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## Leadership Development of Women in Panhellenic Organizations

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Leadership Development of Women in Panhellenic Organizations

Kristen N. Reynolds

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### Abstract

This study seeks to understand how women of Panhellenic sororities at the University of San Diego (USD) define and perform their meaning of leadership to create positive change in their organizations. My overarching research question was: How can I assist the members of Panhellenic sororities at USD to take up their authority as leaders to influence positive change in their chapter? This research reflects my experiences with Panhellenic sorority women at USD and intentional stakeholders throughout the 2019-2020 academic year. This study was influenced by Ira Chaleff's work on courageous followership, Baxter Magolda's theory of self-authorship, and David Cooperrider, Diana Whitney, and Jacqueline M. Stavros tenants of appreciative inquiry. A multilayer approach was taken by hosting focus groups, as well as surveying and interviewing multiple stakeholders connected to the Panhellenic sororities at USD including sorority leaders, chapter members, chapter advisors, and inter/national headquarter staff members. The findings reveal actions and strategies for all stakeholders to including campus-based fraternity and sorority life advisors on how to intentionally support the leadership development of Panhellenic sorority women to create positive and sustainable organizational change. Ultimately, by allowing Panhellenic sorority women to make meaning of their influence, as well as claiming their own authority of their membership experience and chapter culture, they are able to create positive change.

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### Leadership Development of Women in Panhellenic Organizations

Fraternal organizations present students with unique leadership experiences as self-governed organizations with large memberships. Each year, the fraternity and sorority community and chapter leaders' change, passing the successes and pitfalls of the organization on to the next group. Often, the men and women that are elected into these roles see a need for positive change to happen so that their organization can progress forward. However, due to the nature of fraternities and sororities being deeply rooted in ritual and tradition, positive organizational change can be incredibly slow and even difficult.

Practitioners and industry leaders put a lot of the responsibility of change on the student leaders elected into their roles. Chapter leadership (executive boards) assume the responsibility to create positive change at the will of their members. Yet, some of the challenges that chapter leaders face are lack of engagement and responsibility of their members causing poor behavior in all aspects of fraternal membership. Furthermore, resistance from their organization's membership, who may not see the same need for change, contributes to student leader burn out.

Much like other student organizations, fraternity and sorority life provides students with the opportunity to build community, further passions, and grow intellectually and culturally. While fraternities and sororities provide a special type of leadership experience, the organizations' structure and traditions have created a definition of leadership that foregoes an atmosphere of collective responsibility to the organization leaving those who hold a title to do all the work.

In a large organization, members are missing that they matter to the collective group just as much as the chapter leaders. Due to the overall demands of fraternity and sorority life, investing in the larger membership experience of these organizations is difficult and untapped.

Looking at our student leaders to understand policies and procedures, while also expecting them to challenge their traditional cultural norms, is difficult for young people in these positions. It is a disservice to our students and does not align with the purpose of these organizations. I believe by not tapping into the general membership of fraternities and sororities, practitioners are missing the mark on answering the call to change that our students and institutions are asking of fraternities and sororities to make.

### **Research Question**

For the purpose of this study, I focused my action research on the Panhellenic sorority membership experience at the University of San Diego (USD). Fraternity and sorority life have many acronyms and lingo. Throughout this paper, many of these terms are used, so they will be spelled out and their acronyms are used interchangeably. For additional references, see Appendix A for definitions of each of these terms.

My research question was: How can I assist the members of Panhellenic sororities at USD to take up their authority as leaders to influence positive change in their chapter? Through this process, I encouraged sorority women to make meaning of their own leadership and membership experience through challenging and better understanding their own beliefs and values. Ultimately, this research is a reflection of my journey to help redefine leadership among sorority women to create positive change influencing chapter moral, accountability, and engagement.

### **Literature Review**

Much of the current research that exists on the topic of fraternity and sorority life (FSL) in connection with organizational membership and leadership development focuses on organizational issues versus solutions. There is extensive research on trends and experiences

affecting a variety of campuses and communities such as diversity and inclusion, stereotypes, hazing, alcohol abuse, etc. Many of these articles confirm that these trends exist but do not answer the question of why they exist.

Wilson and Tollni (2013) focused on defining stereotypes of sorority women. The sorority women who participated in this study did not believe that the negative stereotypes were true, yet the women also stated that there are select women in sororities and select sorority chapters that do match the negative stereotypes. Wilson and Tollni (2013) suggested practitioners should explore their FSL campus community in terms of stereotypes and use it to inform policy and programs because they believe that each chapter is different so a “one type fits all” approach may not work. I argue that Wilson and Tollni (2013) missed the mark on understanding why the women believe that they do not subscribe to the stereotypes, but other sorority women do. When women are saying this, they are acknowledging that negative stereotypes do exist, and they continue to support the current narrative of FSL.

Johnson (2010) studied the USD Panhellenic council regarding the lack of intercultural competence in the community. Johnson (2010) noted that more work around self-awareness, inclusion, and diversity in the Panhellenic community needed to be done for the community to be welcoming to all. While I do not disagree with Johnson (2010) regarding the work that needs to be done in the Panhellenic community on these topics, it remains a concern that all of her participants were women that held leadership positions in the community.

Expecting student leaders to learn and articulate their learning to a large membership is doing a disservice to the membership and professionals who are challenging these organizations. Expecting a culture to change because of a policy change or more educational programming is an approach that does not recognize the root cause of these various trends. By doing this, fraternity

and sorority life professionals are missing the investment of the general membership of fraternities and sororities, which I believe is where true organizational and cultural change can exist. There is a need for creative action to take place while supporting and challenging students in all aspects of their membership.

To identify the root cause, I explored what empowers women to enact in their leadership and how it has allowed them to recognize their authority in influencing their chapter culture. Specifically, I examined literature on Panhellenic sorority membership and focused on the leadership development of women that belong to these organizations. I found that much of the literature focused on men's fraternities or the overarching FSL community encompassing traditionally White men's and women's and culture-based fraternal organizations.

Dugan (2008) explored the relationship between fraternity and sorority membership and student leadership development through the lens of the social change model. Fraternity and sorority members scored similarly among their peers especially among the components of controversy with civility, citizenship, and change, where all students reported the lowest scores. As mentioned earlier, fraternal organizations are rooted in tradition thus making change difficult. This continues to support the notion that a new approach needs to be taken in these organizations for change to flourish. It was also found that sorority women score higher than fraternity men in seven out of the eight components of the social change model. This is congruent with outside research that women participate in a more reciprocal leadership style. It is important for practitioners in FSL to keep this in mind when supporting women leaders. This study underscores the leadership development of students, particularly affiliated women and what curriculum needs to be developed to support the growth of members' leadership identity as a woman.

McKenzie (2018) took a grounded theory approach to look at how traditional undergraduate women view themselves as leaders. Although McKenzie's (2018) participant pool is made of mainly White students from different organizations and levels in school, it was helpful for my research because my participant pool looked similar to hers. The themes that McKenzie found created an understanding of how women develop their leadership identity. Specifically, McKenzie's (2018) developed a 4-phase theory. The phases were awareness, leader identified, leadership differentiated, and generativity. Thus, social constructs of leadership define women's understanding of leadership and their ability to be a leader.

Finally, gender identity development also is critical to recognize in this research as I worked with exclusive single-gender organizations. Often, members have described their sorority experiences as a place to practice their leadership without fear of failure or repercussion of gender determining their success. A sorority offers a place where women can feel empowered to lead authentically because there are no men present. Capitalizing on the experience of being a women leader/member in sorority life can help create a brave space for women to recognize their potential and understanding of the leader they are and can become. Ultimately, it is important to recognize how the world influences women's understanding of leadership.

In summary, much of the literature shows all the problems that the system of fraternity and sorority life have and conclude that change needs to happen, but no one answers how to do this. I argue the "how" is through tapping into the membership of the large organization by redefining leadership/authority while allowing members to make meaning of their experience to become self-authors and more productive members of their organization. However, there is no current research on how members of fraternal organizations take on the traditional leader-follower relationship. Nevertheless, members, along with the leaders of sororities, need to "get

comfortable with the idea of powerful followers supporting powerful leaders...we can [then] fully develop and test models for dynamic, self-responsible, synergistic relationships in our organizations” (Chaleff, 2009, p. 2).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The power structure of fraternal organizations has created a distant relationship between the governing executive board and the membership. Chaleff (2009) described this as “a relationship in which the follower is dependent and unable to relate to the leader on an equal footing” (p. 4). This current relationship between members of fraternal organizations and their leaders is a parent-child authority relationship because students are locked into the “assumption(s) that the leader’s interpretation must dominate” (Chaleff, 2009, p. 4). For my research, I used Ira Chaleff’s work on courageous followership and Baxter Magolda’s theory of self-authorship, as a guiding theoretical framework to understand how women of Panhellenic sororities at the University of San Diego (USD) define and perform their meaning of leadership to create positive change in their organizations.

Chaleff (2009) offered the notion of courageous followership which is built on the platform of a courageous relationship. Specifically, each individual in the relationship has “the courage to be right, the courage to be wrong, the courage to be different from each other” (p. 4). Fraternal organizations were built with the idea of deep and meaningful relationships. Taking courageous followership to these organizations would allow for a deeper understanding of their sisterhood and their relationship to the organization. Chaleff (2015) provided the notion of intelligent disobedience as “finding the healthy balance for living in a system with rules and authorities while maintaining our own responsibility for the actions we take” (p. 1). Establishing intelligent disobedience as the foundation of courageous followership in sorority membership

could possibly allow for members to feel collectively responsible (Yung & Tasi, 2013) and accountable to their organization and peers. Investing in how the members view their relationship with the chapter leadership and teaching them how to take up their own authority could create a place for positive change to arise. Chaleff's (2009, 2015) courageous followership and intelligent disobedience provided me with a framework for this research and guided my engagement with students throughout.

Baxter Magolda (2008) developed the self-authorship student development theory with influences from Keegan that focus on how students make meaning and understand their knowledge, identities, and social relations (Baxter Magolda, 2014). Self-authorship allows students to navigate and make meaning of life challenges, relationships, and leadership (Baxter Magolda, 2014). The theory of self-authorship focuses on how students go from authority-dependence to self-authorship. Through self-authorship, students can develop an understanding of what it means to be able to take up their leadership (their own authority). For example, a research team at Bryn Mawr College found self-authorship developed in various leadership programs when students participated in dialogues where differencing opinions and experiences existed. These dialogues allow for the opportunity for students to revise their sense of self, leadership, and relationships while creating a community (Cohen, 2016). While in fraternity and sorority life differences are often not celebrated, these findings suggest creating space where members of these organizations can experience difference is crucial for members to make meaning of their internal voice or personal authority.

Although both courageous followership and self-authorship are different concepts, they can also complement each other. For courageous followership to exist in the sorority experience, members must make their own meaning of leadership, authority, and membership, meaning that

students must be able to establish their own sense of personal authority by becoming their own self authors. Specifically, powerful followers can be developed by making meaning of their experience, authority, and capacity for leadership which I aimed to enhance through my action research on sorority membership at USD.

