testing myself. These opportunities and that family away from home support system appealed to me; it has allowed me to have closer friends.

After the disappointment of being declined admission to her favorite choice, she felt resigned about the decision to attend SU, but excited to join a sorority. Molly did not instantly get involved as a freshman and only fulfilled a small role the next year during recruitment. As a sophomore, Molly was elected as the chapter president, a role rarely held by an underclassman. When her chapter went through a major upheaval, she realized:
This is when I think I truly became a leader in the chapter. First I was the doe-eyed president, questioning “what does this mean?” I barely understood anything on campus. But all my history in leadership helped me. All those skills I had built. I loved answering people’s questions and being the go to person. I am okay with a high stress, high demand schedule. I really enjoyed the role of president.

Ross.

Ross, is a junior and oldest of two boys. He described his relationship with his mother and stepfather as very close; he speaks to his mother every day. After being an academically oriented and over-involved student, Ross took a step back his last two years of high school and focused on a youth sports program he created as a school project. His stepfather is a fraternity alumnus, and although he didn’t push Ross to also join his own fraternity, ultimately his stepfather’s chapter was the best fit:

I didn’t need much recruiting to join my chapter, the whole process involved me resisting and thinking I should look at other fraternities. But my chapter has a dry house and a live-in advisor was that was huge for me...not every chapter had a LIA. At the time, it was an older gentleman, and I thought, “If you can stand to live here and have a full-time job and live with fifty guys, this house is obviously a really good place” so that was a huge part of my decision to join. As a Christian, it was important to me to join a fraternity that wouldn’t challenge my beliefs or morals negatively. I didn’t feel strong enough to be challenged like that from day one. Not drinking was totally OK; I wanted to experience college the first month or two ...without a buzz.

Ross credits his fraternity brothers with providing him the support to succeed in various student government roles. In the fraternity, Ross found close friends that have encouraged him to develop not only as a leader, but spiritually, academically, and socially as well. Ross views the role of leaders as:

Someone who can inspire others to follow them, but sometimes it’s a facade in the sense that they are good at managing time or talent. A great leader is someone who will serve their group before themselves. Leaders also must be intentional about not being afraid to do the least favorite job and show others you are part of the team. Humility and relating to people are attributes leaders need to have and as well as good communication skills.

Finally, Ross shares that one of the most challenging aspects of fraternity membership is “figuring out how to love someone. Loving someone doesn’t always mean you choose the happy
thing for them but rather the thing that will make them most successful.” This reflection came on the heels of a series of difficult decisions the fraternity has made with regard to several ‘favorite’ members’ academic deficiencies. For Ross, the big picture, means that “the fraternity should build people up” including holding brothers accountable, even when it was the difficult choice to make.

Ryan.

Ryan is a senior and the second of four children in his close-knit Catholic family. Growing up with all sisters, he had a special bond with his dad. Ryan was very involved in sports and had long-lasting close friendships from that experience. Ryan values hard work and he has held part-time jobs since high school. Because he was so involved in high school, Ryan considered joining a fraternity another opportunity he should pursue and joined a fraternity before school started his freshman year. He was groomed for leadership in the fraternity and became the chapter president his second year in college. Ryan remains committed to the chapter because he feels invested and that it is worthwhile to be part of something much bigger than himself.

Ryan doesn’t see himself as a leader “in all positions” and described his engagement in the classroom as a quiet participant, whereas in the chapter, he challenges others to think critically about important issues, and sometimes he says he needs to “step in to take a certain viewpoint in order to keep the organization in balance.” Ryan believes his fraternity membership has contributed greatly to his identity and given him the opportunity “to learn a lot. [he is] thankful for it.” He considers, “having that responsibility [leadership] vested in me by the older guys as what got everything started. Just being asked and respected by them [was important]. That allowed me to envision myself being successful as a leader in my chapter.”

Rupert.
Rupert grew up in the Bay area with his younger brother and supportive parents. Growing up, Rupert tried many different sports and activities and had good friends because of this, but didn’t “find my niche until I played lacrosse in high school.” In high school, he was also involved with the faith-based service organization, Lasallian Youth.

As an out-of-state Sunny Flagship University student, Rupert struggled to feel connected on campus until he joined a fraternity colonizing in the spring of his first year. He had not even considered fraternity life because he “couldn’t see myself in that light.” He changed his mind when he had a chance to talk with some of the brothers:

I got the sense that it was very different from the other fraternities on campus at the time. They held themselves to a higher standard and set themselves apart. It was something different that we could make what we wanted it to be. I was able to be part of the change we wished to see. That was cool and [my fraternity] across the nation was a draw too. There are so many chapters and alumni and those connections were important to me.