### **Methodology**

Often fraternity and sorority life are evaluated and critiqued through a deficit lens. Viewing FSL through a deficit lens does not allow us to see what areas fraternities and sororities do well in. Identifying the positive areas of fraternal organizations provides an opportunity to duplicate that behavior or response to address the necessary issues within the organization and in return change the narrative of FSL. The majority of students are trying to make meaning of their young adulthood while receiving an assortment of advice and opinions on their majors, careers, and relationships. Students that belong to fraternal organizations are additionally receiving advice about the organization, often about negative practices or events that the organizational culture has created. Appreciative inquiry (AI) also aligns with my core values of personal development and making a difference. I hope to be a student affairs practitioner that creates a space for students to acknowledge their strengths. For these reasons, I choose to use appreciative inquiry as my methodology.

Every organization has something that works right—things that give it life when it is most alive, effective, successful, and connected in healthy ways to its stakeholders and communities. AI begins by identifying what is positive and connecting to it in ways that heighten energy, vision, and action for change. (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, Introduction, p. XV.)

The four phases of AI allowed me to use a non-deficit model of inquiry. “Appreciative inquiry uses a 4-D cycle: Discover, Dream, Design, and Destiny” (Lahman, 2012, p. 1). Appreciative inquiry allows researchers to identify the strengths of students and the large organization to create transformative change (Lahman, 2012). Appreciative inquiry also looks to benefit all stakeholders. Specifically, AI “is based on the beliefs that human systems are made and imagined by those who live and work in them” (Cooperrider et al., 2008, Preface, p. XI). This influenced my decision to explore the experiences of all individuals and systems involved in supporting the development of sorority women. The stakeholders I involved were the chapter members (both chapter leaders and followers), chapter advisors, FSL staff, and the inter/national headquarters staff members of Panhellenic sororities.

I used an adaptation of the appreciative inquiry method that a graduate of the USD Higher Education Leadership program used for her action research. Her model (Davis, 2016) “consisted of one comprehensive cycle of the 4-D process, with one sub-cycle of the 4-D process in each of the four steps, and a step of evaluation in between each of the overarching steps” (p. 14; see Appendix B). The 4-D cycle model in connection with McNiff and Whitehead’s (2011) model will be expressed as follows: Discover (Observe) → Dream (Reflect) → Design (Plan) → Destiny (Act; Davis, 2016). Using this adaptation of appreciative inquiry allowed me to reflect on my own learning while taking in the ideas and learning of others into account. This methodology also connected the development of self-authorship and how one defines leadership.

While this methodology assisted in my research, I also recognized that perceptions and experiences would influence my work. I kept a journal and used my critical friends to challenge me on these themes and experiences I missed. Lastly, AI allowed for my participants to become collaborators in the process. It would have been easier to be cynical and critical of experiences

and organizations; using a journal and my critical friend was vital for me to remain authentic to my participants, my feelings, and to re-imagine them in the frame of appreciative inquiry.

### **Context**

My work took place in the office of Fraternity and Sorority Life at the University of San Diego (USD), a small private liberal arts college. The student affairs division at USD went through reorganization in 2017 and the ripple effects of the reorganization brought new changes in the FSL office every semester since. In spring 2019, the director of the department the FSL was housed under left the institution and left recommendations to the division regarding her area of Community and Leadership Development. The recommendations she made shifted the FSL's positionality on campus and the office make up. Fraternity and Sorority life became its own functional area that worked in partnership with Student Activities and Involvement and additionally, a new position was created, Assistant Director of FSL, and my supervisor at the time became the Associate Director.

When I began my research in Fall 2019, the Fraternity and Sorority life office was composed of two new graduate assistants (GAs) and one professional staff member. In late October, the new Assistant Director became my supervisor. The mid-semester start of the Assistant Director created a unique and unclear transition. I used both my old supervisor and current supervisor as support. They gave me space to engage with my topic through conversation and resources that provided me with different perspectives.

Throughout my research I worked in my role in fraternity and sorority life, where I advised the Panhellenic executive board which is made up of nine student leaders that serve as the governing body for the Panhellenic community. I also served as chapter development advisor for a men's and women's chapter on campus for the two past years. My role as a chapter

development advisor is to provide needs-based advising to the two chapters. This topic was important to me because of the various experiences I had working with and navigating the sorority membership experience.

Additionally, two years ago, I had the opportunity to work for my national organization as a chapter consultant. During that time, I supported chapter leaders and challenged them to change the norms in their organizations. I found leaders to be frustrated with members and members frustrated with leadership creating dissonance in the chapters. This was no different from my experience at USD.

Although I am Panhellenic sorority women and fraternity and sorority life GA, there are still challenges that I faced as a researcher on this topic. My positionality as an employee of the university gave me a level of authority that influenced my work. I was also considered an outsider of the chapters that I worked with throughout the year, as I am not a member of their chapters. All research was administered outside of my GA role. Thus, I was involved with individual chapter experiences more than normal for someone in my role. I engaged with chapter advisors, chapter members, campus partners and inter/national Panhellenic headquarter offices that assisted me in understanding my role in my research and to take on different perspectives.

### **Needs Assessment**

My research stems from my experience during my undergraduate career working for my organization, as well as my current graduate assistantship in fraternity and sorority life at the University of San Diego. In my undergraduate career, I found myself continuously let down by members of my organization due to the perceived lack of desire to make the chapter better.

As I served my chapter and campus community, I found myself tightly holding on to my titles and trying to influence my communities to buy into the change I saw as necessary. After

running for chapter president of my organization and losing, I questioned myself as a leader because I did not gain the most coveted title. Weeks later, chapter members named me as the sister who embodies leadership; this is where my understanding of leadership began to change.

While working for my organization as a resident chapter consultant establishing a new chapter on a university campus, I advised eight officers. While working with these officers, I hoped that the general chapter members would buy into the sorority experience to establish and support an effective Panhellenic sorority chapter. I often felt defeated while working with chapter leadership due to the resistance of the chapter membership.

Entering into my graduate assistantship, I found chapter leaders consistently frustrated with chapter members for various reasons. Oftentimes, my one on one meeting with chapter officers became a vent session about their members. With further exploration and questioning in my meetings with chapter presidents, I found that the cause was a lack of *collective responsibility*. Chapter members were not able to recognize how they mattered to the organization or how the ways they chose to show up mattered to the organization.

Fraternities and sororities often speak to the leadership experience that membership offers but in reality “leadership” is only given to a few because leadership is viewed as positional. With leadership being viewed as positional, very few members develop as leaders. Leadership is available to everyone and it is an individual’s choice when and how to take it up. I believed the problem is that general members do not believe they have the ability to be seen as leaders. In addition, those informal positions of leadership are not tapping into their members potential to make the organization great. After talking with my supervisor, DJ Mahoney, Associate Director of Fraternity and Sorority Life, I found that the investment of the general membership of fraternities and sororities has often been forgotten when supporting individuals

chapter leaders. DJ also mentioned that leadership is often only valued at the chapter level. Thus, chapter member roles outside of the sorority experience do not hold the same value (D. Mahoney, personal communication, April 29, 2019). These were the problems I sought to understand as I began my research.

### **Cycle 1 (Discovery) - Leadership Dialogue Among Chapter Executive Boards**

The purpose of the discovery phase is to engage in dialogue or storytelling focusing on “peak times” of the organization to better understand the unique experiences of all stakeholders to recognize the potential of the organization (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 43). The intention in this cycle was to observe how chapter leadership understands their own leadership and how they view their chapter membership. Additionally, it was important for me to learn how Panhellenic sorority leaders perceived positive organizational change before anticipating how I could best assist them in implementing change. My goal for this cycle was to create a space where students could share their stories through the lens of leadership so I could better understand the “positive possibilities” (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 6).

#### **Sub-Cycle 1.a Discover/Observe**

This sub-cycle began during the spring of 2019 when I was wrapping up the semester in my Graduate Assistant role. With the semester coming to a close, many fraternity and sorority student leaders were finishing up their first semester in their positions. I observed several of them were beginning to feel burnt out. They had begun to lose their excitement to advance their organization due to the day to day frustrations with members. I began to recognize that there was more I needed to learn about how Panhellenic sorority women take up their leadership and how they define positive change.

#### **Sub-Cycle 1.b Dream/Reflect**

Originally in this cycle I planned to collaborate with a chapter president to facilitate a root cause assessment and membership engagement workshop with the chapter executive board to learn about how chapter leadership view their membership. Upon further reflection, I recognized that this workshop would have been built on the assumption that the chapter was facing challenges and that I already knew the chapter leaders' needs were before even beginning my research. I reevaluated how AI would support my understanding. I found that I needed to learn (discover) where they were at in their leadership development and how they perceived change in and outside sorority life.

### **Sub-Cycle 1.c Design/Plan**

During the fall 2019 semester, I served as co-instructor for an introductory leadership course where I facilitated conversations around leadership and social change in an intimate setting. In this course all students including myself did an activity to learn where each other's definition and experiences of leadership comes from through a leadership timeline. From this activity, students were able to reflect and begin to make meaning of their leadership. I wanted to emulate that experience with chapter leadership to begin to learn about their experiences with leadership throughout their time in their chapter, how they came into their positional roles, and what it was like to serve their chapter in this capacity? I took this activity and edited the questions to fit the lived experiences of Panhellenic sorority life at USD. The timeline would begin on the first day they join their organization and would end on the date of the focus group (Appendix D for the full activity and debrief questions). This cycle consisted of two focus groups, which I will refer to as leadership dialogues, with two chapter executive boards, Kappa Upsilon and Gamma Iota. I met with two chapters during a part of their chapter executive board meetings that happen weekly on Sunday and Monday nights. The leadership dialogue began with the

leadership timeline, to allow for the students to begin to reflect on their experiences in their perspective organizations. Students were able to share significant moments that showed up on their timeline with the group allowing for them to connect and learn from other experiences.

#### **Sub-Cycle 1.d Destiny/Act/Data Collection**

Both chapter's executive board officers had almost completed a full term in their roles during the time this cycle was completed. The dialogue allowed an opportunity for them to reflect on their experiences and commitment to the organization. Each dialogue began with an individual activity which I collected at the end. Additionally, I recorded the entire dialogue with student's permission so I could remain present with the students and then transcribe later to determine themes. Specifically, for leadership dialogue one with Kappa Upsilon, I facilitated a dialogue with the chapters executive board on Monday, October 21, 2019. Due to their chapter meetings being on Mondays, eight out of the 13 executive officers were present. For leadership dialogue two with Gamma Iota, I facilitated a dialogue with the chapters executive board on Sunday, November 10, 2019. Six out of the eight executive officers were present.

#### **Sub-Cycle 1.e Evaluation**

It was important to me during this cycle to learn how chapter executive officers define leadership, I believed that it taught me what they value in leadership and where they were in their leadership development. This becomes a continuous theme I sought to find out throughout my research.

**Definition of leadership.** The two executive boards, Kappa Upsilon and Gamma Iota, understood leadership and who is a leader differently. Srilatha Batliwala (2011) described "*leaders* as mainly focused on the attributes and practices of effective leaders and definitions of *leadership*, as practice or process" (p. 18). This reflects the difference between the executive

boards. Kappa Upsilon viewed leadership through a more positional lens focused on the attributes of leadership. The Gamma Iota executive board highlights leadership as situational and a practice. This is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*Definition of Leadership Kappa Upsilon and Gamma Iota Executive Boards*

Kappa Upsilon	Gamma Iota
Inclusive	“Someone that
Role model	inspires others”
Responsible	“Someone who leads
Committed	by example...
Communication	expresses themselves
Brave	to others' action.”
Empathic	“Someone people are
	looking up to.”

While collectively each executive board presented a wide range in understanding of leadership, individual officers on each board presented varying opinions on who is a leader. The President of Kappa Upsilon, Grace, expressed she didn't believe all chapter members are leaders and that leadership is positional, “No, because you need followers. All leaders need a good following. You need to position to gain a following.” Another officer, Bailey followed up with “Roles are situational, I may not always be the leader and I may have a follower here but next situation I am following that person.”

I found that both officers' understanding of who is a leader is developed with how they have made meaning of their lived experiences as chapter officers. Grace found influence in her

chapter through gaining a coveted role while Bailey offered a socially responsible form of leadership. Chapter officer, Abby, Gamma Iota, shared that “You don’t need to have a position to be a leader, a lot of people I looked up to didn’t have positions...Anyone can be a leader.” All women highlight a theme of following the leader and as I make my own meaning of what these officers share, I am reminded that leadership and followership creates unusual paradoxes.

Courageous followers must remain accountable yet relinquish autonomy to a lead and followers truly benefit from leaders as mentors (Chaleff, 2009). Leadership is both formal and informal, which chapter officers were able to point out. Taking Chaleff’s paradoxes of followership framed my understanding of the wide range of experiences chapter officers shared throughout the dialogue. This helped me identify sub-themes in the larger leadership/followership theme.

**Leadership through courage and vulnerability.** Among the two executive boards, women shared stories about powerful leadership moments during their time in the chapter. There was an overwhelming theme that these powerful moments were during moments where formal leaders found the courage to be vulnerable with the large chapter. Gamma Iota’s President, Claire shared a story where a past president read a letter to the whole chapter expressing her mental health struggles. Claire shared that when the past president showed vulnerability in action it emulated what it meant to be a leader. Multiple Kappa Upsilon executive board offices similarly shared a story where a past president was vulnerable as well. The chapter was facing sanctions for poor behaviors and called on the chapter to raise “themselves to a higher standard.” Hailey, Kappa Upsilon, remembered that particular moment was powerful for her and she felt a responsibility to her chapter and to her sisters. The openness of these leaders set the stage for its followers to engage in a genuine connection that can lead to a change process (Chaleff, 2009, p.

14). A deep connection was built in these moments that produced strength between leaders and followers. These women called each other sisters with hope that their connection was much greater than belonging to another club or organizations. It takes courage to be vulnerable. The women described a connection between vulnerability and courage as strength and admirable among these women.

**Leadership potential.** A consistent theme among all student leaders in Cycle One was that all chapter members have the potential to be leaders. When asked if all chapter members were leaders, Kappa Upsilon chapter officer shared “While I think everyone needs followers, I think every woman we recruit has the potential to be a great leader.” This proclamation was affirmed by all women in the room. It was then added that it was exciting to watch members develop as leaders. Kappa Upsilon President Grace commented, “It’s cool because you can see who the leaders are going to be in the new member class too.” The Gamma Iota executive board spoke of fostering the development of leadership in chapter members by allowing them to grow and find greater confidence in themselves. Gamma Iota Chapter President, Mary shared “statistically women are less confident to hold leadership than men, it was important to continually foster leadership among those that drove me to run for president.” This theme of confidence emerges through this Cycle and is largely connected to women finding leadership potential in themselves.

It is widely known that women lack self-confidence or feel like imposters when serving in leadership positions. There were no differences for the women serving in leadership roles in their chapter. Hailey, Kappa Upsilon, reflected on being a new member during her first chapter meeting in awe of the confidence that the executive board portrayed. She said “never seen a group of women that confident even though it was the first day of exec and I didn’t know that. It

was really cool to see.” This confidence became a quality that many of the officers believe they needed to be a leader in their chapter. Many of the women in both chapters spoke of never seeing themselves as leaders or taking on a formal role. This comment was affirmed by Hope, Kappa Upsilon as she shared reaching out to women to run formal roles:

Some people do surprise you; people probably didn’t see me doing it....[I reached out and was like] I know you would be good, [chapter member replied] oh my god I wanted to do it but I wasn’t confident enough to do it.

Confidence is tied to women talking on leadership roles in their chapter and connected to needing others to reaffirm them. All women in this cycle held formal leadership positions and still lacked confidence in themselves as leaders. This was an interesting and important theme for me to understand, how chapter women without formal leadership position make meaning of their own leadership.

**The tapping of members.** The most profound theme to emerge from this cycle was the constant naming of sisters and the recognition of sisters tapping them to apply or run for officer positions. Table 2 lists out a few of the many statements made by executive board officers in both leadership dialogues that highlight the importance of informal mentorship by senior (members older than them) leaders and followers.

Senior leaders and followers in their chapter tapped many of these women to take on leadership which allowed them to see the potential in themselves as someone who could lead their organization. Chaleff offers that senior followers oftentimes have greatest influence and mentoring other followers. Older chapter members outside of the formal leadership role were important to developing leaders. Kappa Upsilon’s Chapter President, Grace described her experience:

Being abroad and not necessarily wanting to run for a position but the people I was with (looked at another officer, who she was aboard with) [they all] pushed me and said I would do a good job and made me feel really special. [They] made me run! If it wasn't for them, I don't know if it would still be in the chapter.

Table 2

*Executive Board Member Statements Regarding Informal Mentorship and Tapping*

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Reflection of the leadership timeline:

- “Most of us said something to someone older than their current position that made them feel special” (Kappa Upsilon).
- “It is important for older members in leadership positions to continue to foster that and tapping younger members” (Gamma Iota).

Reflection on taking on a leadership role

- “It felt great to know that older girls in the chapter were seeing me as a leader” (Gamma Iota).
  - “I noticed how everyone had a role model or a friend to pull them into to do this position which is cool that they were encouraged by someone” (Kappa Upsilon).
- 

Women encouraging one another to lead their chapter was how the majority of them found their place on an executive board. Grace also highlighted that leadership roles provided a sense of connection to the chapter. It gave women a purpose to remain a part or rekindle the relationship to the organization. Many of these women were encouraged by another member to lead their chapter, thus we need to engage chapter members as courageous followers, tapping them to exert their leadership without a formal title. Throughout the dialogues with both chapter

executive boards, I found myself relating to them as women in leadership and sorority women. The imposter syndrome I felt as a young leader in my chapter still continues today. I continue to seek validation from authority, mentors and my peers much like many of the officers highlight in this cycle. Being able to relate to them was crucial for my understanding on how I could aid Panhellenic sorority leadership development.

**Organizational change.** When I asked members about positive organizational change, I found that creating an impact fueled change. Additionally, chapter officers unknowingly articulated a relationship between positive organizational and social change models. “The social change model was designed for college students and advocates for leadership development grounded in social responsibility and change for the common good” (Dugan, 2006, p. 219).

*Change as impact.* Women expressed that positive organizational is creating a lasting impact in their chapter. A Kappa Upsilon chapter officer, described positive change as “something that stays in effect [for] those that come after, not just something during your term but it is creating something that would last for the terms to follow and for others to follow.” An officer followed up with “it is a message you create and then pass down. When you are gone it is still there.” Chapter officers spoke about taking on leadership roles to implement change or bring topics to light they felt were missing. A Gamma Iota officer shared, “I am super into mental health because I deal with my own issues with it. I thought this position (Standards) would be a great way to start implementing stuff so that people could see (this role) as a resource.” While the members of the executive board could speak on making an impact on their chapters, they overall were unable to identify tangible impacts or changes they had made. Yet they collectively believed that they had made changes in the chapter. Overall, both groups identified positive change or impact as feeling rather tangible progress.

*Change as social change.* Gamma Iota's executive board highlighted change in a different context. They identified positive organizational change as change for social good, emphasizing the connection between social issues such as racism, classism and mental health. An officer in Gamma Iota mentioned that organizational change in sorority life is letting go of tradition by "Staying current to new and developing issues and even though it's a traditional organization, being willing to adapt to new issues that come up." The women of Gamma Iota executive board discussed that having honest conversations with the larger community about the issues that riddle the FSL community could allow for real change to begin. They believed that all organizations needed to be committed but aren't. Gamma Iota's President Mary affirms this saying, "a lot of organizations thrive on traditional ways, it [social change] can happen if organizations are willing to. But a lot say they are but aren't." Women in Kappa Upsilon also mentioned social issues but were not explicit like the women of Gamma Iota. Learning how two different chapters view positive change was crucial for me to understand as there is a wide range of the development and understanding among these two groups.

Lastly Taylor, Gamma Iota mentioned a key point about sustaining positive change in sorority life:

People serve in these positions for one year and it's at the end of the college career and whatever happens after this is not my problem, I'm not here for it. I just need to do this now and it can be a later problem, but I am not here for it. I think that also makes it difficult because we are just trying to do the day to day and then graduating.

Taylor brings up a point that has often crossed my mind. Panhellenic sororities operate with consistent changes in leadership every year meaning that if leadership only happens at the

executive board level, it can be incredibly difficult to produce. Thus, the need to invest in chapter memberships' leadership development is crucial.

### **Cycle 2 (Dream) - Leadership Dialogue/Survey of Chapter Members**

The themes from Cycle 1 guided my observations and reflections in Cycle 2 as I sought to engage with the chapter members on how leadership and positive organizational change showed up in their chapter experience. The objective of the Dream cycle “is to expand and extend people’s sense of what is possible” (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, p. 44). It was important to me to engage with chapter members of all years in school, ages and leadership experiences. For this cycle, my goal was to facilitate a dialogue for chapter members to dream to take up their individual leadership and influence in the chapter.

#### **Sub-Cycle 2.a Discover/Observe**

In my Graduate Assistant role in Fraternity and Sorority Life, I spent the weeks following the leadership dialogues intentionally observing how chapter members in the Panhellenic community were taking up their leadership and their understanding of their individual influence to create a change. Through my role in the Panhellenic advisor, I had multiple opportunities to observe Panhellenic sorority women. During this time recruitment counselor interviews took place where chapter women were asked “What is a leadership moment you learned from?” All examples either were when they served in a leadership role or they struggled to identify a moment because they tied leadership to a position. Additionally, I facilitated educational workshops where chapter members learned about alcohol use and their role of being an event monitor at a social event. During this training, members were asked to reflect about how they perpetuated and permitted behaviors in the FSL community. I began to notice that women struggled to identify the part of allowing behavior to exist, yet I was impressed that they were

eager to find ways to interrupt or change the behavior. Lastly, there was an overwhelming focus on how other members of the chapter and not themselves contribute to poor community behavior. This made me wonder how chapter members would interpret the leadership dialogue I hosted with chapter members. I decided to host two focus groups that invited chapter women from all seven Panhellenic chapters at USD to engage in a conversation around leadership and positive change.

### **Sub-Cycle 2.b Dream/Reflect**

Following the leadership dialogues with chapter executive boards, I reflected on the themes that emerged. Both Kappa Upsilon and Gamma Iota shared different views of chapter members' leadership and change but expressed similar views regarding being a woman in a leadership role. This left me questioning how chapter members view their leadership and the leadership of their peers. Additionally, I wondered how organizational change shows up for them as members. As a student affairs practitioner studying leadership, I believe that all individuals can be leaders and that leadership is a commitment to encourage change. For me to better understand how to support chapter member leadership development to create positive change, I needed to learn about how chapter members engage with leadership and lead in the Panhellenic community.