Now, as a senior, Rupert credits his fraternity for “making all the difference to him.” Once quite introverted, Rupert describes himself as much more outgoing now and he became involved in student government, the IFC, and other leadership roles in his chapter. He found “camaraderie, brotherhood...a lifetime bond. A commitment to each other, and to higher ideals and holding [ourselves] to a higher standard.” He believes the fraternity has “strengthened and reaffirmed my beliefs and my courage and conviction to do the right thing, always.”

Sam.

Sam always knew he would be an engineer. Both of his parents and grandparents are engineers, so he feels he was destined to excel at math and science. His younger sister is a college student at another university and “not the engineering type, more into people.” Although Sam attended college not far from home, he was very independent. He joined his fraternity as a junior in college after serving as a Resident Assistant in an engineering themed residence hall the
preceding year. Many of his engineering friends had already joined the fraternity and he trusted their opinion of the new colony on campus. He recalls:

I originally looked at going Greek my first two years, because I really liked the idea of the fraternalism, but I mostly saw the partying and the drinking aspect. But now on the other side, I see there are some fraternities that don’t fit that profile, but it’s the larger fraternities that overshadow the [others] that [aren’t] necessarily [all about partying].

The values of his fraternity really resonate with Sam and he wholeheartedly adopted them as his own. He believes leaders must encapsulate these values in order to be effective and additionally possess “Empathy, compassion...and the ability to put the organization first and themselves last...always.” Sam developed people skills, formed close relationships with men outside of his engineering activities and projects, and “grew as a leader and manager of people, conflict resolution, and in working with different kinds of people.” Sam graduated from college the day after his interview, but plans to return to his alma mater the following semester to begin a graduate degree in engineering and serve as an alumni chapter advisor.

Sarah.

Sarah is a junior at State University far from her home, younger brother and parents. She described the opportunity to get a college education and join a sorority as one that “will help make [her] a better person, a better parent, a better citizen...and help [her] have a successful job and future.” Sarah was very involved in high school government, soccer and golf, and has spent every summer for nearly ten years at a camp for Jewish youth. In student, she has been involved in planning the curriculum, training the staff, and leading the camp during her summer breaks.

Inspired to join a sorority by a close older friend, Sarah is thankful for the friends and support she has found within her chapter, but is also vexed by incongruencies between the espoused values and actions she sees in the Greek community. She decided to become a leader
outside of her own organization with the aim of making an impact on the entire Greek community. From her sorority, she has learned what it means to be a leader:

A leader can be someone who is standing up in front, or organizing everything. A leader can be silent, but show it through their actions. My best friend, [name], that I mentioned is the exact opposite type of leader from me, but we were hired together to build this summer program, even though we butted heads all the time. I’ve learned a lot from her. For example, we were on a hike and she was at the back of the line encouraging everyone even though she was having a hard time. That is a huge part of being a leader that when you are at your very worst, you can pick up someone else and help them feel better.

Because of her experiences as a leader for the sorority community, Sarah confidently believes she is ready to “tackle anything” in life as an organizational and community leader. Sarah’s sorority experience has been a “rollercoaster” full of challenges and successes, yet she says, “I wouldn’t be the person I am without it.”

Steven.

Steven chose to attend State University, far from his home in southern California, after praying about it. Steven was not very involved in high school other than becoming a group leader in a Christian student’s club and attending church regularly. His faith is the foundation of his decision-making. He remembers, “I grew a lot by reading and spending time with God and praying [during that time]. Not long before he left for college, his father passed away unexpectedly. Steven was very close to his father, who taught him, “[to] always respect women and other people.” Steven said:

I wanted to be just like my dad. That is why I was a lot more mature in many of areas. He would teach me his philosophies on life and I would take those to heart and try to model my life after them. He was my best friend. So when he died it was really hard. I felt alone.

Going away to college was very difficult for him and his mother, as he is very close to her. She is very involved in his life from afar and she “helps me out in so many ways”; he cites her reminders for him to “take care of his business” as one such way. Steven describes himself as different from his parents and two brothers:
There were certain things I was taught and went along with and other things that I was taught that I went against. Like when you are growing up your parents might tell you if a kid at school pushes you they would say push them back. Depending on how you are raised. I always had an opposite viewpoint. I wasn't the push them back type of guy. I was just going to love them and just let them do it and hope they get they get the point. I am a lover not a fighter.