### **Sub-Cycle 2.c Design/Plan**

The chapter executive board member gave me a foundation for understanding leadership of Panhellenic sorority women. Chapter members not in FSL leadership roles make up the majority of the Panhellenic community so it was important to understand their lived experiences. I planned to host two leadership dialogues like Cycle One with a leadership timeline and a set of debrief questions, which I altered. Due to the unforeseen circumstances, I was only able to host

one focus group which three women attended. While the conversation was rich with the three women that attended, I felt that it was necessary to learn more from chapter women in the community. After reflecting, I knew I would be able to reach more women if I created a survey, which encompassed the similar questions in a different format.

### **Sub-cycle 2.d Destiny/Act/Data Collection**

The leadership dialogue with chapter members was hosted on November 18, 2019. I hosted this dialogue in the time between the seven organizations chapter meetings and invited all Panhellenic sorority women to attend. I asked chapter presidents of the seven Panhellenic organizations to encourage their members to attend as well. Three women from the Zeta Eta chapter attended. After conclusions of the dialogue I knew I wanted more data on the questions I asked. I reflected and decided to create a predominantly open-ended question survey. In January 2020, I administered a survey that 24 women participated, and it captured women in all seven Panhellenic chapters at USD.

### **Sub-cycle 2.e Evaluation**

Similar to Cycle One, I believed that it was important to learn how chapter members define leadership. This Cycle is significant because the participants in this cycle are the group of women that I hope to better assist in recognizing their leadership. Additionally, the theme of leadership showed up in a variety of ways. I will share each of these themes below.

**Definition of leadership.** Sharing chapter members definition of leadership is valuable as it encapsulates all the sub-themes of leadership that I break down in later sections. The word cloud (see Figure 1) highlights the chapter members definition of leadership, along with how they view leadership in themselves and others. A 4th year chapter member in Alpha Lambda summarized chapter members views of leadership, sharing:

Leadership is guiding others toward a common goal and setting good examples for those to follow. There are several qualities that define an outstanding leader: excellent communication, honesty, has a vision, and motivation. Leadership is being selfless and acknowledging others and their opinions and perspectives. Leadership is not something that happens overnight - it is a growing process and takes a lot of work... All individuals have the ability to be leaders.

Chapter women identified both characteristics of leaders and leadership as a practice and process. I believe that members' positionality of not serving in leadership positions allows for leadership to be recognized as a practice that individual can take up. As an advisor, this definition deepens my desire to engage with chapter members leadership development in a more intentional way. I learned that chapter members are more attuned to leadership and organizational change than they often get credit for. They are making meaning of leadership and their roles as leaders through contexts of their role in the chapter. It confirmed the importance of empowering students at all levels of the organizations.



Figure 1. Leadership Word Cloud.

**Leadership as serving others.** Over and over again during the leadership dialogue and in the survey, leadership was described as serving others. Chapter members provided leadership as a form of helping others to meet needs of a community. They expressed a form of transformational leadership. For them, leaders were community minded rather than individualists. Leadership was an opportunity to provide and guide others. See Table 3 for chapter members' statements of leadership as serving others.

This finding adds to the previous cycle of wanting to make an impact for others to experience. There was a difference between how the two groups between Cycle 1 and 2 described serving others. In this cycle, participants (chapter members) saw serving others as a collective experience while in Cycle 1, executive board offices described serving others through an intrinsic motive. I found this valuable as an advisor for understanding how I could personalize leadership development for different levels of membership. Chaleff (2009) argued that courageous followers must have courage to serve a leader.

In many of the survey responses, members felt powerless and shared feeling frustrated with their executive boards. A member of Gamma Iota shared "In our current e-board, I personally feel like it is not an open relationship with members. It feels very "their way" or no way with certain issues." Additionally, a member of Alpha Gamma expressed "Chapter executive boards [have] used their leadership/title to go on a power trip. Rather than engaging in a dialogue it always felt very one sided like we have the answers because we're in charge and your input is invalid because you're not on exec." Empowering chapter leaders to serve and build up their followers could help create collective responsibility and connection to the organization. Empowering members to serve their leaders by helping them could also provide opportunities to live out their values of leadership expressed in this cycle.

Table 3

*Chapter Members Statements of Leadership as Serving Others*

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- “My definition of leadership is supporting a community one is involved in through learning and uplifting their needs.”
  - “Leadership to me is going above and beyond to serve others and make sure their needs are met before your own.”
  - “I am a leader because I make decisions and perform actions to help others in my chapter.”
- 

**Positional leadership.** One the questions asked, both in the focus group and survey was “What is your definition of leadership?” Only one woman referred to it as a formal leadership position and title. When the women were asked “Are you a leader? Please explain,” 94% believed they were leaders yet many of them justified it with leadership roles they currently or previously held. Table 4 showcases their responses. Chapter members also mentioned that they were leaders and had the characteristics of a leader but did not have a formal leadership role. Due to not having a role, they believed they were unable to exercise those skills. Table 4 also emphasizes chapter women beliefs that they must be in a leadership to lead a group. Ultimately, there was a disconnect between members' definition of leadership and how they saw themselves as leaders. I believe that their views were connected to the power, or lack of power, that members perceive exists. Members unable to identify their leadership or influence in the chapter makes it difficult for change to unfold in a large organization as they are the main consumers of the change, not their executive board. Additionally, if members cannot recognize their power

then they are lacking the ability to challenge formal leadership to make necessary positive changes which are part of being a courageous follower.

Table 4

*Are you a Leader? Please Explain*

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Justification of being a leader

- “I am a leader of student sustainability at USD and a leader in the FSL community. “
- “I believe I am a leader because I am in a position.”
- “I consider myself a leader. I have had formal leadership roles in Panhellenic.”
- “I am a leader in the USD Women's Water Polo club, as a Torero Tour Guide, and as Panhellenic Delegate in my sorority.”

Unable to be a lead without a formal leadership position

- “I have the potential and I have the qualities, so yes. However, I am not in a position at the moment to be able to exercise those abilities.”
  - “In my chapter, I didn't always think that I made a distinct impact on others until I was nominated for my position. I have always had a lot of ideas about what I wanted for my chapter, but I didn't always think that my voice would be heard.”
- 

**Leadership potential.** Through this cycle, chapter women repeatedly mentioned their potential and their ability to grow as a leader not just themselves but in their sisters as well. This idea of potential is linked to the need of recognizing it, which I discussed in Cycle 1. A chapter member from Alpha Lambda said “All individuals have the ability to be leaders. It all depends on the motivation toward being a leader.” While a chapter member in Kappa Upsilon stated, “I don't believe that every chapter member is currently a leader, but I think they all have the

capabilities to be leaders if they so choose to.” The connection to potential and the need to recognize one’s potential had me questioning, how are Panhellenic sororities building or developing leaders at all levels? I come back to this question in Cycle 3. The chapter member in Kappa Upsilon continued sharing that “chapter members who do not hold leadership positions but are highly active in the chapter and are motivated to help and set a good example are also leaders because they are helping to progress the chapter.” This highlights the importance of senior followers and their influence in the chapter. Engagement and connection to the chapter was how many chapter women recognized leaders or senior followers in their organizations.

**Leadership as role modeling.** As it showed in Cycle 1, leadership is connected to relationships. In this cycle, chapter women referred to it as role modeling. Chapter women aspired and looked up to chapter leaders. The word cloud (see Figure 1) highlights statements made about being a role model to others. A chapter member of Gamma Iota stated, “My definition of leadership is someone who is a role model for others and helps to create a productive and positive atmosphere for a community or group of individuals.” Leadership is acting in a way that others want to emulate. The sorority experience highlights, both the new member and seniors’ experiences, creating an environment where women look up to older members and create informal mentor relationships. As a sorority woman, I can relate to the experience of looking up to others that were older than me. I believed them to be wiser and more confident than me. I believe that this underscores the importance of older members tapping younger women to take on leadership that was discussed in Cycle 1. Peer to peer interactions are an important part of leadership in the sorority experience and I believe a key factor is producing change. A member of Iota PI expressed a challenge in her chapter, “The biggest challenge that my chapter faces is passing down bad examples of drinking to the new members because that

perpetuates a negative drinking culture.” This member connected that leadership, first is not positional and second, role modeling expresses the power of influences older members have on younger members. Role modeling can also cause poor culture in chapters to continue.

**Leadership as connection.** Another major theme that showed up in Cycle 1 and was reaffirmed was that leadership provided connection. I reflected in my journal on leadership as connection writing, “Chapter women view leadership as a form of connection to the organization, one another and as a mission to create an environment where others can feel loved and belong” (March 15, 2020). An incoming chapter officer, described that she ran for her positions because she was not feeling connected to the chapter, “[I wanted to create] a similar situation I mean [how] I could make this time [recruitment] time to make people finally feel comfortable around everybody.” Women looked to formal leadership roles for the opportunity to create an experience they had or lacked in their membership experiences. Additionally, women described positive leadership experiences with feeling connected to one another, feeling a part of the larger organization or community. Holding a formal position provided women purpose in the organization creating a connection. Sometimes however that purpose was to serve their self-interests, as I saw in cycle one with chapter officers. As women seek leadership to provide connection, followers may become disconnect and lack purpose in the organization. Chapter leaders need to show followers the value and purpose they add to the organization. (Chaleff, 2009).

**Change.** Positive organizational change was described in two categories: first- change for the common good and second- social change. Table 5 show statements that fall into these two categories.

Table 5

*Change for the Common Good and Social Change*

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## Common Good

- “Change that makes the sorority as a whole better for everyone.”
- “Positive org change is when people in an org rally around a common goal and focus to support the people both in and out of the organization”
- “Consistently maintaining a community-first mindset, working toward constructing, designing, and sustaining a healthy and uplifting environment for the entire community [...] always demanding more from each other so that we continue to make forward strides and better ourselves and learn from each other and our surroundings”

## Social Change

- “Organizational change can be extremely small or large. I think that to be positive, the change needs to be moving the chapter forward and challenge us to do more. Positive change is sometimes uncomfortable, but it means that there is improvement and growth.”
  - “I believe positive organizational change is restructuring current methods and structures as technologies change and develop to strengthen an organization from the inside out and continue to move toward positive social change”
  - “To me, positive organizational change is creating systemic change that improves the organization or chapter as a whole.”
-

The understanding of organizational change at the chapter member level is wide. Members associate positive change in organization differently and each type of change does not necessarily support the other (common good vs. social change). For example, in the context of sorority life, common good change may not support social change due the historical exclusive nature of sorority. Also, I questioned who common good change or social change was aimed at helping? Is it the current members or the future membership? I questioned this because I believe understanding who the change is for can allow organizations to work on both technical and adaptive challenges. This deepened my understanding that organizational change in Panhellenic sorority life varies based experiences, cultures and identities similar to members' definition of leadership.

### **Cycle 3 (Dream): Leadership Dialogue/Survey of Chapter Advisors**

As I reflected on my first two cycles, I was not in place to progress through the appreciative inquiry model into the Design phase. I was still dreaming. I was still questioning, “What might be?” (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 6). The dream phase encourages all stakeholders to envision the future of the organization together while not losing sight of the organization’s history. In this cycle, I sought to understand the history of the Panhellenic organizations at USD with the chapter advisors, who are typically alumni volunteers. While the chapter members and student leadership are constantly changing, chapter advisors tend to remain consistent. Many chapter advisors at USD had been supporting their chapters for years and their insights were crucial to understand before I progressed forward.

#### **Sub-Cycle 3.a Discover/Observe**

Over the course of the semester, I had the chance to observe how student leaders and the Fraternity and Sorority Life office engages with chapter advisors. Chapter advisors are critical in

the FSL experiences as they guide the local chapters through the alumni lens and keep the chapter accountable to the national organization policies and procedures. The Panhellenic chapter advisors at USD were very engaged with their local chapters yet the relationship they had with their students varied. This wide range of support and relationship chapters have with their chapter advisors trickled down in the chapter experiences and culture.

### **Sub-Cycle 3.b Dream/Reflect**

Upon reflecting on my first two cycles, I was wondering how the leadership of their chapter advisors influences the chapter. I spoke with my supervisor at the time, DJ Mahoney, about my findings from the previous cycle and how I planned to engage the chapter advisors. DJ and I agreed that they are key stakeholders in the Panhellenic sorority experiences and vital in this research to hear from. As I reflected on my experiences with chapter advisors, both as a student and paraprofessional, chapter advisors are the consistent people who experience the organization in its fullness. They remain present year after year, witnessing new leadership and new members come and go. Chapter advisors experience chapter cultural change and they hold vital knowledge about the Panhellenic sorority experiences. I wrote in my journal “Chapter advisors are a foundational piece to the function and livelihood of sororities. They can help propel sorority progress forward or hinder the advancement. Either way they are indispensable and working alongside them in a productive manner is crucial” (March 17, 2020). This reflection forced me to recognize that I didn’t know where chapter advisors stood in their understanding of leadership and positive organizational change. I needed to let go of my assumptions and treat this cycle like others so I could determine next steps.

### **Sub-Cycle 3.c Design/Plan**

After speaking with my supervisor, I hoped to host a focus group with questions adapted from the previous two cycles to highlight their experiences as chapter advisors, whom many have been around for 3 or more years. I planned to host this focus group at the conclusion of the Fraternity and Sorority Life advisor quarterly meeting. At this meeting all chapter advisors are asked to attend, which includes chapters a part of Interfraternity and Fraternity and Sorority Life Multicultural Council. This provided an opportunity to sit and engage with all organizations at once. My supervisor made time for the focus group during the meeting to help support my research. Four out of the seven Panhellenic chapter advisors attended the advisor meeting and the focus group.

Similarly, to Cycle 2, after the focus group, I felt that it was necessary to engage with the other three Panhellenic chapter advisors that were not present at the meeting. I spoke with my supervisor about wanting to reach out to the other advisors. He encouraged me to do so and believed that they would be willing to participate. Due to timing, I chose to create an open-ended question survey similar to the questions I asked during the focus group.

### **Sub-cycle 3.d Destiny/Act/Data Collection**

The focus group was held on Monday, November 11, 2019 during the Fraternity and Sorority Life advisor quarterly meeting. Once the topic was introduced only the four Panhellenic advisors that attend stayed. The dialogue consisted of questions that reflected both leadership with their chapters and the greater FSL community. Additionally, I recorded the entire dialogue so I could remain present with the advisors. After the conclusion of the advisor leadership dialogue, I saw a need to hear for them the other chapter advisors not present. I administered a predominantly open-ended survey to all seven-chapter advisors in January 2020. An additional two advisors participated in the survey.

**Sub-cycle 3.e Evaluation**

I found this cycle difficult because I let assumptions, I had about chapter advisors influence the questions I asked, which left me frustrated with the outcomes of both the focus group and survey. I struggled with finding continuity or connections between statements of advisors. Chapter executive board leaders and chapter members were more equipped in creating dialogue around leadership and organizational change than advisors. With that said, themes from this cycle reinforce themes that have been identified earlier and brought up new challenges. Additionally, chapter advisors all mentioned not being able to speak about the chapter member experiences as they are mostly connected to chapter executive board leadership.

**Leadership as potential.** Leadership and being a leader continue to show up as potential that all members can access. Jessica, Kappa Upsilon advisor, expressed that “being a leader requires more effort than just showing up. While not all members are currently leaders in the chapter, I do believe that every member has the opportunity and potential of being a leader at any time.” All six advisors mentioned a statement similar to Jessica’s, yet it was often followed up with members not choosing to take up leadership. Michelle, Beta Epsilon advisor, highlights, “all members have the ability and opportunity to be a leader, but for whatever reason, some do not present themselves as a leader.” Individual members are not taking up their own authority unless given a sought-after title. Michelle followed up in the focus group, “I do have other members who are maybe in a small leadership role that don’t take it as seriously, that don’t feel as important.” Large leadership roles are where members feel empowered and important. Emma, Gamma Iota Advisor, sums up leadership potential with “every woman in the chapter has the ability to impact another person whether in the chapter or in the community at large. Regardless of their title, their actions and words are influential.” While I am glad that leadership potential is

a continuous theme, I began to get frustrated that there was no perceived desire to further develop members in their leadership if they were not in a role. Chapter women must recognize the power and potential influencing in the chapter despite not having a role. This would allow them to recognize they could lead anywhere.

**Tapping members.** Chapter advisors discussed the influence that older members have on younger members in the organization. Older members who are committed to the organizations provided a form of wisdom and pride for the chapter that younger members may not have gained yet. Amy, Gamma Iota advisor, provided an example of intentionally tapping women:

For us (Gamma Iota) part of our membership education is actually tapping those very specific members to lead membership education who aren't necessarily officers but are seen as leaders in the chapter... the chapter really respects them, [often they] just got back from abroad and we know they're going to be a leader but right now they're not in that position.

The tapping of members also shows that members see leadership as something greater than a position, yet it is fueled by making sure their chapter can fill an executive board in the future. It also allows for members to gain a strong connection to the organization and grooms them to run for large leadership positions. As I learned earlier in cycle one, tapping members to serve in leadership boosts confidence, makes women feel special and encourages them to take risk in taking on leadership. This example highlights Chaleff's (2009) take on peer-to-peer relations allows for followers to be brought along by other followers that will provide the member what they need. Finding ways to give chapter member authority of relationships, especially sorority life, could provide healthy leadership development.

**Health of leaders.** One theme that showed up in this cycle that I believe is important to highlight in the overall health and wellness of chapter leaders with the Panhellenic sorority and the USD community. Linda, Alpha Lambda advisor, stated:

There's a higher expectation across the board whether it's academically, participating in campus activities, internships or the image factor you know with all of the social media... everybody is expected to be perceived as happy and you know they've got everything together... I hear about or see more of depression, anxiety, mental health struggles and because they're so spread thin.

As the conversation continued, advisors expressed that their officers believe it is their job to fix the issues with FSL and either get bogged down or do everything in their power to overcorrect and then burnout because they don't see the change they wanted. The burnout then filters into their mental health and wellness concerns. Mental health and burnout experiences among officers is affirmed by all advisors and staff in the room. Students well-being is my one number priority as an advisor. Students' expectations and health are at the forefront of every conversation as every part of a student's life is intertwined. I found this enlightening as it was not a focus before this focus group. For students to make change and take up their own authority, they need to take care of themselves. Students take in external and internal forces that are both implicit or explicit contribute to the pressure they are under and must be taken into consideration.

**Change.** When discussing positive organizational change with chapter advisors, two categories stood out. The two categories were: change for the common good, similar to Cycle Two, and being ahead of the curve. Change for common good focused around a "general consensus that this is something that everyone is agreement" as Linda, Alpha Lambda advisor, described. Michelle, Beta Epsilon advisor, continued on "that it's something good. It's a change

in your organization that all members are a part of, that they feel accountable toward.” There is a collective nature to organizational change, and it must be agreed upon by all members of this organization. I found this hard to reconcile with because waiting for everyone to be in agreement is slow moving. Nevertheless, I believe a commitment from the organization is necessary. It returns to the question, who would benefit from positive organization in Panhellenic sorority life?

The second category I determined was organizational change as of being ahead of the curve. Sarah, Iota Pi advisor, shares that positive organizational change is “Keeping up with the current times, adapting when needed, and making the organization better for current and future members.” This answers the question who is for and who is benefiting. It gives the opportunity to transform the organization for the betterment of everyone. Michelle, Beta Epsilon advisor, also stated later that organizational change “is intentional actions that transform the chapter in a way that better align them with their values and society.” Positive organizational change with Panhellenic organizations can exist when organizations look to their values and history to help pave the way for other women, today and tomorrow.

**Transitional leadership in change.** A consistent theme that surfaced during this cycle was the structure of transitional leadership makes it difficult for consistency in leadership and organizational development. This was discussed during Cycle 1 with chapter executive boards. Each year officers’ transition in Panhellenic sororities. While elections can be exciting times in a chapter as younger members step up to take on roles, it also can mean that everything that the last executive worked on is lost and leaders look to build from the ground up. At USD this can be more difficult due to USD’s going abroad culture. This past year 35% of the Panhellenic community was abroad and many of these women then ran and won officer elections after being

away for a whole semester. Amy, Gamma Iota Advisor, mentions that the abroad experience “it does hinder what happens with our leadership...it’s not consistent, when you change over that many times things fall through the cracks and there's not enough consistency to build on.” All chapter advisors expressed how the abroad experiences at USD impacts the chapter and its progress. Amy continues with “it feels like starting at square one, sometimes.”

In previous cycles, I have learned that taking on leadership roles provides members coming back from abroad a point of entry and connection to the chapter after being gone for several months. Linda, Alpha Lambda advisors, indicates that this often point of frustration,

[Over the] last 5 years, there are members who were very involved, who go abroad and then coming back are disengaged and then there's others that weren't involved go abroad come back and seek out the involvement. We don't typically know how they will adjust back in the chapter and which can make things difficult.

Chapter members are experiencing a large transition after coming back from aboard to campus life at USD. Jumping to leadership roles can give the opportunity to feel a part of the chapter immediately because they have purpose, yet it can hinder the ability to change or build upon goals and initiatives because they were not present the semester before. Without proper onboarding many chapter leaders may feel in the dark, which emphasizes the important role chapter advisors play in Panhellenic sorority life at USD.

#### **Cycle 4 (Design): Interviews Inter/National Panhellenic Sorority Staff**

The purpose of the Design Phase brings attention “creating the ideal organization so that it might achieve its dream” (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 162). The Design phase is important because it is the gatekeeper for “sustaining positive change and the organization's positive past” (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 162). In this cycle, I looked to hear from the inter/national

organizations of the seven Panhellenic organizations on USD campus and how they are designing sorority for what it can be. The individuals working at headquarters officers look to achieve the mission or dream of the organization through its values and founding.

#### **Sub-Cycle 4.a Discover/Observe**

As I entered my final cycle of research, I felt unmotivated due to the lack of participation and unmet expectations in previous cycles. I spent time talking with both my old supervisor, DJ Mahoney and my new supervisor, Kristen Lemaster. As I talked through my discontentment, I came to the realization that the lack of engagement and feedback during Cycle 3 was data itself. I expected advisors to have a high level conversation about leadership and positive organizational change without giving them an opportunity to learn or reflect themselves much like chapter officers and members did in Cycles 1 and 2. I assumed that the education and training offered to chapter advisors by their inter/national headquarters offices provided them this discourse. I also believed that chapter advisors would have educational backgrounds in student development, leadership and organizational theory yet many of them did not. I was not valuing the benefit of advisors coming from differing backgrounds. This observation left me wondering if and how Panhellenic sororities are providing intentional leadership development to prepare chapter members and volunteers to become dynamic leaders.