This ideology was apparent throughout the interview and came up in several examples. In addition, Steven carefully scrutinizes and prays over decisions in his life. He took the decision to join an African-American fraternity very seriously and compares it to choosing a wife. Steven shares his feelings on the fraternity:

I am very grateful for the brotherhood. Forget the networking stuff...just meeting guys for the first time that want to treat you like their brother...that is great. Also for us, it [is]...about learning about people, the chapter and about how to become a leader. On the other hand, when things aren't always going your way as far as the way the fraternity is going. Sometimes you may, think “this is over rated.” It just makes want to back up but you can’t. Like your marriage, when it gets difficult, you have to pull through it but it is worth it.

Steven believes “leaders must have passion about their organization and their job...whatever you are going to be, be the best at it.” He went on to share that leaders hold others accountable, but aren't afraid to let someone or something fail as an opportunity to learn. Steven has served his fraternity as chapter president, is a leader within an African-American student organization on his campus, and will graduate this year.

Teena.

Teena hails from a very small town several hours from Flagship University. Her parents and older sister lived far from her high school so she participated in “everything” after school to “kill time” in between school and sports practices or games. Although she is the first in her family to attend college, she “always knew” she would go and her parents and guidance counselor were very supportive and encouraging of her attendance. Because she had been so
involved in high school, Teena was naturally drawn to the opportunities for involvement that she heard would come from sorority membership.

Teena engaged in leadership positions both inside her sorority and on campus; she loved “being connected with people in the sorority and others in chapters through [campus events]. These connections can really make or break your college experience.” Teena made connections through a campus Christian group and this affiliation fostered the ability to lead congruent to her values. With her experiences as a leader in a campus [student alumni] organization and as a chapter president, Teena shared:

[The sorority] has impacted my views of leadership in the sense of personal relationships. You wouldn’t join a sorority if you weren’t interested in bonding and forming friendships. That is number one in a sorority...[especially] to become a leader in a sorority...People enjoy their jobs more if they love one another and get along and are encouraged and are friends. It has changed my perspectives on leadership because I’ve found personal relationships with people are extremely important.

Teena presents as very outgoing, friendly and warm; during our interview (which occurred in a lounge in the union), several students stopped by to greet her. She credits Greek life for helping students find their place on campus and has enjoyed her student involvement experiences so much she decided to pursue a master’s degree in higher education administration. At the time of the interview, she was in the application and interview stage with several universities across the country.

Thomas.

Thomas is the fourth generation in his family to attend State University. His teacher/school administrator parents encouraged him and his younger sister to be involved in school. He played sports and was active in the student government at his high school as well as a student representative on many committees. Although he vowed to never become a teacher, he realized in his junior year at SU that he “loves science and loves kids...[I] should be a teacher.”
Thomas wasn’t interested in joining a fraternity when school started his freshmen year, “I wanted to take a step back after all the [student government] stuff I did in high school”, but soon realized he needed to get involved. He was recruited by a fraternity that was rebuilding:

What totally sold me was the next day the consultant invited me over again and talked to me one on one. He gave me the background of what had happened with the chapter and how they were trying to rebuild and they needed strong leaders to make that happen. The fraternity consultant thought I would be a good person. More than anything, that is why I joined.

Thomas describes himself a principled and rule-following student. Ironically, the men that had remained to rebuild the fraternity couldn’t have been more different. His early fraternity experience was full of moments of frustration and incongruence. However, Thomas became a leader in the chapter, first serving as the recruitment chair seeking a very different type of member, and later as chapter president for two years (a rare occurrence). At the time of the interview, Thomas had recently been elected to serve on the IFC for the following year.

Thomas’s strong sense of duty, responsibility, and integrity guides his actions. He describes a leader as one who leads by example, is reliable and trustworthy, and enjoys working with other people. As a fraternity leader, he found friends “who will be there for [me] and that I can trust. As a leader that is huge because it feels as if you are all alone sometimes.”

The participants in the present study are linked by far more than fraternal affiliation and the similarity of their institutions. The actuality of their experiences was richer than these connecting points. They described their fraternity or sorority experience as the most significant part of their college career; each echoing the importance of relationship building, living and leading with their values, and shared a commitment to developing the next generation of student leaders in their organizations. Many of the participants in this study value the religious faith of their upbringing or found a new sense of spirituality as part of their college experience. Several of the participants joined new (i.e. colonizing) or rebuilding chapters with the specific
intention of enjoying a fraternity or sorority experience that was ‘different’ from what they believe was available on their respective campuses. Finally, while many of the students are leaders within their chapter and outside of it as well, others chose to be involved exclusively internally or externally.
References