#### **Sub-Cycle 4.b Dream/Reflect**

In reflecting, I wondered how, and if, Panhellenic sororities were providing intentional leadership development to prepare chapter members to become dynamic leaders. I reflected on my experiences working for my national organization. There was an educational and programs office full of individuals committed and passionate about development of Panhellenic sorority women. There was intention built into every program and educational workshop that was created

and put forward to the larger organization. Each program was rooted in the values and mission of organization. The goals were aligned with mission yet were provided opportunity for women to grow in leaders in today's world. After much consideration, I identified that I needed to engage in conversations with the individuals developing leadership development programs at the inter/national level.

### **Sub-Cycle 4.c Design/Plan**

For this cycle, I reached out to all seven Panhellenic chapters that are present on USD campus intern/national headquarters officers. I looked to set up interviews with the directors of the education and leadership development programs departments. I found the directors contact information of each of these departments on the organization's websites. I planned to host these interviews earlier during the Spring semester start but due to many inter/national organizations hosting their officer national leadership programs, it was difficult to connect with these individuals. Three total organizations responded back and set up an interview. I reviewed the questions I asked in the previous cycles and reimagined them with the Design phase lens. Additionally, I inquired about how the national organization understands and influences leadership development of sorority women.

### **Sub-cycle 4.d Destiny/Act/Data Collection**

My first interview was with Anna, who is a senior director working for Kappa Upsilon, on February 14, 2020 via Zoom. She is not a member of any Panhellenic organization. My second interview was with Joyce, who is a director and a member of Zeta Eta on February 21, 2020 via Zoom. My third interview was with Ashley, who is a coordinator and member of Beta Epsilon on March 10, 2020 via Zoom. I audio recorded each of these calls to remain present with the participant.

### **Sub-cycle 4.e Evaluation**

All participants in this cycle had completed or were working on their master's degree in higher education or leadership studies. The participants from Kappa Upsilon and Zeta Eta organizations had 10 plus years' experience and worked at the Director level which provided me with a deeper understanding of the organization. All three women I interviewed illustrated how their national organizations have and are building structures and programs to reflect the "positive core" (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 130) of the national sorority through its mission and values.

The definition of leadership provided in all three interviews was that leadership is not born, leadership is learned. It was also shared that leadership with the Panhellenic sorority experiences is an opportunity to "build those building blocks and foundation for what you [the student] want for yourself [themselves] to look like in the future" (Ashley, Beta Epsilon). Additionally, all members are leaders, Joyce, Kappa Upsilon, summarized, "regardless of your position, everyone is part of leadership because leadership is also followership." Each woman described the intentional leadership development opportunities of sororities members, both for collegians and alumnae in addition to how organizational change can unfold when members design their future. This laid out in the following themes.

**Leadership development programs.** While each woman I interviewed said that leadership is not positional, all women spoke to the development programs that the organization offers chapter officers and emerging leaders. These programs support hundreds of women across the national that come from each chapter. The hope is that by providing well rounded leadership experiences for a few select officers each year, they can return to their chapter with their newfound knowledge to teach others. There are also one-off leadership opportunities provided by headquarter officers through webinars, regional training days and class cohort membership

development workshops. Throughout the interviews, I found that each of the organization's programs and educational workshops are rooted in a variety of adult, student and leadership development theories. Anna shares that Zeta Eta has membership competencies for collegiate members, volunteers, staff members, all the way to the National Board. This is consistent with the other two organizations I interviewed. While Panhellenic national organizations provide various opportunities to the executive board, I quickly recognized that very little is done to support the development of chapter members that do not hold leadership positions. As I discussed my research with Anna from Zeta Eta about wanting to learn how to empower leadership from the bottom up among women not in positions. She shared honestly:

“We are not doing a good job of creating good followers. ...Broadly I think in Higher Ed, we focus a lot of time, energy, and effort on people who are in positional places of leadership, even though we say everybody can be a leader. I mean the amount of money and effort we spend on our volunteers...and officers is ridiculous...we have hundreds and thousands of members.”

It's not just Panhellenic sorority life that focuses all its attention on student leaders, it is across the board in student affairs in higher education. While I think intentional development of student leaders is important, I was left wondering what we may be missing by not tapping into organizations' membership to build members to recognize their leadership ability. Specifically, I reflected on how I could build intelligent disobedience or authority of followers in organizations particularly in Panhellenic sororities.

**Change.** The theme of change emerged early on in my conversation with these women. Each of them provided a big picture understanding that allowed me to deepen my awareness on

how positive organizational change occurs in Panhellenic sororities. I split the theme of change into sub themes.

*Working among different generations.* A unique component of the Panhellenic sorority experiences is life-long membership. Lifelong membership provides an opportunity for graduated members to serve an advisor or a volunteer of the organization, even for other fraternal groups. Advisors and volunteers' range in age and expertise, spanning across the nation and providing individual chapters different support and guidance. They are also provided a more consistent support. Due to the nature of the role of a local advisor, both Anna and Joyce spoke to the importance they believe that advisors have in allowing positive organizational change to exist. Anna points out:

“they [local advisors] are in a position of high influence with the collegians...in many cases they are volunteering at that local level, have super rich dynamic relationships, both personally and for the organization with those members... I think it's really at the advisor level that they have a lot of power to have positive influence and positive impact because they shape that experience and get collegians on board.”

Joyce affirmed Anna by sharing “local advisors have huge influence... I think they have the ability to influence officers and members in terms of interest but for a general change it's like one person has to make the decision to make a change and then get other people on board with that decision.”

Chapter leaders and membership today are recognizing needs for certain change with fraternity and sorority life. Working in different generations and experiences can cause conflict, Anna hits on this with “ there are some folks are pretty committed to some old ways of thinking and doing sorority, older generations get the more resistant to change right like it's just what

happens from a psychological standpoint and so I think the challenge is stop trying to mix generations of leadership at those local levels.” She continued “I don't know that we're being very responsive at all to collegians. Then I think that again generationally, we tend to think older folks tend to discount the voice in the opinion of younger generations and so I think we need to maybe do better with that.” Advisor and volunteer support are necessary for consistent support, working across generations is also important to recognizing in producing change. Villainizing or discounting folks for being younger or older can create poor relationships and halt progress.

***Power in autonomy.*** All women spoke to the power of members recognizing their authority in creating change. Across the country communities are asking for change in structure and policies in the sorority experience from a national level. Change at the national organization level is slow moving as they are answering to numerous stakeholders. Joyce, Kappa Upsilon, offered that “ when someone gives us an idea and it might take us a little bit longer...I think the other part of what we do is work with each chapter...we have 146 different chapters on different campuses, their campuses climates, chapters and institutions are all different.” Fast and powerful change can happen when members choose to lead with their values and determination for creating an environment that fits their campus needs. Ashley, Beta Epsilon, described that she believes that autonomy provides chapters the ability to create positive organization change.

“It's important to let them (chapter members) know that they are in *charge of their own experience* and if they see something in our policy that is not working, I am willing to work with people...I think we can do as much as that is in our power as a national organization as volunteers staff members but at the end of the day the chapter members themselves are going to be the ones to make the change.”

For this change to be sustainable, the commitment from local volunteers and university campuses are crucial to passing wisdom and knowledge to future generations of members and ultimately chapter members have “great power to own the responsibility and shape experience themselves.” (Joyce, Kappa Upsilon) It is clear to me that supporting women in Panhellenic sororities to take up their own authority to create change is a community effort that fraternity and sorority life stakeholder believe in.

### **Limitations**

I am proud of the work that I have done through my action research. I dove deeper into a topic that makes me inspired to continue to empower women and better the Panhellenic sororities in a purposeful way. However, I did not complete my research without challenges or limitations. First and foremost, at the beginning of my research, I did not have a full grasp of AI which took my methodology a little off course. The AI approach allowed me to identify the bright spots throughout my research, but I believe it could have guided my actions and cycles in a more intentional manner that allowed for stakeholders to work as one instead of separately.

A major limitation of my research was that I engaged with seven Panhellenic chapters and their direct stakeholders on USD’s campus. There are in total 26 national Panhellenic sororities, at a variety of different institutions, with a wide range of campus cultures, that influence members' experiences and understanding on the topic. This should be considered by the reader when seeking insight from the experiences of this study’s participants

As I examined my research, I also found that the majority of my student participants, in Cycle 2, were women that have held leadership positions in the past, currently or were recently elected into leadership positions. These students don’t represent the majority of Panhellenic sorority women on campus. Additionally, the Panhellenic chapters on campus have multiple

advisors that support them in different functional areas, thus their participation would have been meaningful in Cycle 3.

Overall, more participation in all cycles would have strengthened the research, provided a richer set of data and deeper understanding of the student experiences with Panhellenic organizations. Additionally, I did not engage with the Fraternity and Sorority Life office or other on campus advisors as much as planned. Both the FSL office and campus advisors support the operations and development of fraternal members. More involvement with them would have been important as the professional staff on campus serve as the connection between the large organization and the university.

Lastly, as I concluded my research, COVID-19 started to change the dynamics on college campuses and shifted the Panhellenic sororities' experiences from collegiate to the inter/national level, which may have influenced participation and come outs. The impacts of COVID – 19 provided me with new lens to look to at my research. In my role, I supported the transition of fraternity and sorority life at USD to a virtual model while completing my final examinations and reflections of my research. COVID-19 has disrupted institutions of higher education forcing them to change and these changes have dramatically affected fraternity and sorority life. While fraternity and sorority life has endured other national/global epidemics, there is no doubt in my mind that COVID-19 will push the FSL industry to make changes and reimagine the fraternal experience. I believe we will see a decrease of membership and closure of chapters across the nation, yet I am hopeful that the fraternal experience will come out stronger.

### **Destiny - Recommendations**

In my research I never reached destiny. The destiny phase represents the conclusion of discovery, dream and design phases and the beginning of the evolving creation of an

“appreciative learning culture” (Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 443). Thus, the conclusion of my research does not mark the end but continues in my learning and hopes for sorority life at USD and FSL industry. The Destiny phase asks, “what gives it life or what will it be?” In this section, I answer “what will it be” through recommendations that could potentially empower Panhellenic sororities members to take up their authority as leaders to influence positive change in their chapter and communities for all stakeholders involved. (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008, p. 433). Additionally, I used Chaleff (2015) five dimensions of courageous followership to frame my recommendations (Appendix I for Chaleff five dimensions of courageous followership).

### **Recommendations for Panhellenic Chapters**

As I began to imagine what density would look like for the Panhellenic community at USD, I remember moments where women shared when they felt confident and special. The tapping of members provided informal mentorship opportunities and gave women the ability to recognize their own ability as leaders. This also inspired women to give back to their chapter because it deepened their sense of belonging and identity. Chaleff (2017) shared on twitter that “Followers and leaders both orbit around the purpose; followers do not orbit around the leader.” Members connection to the organizations are truly influenced by their purpose to the organization. In creating spaces that inspire women to assume responsibility to their organizations, chapter leaders must listen and sit with their followers to identify potential opportunities they can have. Much like when chapter officers ran for their positions because they sought to fulfil a purpose, chapter members can find their informal authority and gain ownership of the organization. Chapter executive boards and local advisors should provide programming that allows for chapter members to develop their own authority in the chapter. I also recommend for chapter executive boards and local advisors to engage in education on how to build up

followers to support the advancement of the organization. Chapter leadership and membership (followers) need to work together in order further positive development of the organization.

Understanding one another will allow for this be fostered.

Additionally, during the sorority experiences, there is a formal mentorship program most often referred to a big and little that happens during members new member experiences. I recommend that chapters create informal opportunities for younger members to seek out the mentorship of older members (outside the big/little relationship), allowing older members to see the impact they have made on women. I also recommend chapters use connections between older and younger people to create a reentry point for members aboard. This could potentially increase engagement and retention of members as they are re-connected to their purpose in the organization.

Lastly, I recommend USD chapters seek opportunities to develop members through peer to peer interactions that build their capacities: to take responsibility, to serve, to challenge, to recognize the need to transform and make moral action when necessary. Sorority life would not exist without its membership. Individuals join sorority for connection and stay because of their connection and the opportunity to create impact. Empowering chapter membership to become courageous followers will propel sorority life USD in allow members to transform, in return transforming Panhellenic organizations.

### **Recommendations for the USD Panhellenic Executive Board**

Throughout my research, chapter women discussed the need to create positive organizational change in multiple lenses yet fear critical conversations around topics related to social change. I recommend that the USD Panhellenic executive board create committees, task forces and/or affinity groups around topics such as women of color within Panhellenic

organizations, accessible, behavior, body image etc. Change will only form action where there is a commitment from all stakeholders including chapter members, advisors or volunteers, campus staff. These committees should not be chaired by executive board members but by women who recognize the need to approach the topic to better the large community. The Panhellenic executive board can provide oversight and commitment of community issues that further the development of members and creation of programs and initiatives on these topics. These committees would allow for collective response instead of seven different approaches building an affinity with the Panhellenic community. This is also an opportunity for the Fraternity and Sorority Life office and campus partners to advise students on these issues.

### **Recommendations for Advisors and USD FSL**

Throughout my research, local chapter advisors were highlighted as important stakeholders in developing members and staining positive organizational change. Local advisors' authority and sphere of influence is important to recognize in the Panhellenic sorority experiences. I recommend that Fraternity and Sorority Life at USD fosters international relationships with advisors that build an affinity for the institution. Students leaders experience the campus culture and initiatives which inform their priorities as chapters and can vary from the inter/national offices. Bringing in local advisors will be key in providing a well-rounded experience for students and the organization as a guest of campus. Additionally, strategic educational experiences should be mandated by the Fraternity and Sorority Life office in order for local advisors to fulfill their commitment to the institution. This education should cover student and leadership development theory, campus expectations, FSL trends and supporting today's student. It important for advisors to make a commitment to the institution's priorities as well as the chapters and inter/national offices. Advisors of key players should participate, if

possible, on committees related to Fraternity and Sorority guidelines, conduct processes, educational opportunities and so on. Empowering advisors can create a holistic image of providing an intentional sorority experience that supports all stakeholders.

### **Recommendations for Fraternity and Sorority Life Program Development**

**FSL industry.** Research indicates leadership development programs “must not only encourage women who already have leadership aspirations to improve their leadership capabilities, but must also foster leadership aspirations in women who may not think themselves capable of leadership” (Boatwright, K. J., Egidio, R. K., & Team., 2003, p. 667). This holds true with my action research. Fraternity and Sorority Life and inter/national headquarter offices set the tone for how leadership views in the organization. I recommend to these stakeholders to research the best practices for how to be courageous leaders and followers. “The mark of a great leader is the development and growth of followers. The mark of a great follower is the growth of leaders” (Chalff, 2015, p. 26). All chapter members and people are both leaders and followers. Thus, they need to make meaning of both to develop into a dynamic leader. Lastly, I recommend that leadership development programs for Panhellenic women should include identity and self-confidence development opportunities.

**USD Fraternity and Sorority Life.** Currently the FSL office at USD has five principles that guide the programs and initiatives of the office. These principles reflect the values of the 18 organizations on campus and USD. These five principles were recently developed and are in the phase of implementation. With this in mind, I recommend the FSL office to adopt a framework that structures and provides vision for continuous program development. This would provide students with a similar language and understanding of leadership, changemaking and service. Additionally, chapters could identify goals within the principles and framework that facilitate

tangible and trackable changes for assessment purposes. Students want to make an impact and often get lost in being able to identify it. This system could give FSL offices a chance to show the impact to students and stakeholders.

Additionally, throughout my research, the study abroad culture at USD continued to come up in multiple ways. The study abroad culture at USD creates unique challenges for the sorority community in implementing change and keeping members engaged. I recommend the Fraternity and Sorority Life office at USD to create a reentry program for students who were abroad the semester prior. This training could cover new programs and community initiatives that have been developed over the semester and changes that have been made in their communities. The program could also provide members the opportunity to reflect and intentionally reenter their chapter and community by identifying ways to rebuild the connections back to the organization. I also encourage the FSL office to work with Chapter Development Advisors to support the individual chapters in creating a reentry program at the chapter level, where recently abroad members can share their experiences and chapter can share an overview of the semester they were gone.

Lastly, I recommend that the FSL office create intentional partnerships, including but not limited to partnerships with the Women's Commons, University of Ministry, and Center for Women's Leadership, to provide rich leadership development programs for all chapter members that do not hold positional leadership. All leaders need followers and it is important to build strong followership. Followership is an act of leadership. Establishing programs that allow for members to identify their leadership and authority as a member will create a stronger chapter where members feel a responsibility to the organization and its members.

**Research.** I believe my research is important in understanding the Panhellenic sorority experiences through a different lens. It helps our offices, the institutions, and the FSL industry understand a perspective of how today's sorority women and organizations are impacting student's development. There is very little research on the leadership development of sorority women and its connection to positive organizational change. At the conclusion of my research, I was left with new learning but also many new questions. A major question is the influence of how gender and power dynamics of leadership constructs influence women leadership in sorority life. The social constructs of gender and performance of leadership continued to show up and there are societal and community factors contributing individual meaning making.

### **My Destiny and Conclusion**

As a believer in the fraternal experiences I believe that change must ensue among the fraternal industry. As an advisor and alum of a Panhellenic sorority, I can work to change structures and policies. I have learned that women want to create change and recognize the need for it in their organizations. It is my role to work with them and allow them to lead the charge with their peers. As an advisor, I hope to see chapter members and work with chapter leaders to create good followers. This action research has confirmed my passion for developing women into leaders to seek change in their given communities. I was inspired by the countless stories I heard from women about what empowered them to lead. It reminded me of the importance of connection. My action research provided me an opportunity to reflect on the moments that have impacted me during my sorority experiences as a collegiate member and now alum. I have found that it is my job to continue to tap and mentor young women in seeking their potential in my professional and personal life. Additionally, role modeling, standing up for what you believe, living your values are all actions individuals notice and that can spark change. As I think about

my original question, how can I assist members of Panhellenic sororities to take up their authority as leaders to influence positive change in their chapter, I've realized that this research has provided a context to bring into my work as a student practitioner and FSL industry stakeholder. I have developed my personal leadership philosophy as a student affairs practitioner that has been shaped through this research process. My leadership philosophy is part of my destiny to create a positive impact on individuals and in communities. I seek to provide a space where students can make meaning of their experiences and can seek to understand themselves, their values, and beliefs of the world. I believe it allows students to gain a deeper understanding for others, the system we live in and the responsibility they have to better their communities. Through my learning, I believe that leadership is changemaking, using your power to mobilize others to create transformational change. At the conclusion of my research, I sought to understand different forms of leadership. I reached out to the Director of Gender Identity Resources at USD to learn how Women's Commons defines leadership. The Director recommended publication of *Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation*. This publication offers "We build leadership capacity and skills for something, to do something or change something, and not because leadership is a product or service for consumption" (Batliwala, 2013, p. 13). Leadership is the creation of something better. When systems need to be dismantled, behaviors need to change, and compassion needs to be developed, I believe we must support people to use their strengths to challenge others. Sorority life is built on connection and its people, the affinity to the organization comes from those people. Panhellenic sorority women have the opportunity to make great impact on others and develop inclusive practices. It's hard for me to leave my Graduate Assistant role at USD at the end of the year. I have been able to dream and discover the professional I want to be. I have designed programs and research that inspires

me to continue to learn and work to empower others. I see the density of a community that has taught me so much and continues to allow them to learn about themselves. Jackie Stavor, said “Allow yourself to dream and you will discover that destiny is yours to design.” With that, I am excited to take my learning with me and continue to dream, discover, and design to hopefully reach destiny as I seek to empower and inspire women to reach theirs.

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## Appendix A

## Fraternity and Sorority Terminology

**Affiliated student:** a student that belongs to a Fraternity or Sorority.

**Fraternal Organizations:** brotherhood or sisterhood type organizations, i.e. social fraternities and sororities.

**Chapter:** a local group of a national fraternal organization.

**Chapter advisor:** typically, an alum of the organization that volunteers to support and advise the local chapter.

**Executive Board:** the governing body of an individual chapter or community

**FSL:** Fraternity and Sorority Life

**Fraternity:** a men's only organization.

**General chapter members:** women or men that belong to the organization/chapter but do not hold an executive board or leadership position in the chapter

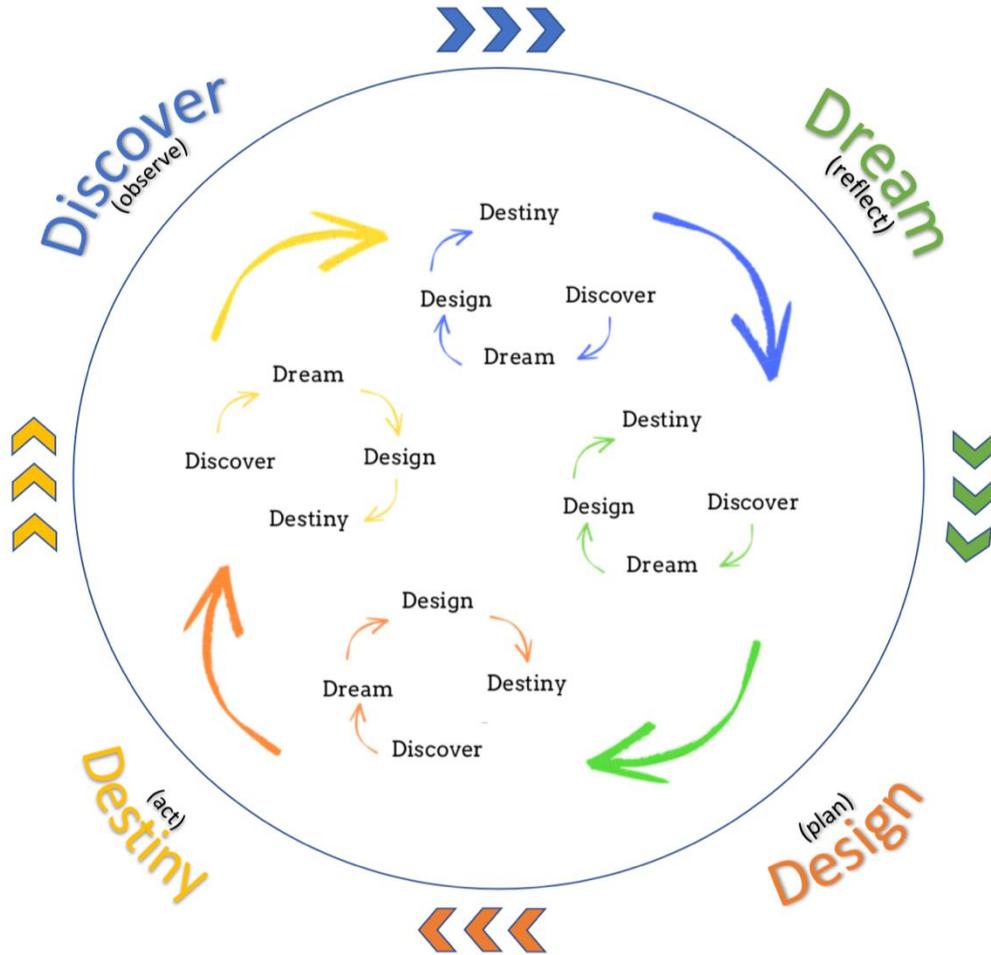
**Inter/National Panhellenic Sorority Leadership Development Staff:** Women and/or men that support educational programs for the individual chapters on a national level.

**Panhellenic Sorority:** traditionally, social women's organization, that belongs to the umbrella National Panhellenic Conference (NPC).

**Sorority:** a women's only organization.

Appendix B

Action Research Method (Davis, 2016)



## Appendix C

## Student/Organization Pseudonyms and Demographics

**Executive Board Chapter Dialogues**

Executive Board 1: Kappa Upsilon

- Grace, 4th year
- Hailey, 4th year

Executive Board 2: Gamma Iota

- Abby, 3rd year
- Claire, 4th year
- Taylor, 4th year

**Chapter Members Dialogue**

Lauren - Zeta Eta - 4th year, out-going chapter president

Emily - Zeta Eta - 3rd year, incoming Recruitment Chair

Nicole - Zeta Eta - 2nd year, incoming Panhellenic Delegate

**Chapter Member Survey Break Down**

Alpha Lambda - 5 Members

Alpha Gamma - 2 Members

Beta Epsilon - 4 Members

Gamma Iota - 4 Members

Zeta Eta - 4 Members

Iota Pi - 3 Members

Kappa Upsilon - 2 Members

**Chapter Advisors Dialogue/Survey**

Amy - Gamma Iota Advisor

Emma - Gamma Iota, Advisor

Linda - Alpha Lambda Advisor

Michelle - Beta Epsilon, Advisor

Sarah - Iota Pi, Advisor

Jessica - Kappa Upsilon, Advisor

**Inter/National Headquarters Interviews**

Anna - Kappa Upsilon, Senior Director

- Oversees educational and engagement programs national organization

Joyce - Zeta Eta, Director

- Oversees all educational programs for the national organization

Ashley - Beta Epsilon, Coordinator

- Support west regional chapters for Alpha Mu in day to day operations, organizational development and education programs

## Appendix D

## Chapter Executive Board Leadership Dialogue

Chapter: Date: Time:	
Outcomes: - Members will have the opportunity to discuss their leadership experience throughout their time in their chapter	
Materials Needed	

**Introduction:** Hello everyone, for those that do not know me, my name is Kristen Reynolds. I am the Panhellenic Advisor here at the University of San Diego. I want to thank you for coming today and taking time out of your day to participate in this study.

As I mentioned this before but just to remind you, I will be taking pictures of the work that we do here today and will be taking notes along the way. I will be using these only to help remind me of what was said today. Your names and identities will not be used for the study, only pseudonyms will be used. Does anyone have any questions or concerns?

**Ground Rules:** Let me give you a few quick expectations for the group. First, everyone's opinion is valued and it's okay to disagree with each other or with me. I am interested in hearing about all points of view and want this to be an open and honest experience. If at any time during the session you need to step outside, please do so.

**Introduction (Purpose):** The primary reason we are here today is to engage in dialogue about membership engagement and how it relates to leadership and positive change in your chapter experience. Throughout tonight, you will be asked to engage in dialogue of your perceptions and thoughts, along with a short activity.

### Collegiate Leadership Timelines -

For tonight's activity, we are going to focus on your individual experiences leadership as it relates to your chapter membership.

1. If each of you could take a blank sheet of paper and pen. If you could draw a line with a dot of each end, running the entire length of the paper.
  - a. This is going to represent your leadership timeline in relation to your chapter.
2. The first dot is the first day you interacted with your own leadership with the chapter. The second dot is today.

3. I am now going to ask you questions about your experiences with leadership throughout your time in your chapter. There is no right or wrong answer. It should highlight your individual experiences.
  - a. When was the first time you interacted with leadership in your chapter?
  - b. When was the first time you enacted your own leadership in your chapter?
  - c. When did you decide to run for executive board position?
  - d. When was the first time you held a formal leadership position?
  - e. Any moment that has stood out to you as significant leadership in your chapter?  
This could be a personal moment or a time that you saw someone else lead in a powerful way.
4. Each person now has 30 seconds to share what stands or important to them on their timeline. Remember that the timeline may look different to yours and that is okay. Each experience is just as valid and important as the other.

<b>Debrief</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What did I feel like to do this activity?</li> <li>2. Reflecting on your own membership experience before serving on your chapters executive board, what made you want to engage with the chapter in this way?</li> <li>3. Why did decide you to run for an executive board position?                     <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Are there particular reasons why you choose to run for the current position you are in?</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. What is your definition of leadership?                     <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Follow up: Do you believe that all members are leaders, please explain?</li> </ol> </li> <li>5. Many of you mentioned that you ran for a position on the executive board to create change in the chapter.                     <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What do you believe is positive organizational change?</li> <li>b. Follow up: Now serving in your role for almost a full term, do you believe that it can happen in sorority life here at USD?</li> </ol> </li> <li>6. Who do you believe has the most influence in creating change in the chapter and why?</li> </ol>
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**Wrap-up:** Are there any areas we did not talk about that you think are important for us to know? Do you have any questions about this group or why we held it? Any comments you'd like to make?

**Thank you:** Thank you for coming. We learned a lot today and it was a pleasure talking with all of you. Thank you for sharing your thoughts.

## Appendix E

## Chapter Member Leadership Dialogue

Chapter Member Date: Time:	
Outcomes: - Members will have the opportunity to discuss their leadership experiences throughout their time in the chapter	
Materials Needed	

**Introduction:** Hello everyone, for those that do not know me, my name is Kristen Reynolds. I am the Panhellenic Advisor here at the University of San Diego. I want to thank you for coming today and taking time out of your day to participate in this study.

As I mentioned this before but just to remind you, I will be taking pictures of the work that we do here today, audio recording our session and will be taking notes along the way. I will be using theses only to help remind me of what was said today. Your names and identities will not be used for the study, only pseudonyms will be used, including the organization you belong to. Does anyone have any questions or concerns?

**Ground Rules:** Let me give you a few quick expectations for the group. First, everyone's opinion is valued and it's okay to disagree with each other or with me. I am interested in hearing about all points of view and want this to be an open and honest experience. If at any time during the session you need to step outside, please do so.

**Introduction (Purpose):** The primary reason we are here today is to engage in dialogue about leadership and how it relates to positive change in your chapter experience. Throughout tonight, you will be asked to engage in dialogue of your perceptions and thoughts, along with a short activity.

### Collegiate Leadership Timelines -

For tonight's activity, we are going to focus on your individual experiences leadership as it relates to your chapter membership.

1. If each of you could take a blank sheet of paper and pen. If you could draw a line with a dot of each end, running the entire length of the paper.
  - a. This is going to represent your leadership timeline in relation to sorority membership experiences.

2. The first dot is the first day you interacted with your own leadership with the chapter. The second dot is today.
3. I am now going to ask you questions about your experiences with leadership throughout your time in sorority life at USD. There is no right or wrong answer. It should highlight your individual experiences.
  - a. When was the first time you interacted with leadership in your chapter?
  - b. When was the first time you enacted your own leadership in your chapter?
  - c. Any moment that has stood out to you as significant in terms of leadership in your chapter? *This could be a personal moment or a time that you saw someone else lead in a powerful way.*
4. Each person now has 30 seconds to share what stands or important to them on their timeline. Remember that the timeline may look different to yours and that is okay. Each experience is just as valid and important as the other.

<b>Debrief</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is your definition of leadership?                     <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Follow up: Have any of you held positional leadership?</li> <li>b. Follow up Are you a leader, if so please explain.</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Do you believe that all chapter members are leaders, please explain?</li> <li>3. Describe the way you feel your chapter executive board operates their leadership.</li> <li>4. Who do you believe has the most influence in creating change in the chapter?                     <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Follow up: Do you believe that you have influences to create change with the chapter?</li> </ol> </li> <li>5. What do you believe are the biggest challenges that your chapter faces?</li> <li>6. What do you believe are the biggest challenges that Fraternity and Sorority Life faces?</li> <li>7. What is positive organizational change?                     <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Follow up: Do you believe that it can happen in sorority life here at USD?</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
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**Wrap-up:** Are there any areas we did not talk about that you think are important for us to know? Do you have any questions about this group or why we held it? Any comments you'd like to make?

**Thank you:** Thank you for coming. We learned a lot today and it was a pleasure talking with all of you. Thank you for sharing your thoughts.

## Appendix F

## Chapter Member Survey

## Chapter Member Leadership Questionnaire

1. What is your definition of leadership?
2. Are you a leader? Please explain.
3. Do you believe that all chapter members are leaders? Please explain.
4. Describe the way you feel your chapter executive board operates their leadership.
5. Who do you believe has the most influence in creating change within the chapter?
6. Do you believe that you have influences to create change with the chapter? Y/N/Maybe
7. What do you believe are the biggest challenges that your chapter faces?
8. What do you believe positive organizational change is?
9. Do you believe that it can happen within sorority life here at USD? Y/N/Maybe

## Panhellenic Demographics

1. Chapter Affiliation
2. Year in School
3. Have any of you ever held positional leadership in your chapter?
  - a. Yes, as an executive board member
  - b. Yes, as a chair position
  - c. No

## Appendix G

## Chapter Advisor Leadership Dialogue

Chapter Advisor Leadership Dialogue Date: Time:	
Outcomes: - Chapter advisors will have the opportunity to discuss their experiences with chapter leadership throughout their time advising the chapter that volunteer for.	
Materials Needed	

**Introduction:** Hello everyone, for those that do not know me, my name is Kristen Reynolds. I am the Panhellenic Advisor here at the University of San Diego. I want to thank you for coming today and taking time out of your day to participate in this study.

I mentioned this before but just to remind you, this session is being audio-recorded. I will be using these only to help remind me of what was said today. Your names and identities will not be used for the study, only pseudonyms will be used including the organization's name that you support. Does anyone have any questions or concerns?

**Ground Rules:** Let me give you a few quick expectations for the group. First, everyone's opinion is valued and it's okay to disagree with each other or with me. I am interested in hearing about all points of view and want this to be an open and honest experience. If at any time during the session you need to step outside, please do so.

**Introduction (Purpose):** Part of my Graduate program here at USD is to complete an Action Research project. My research focuses on the leadership development of chapter members, specifically Panhellenic sorority women. My hope to learn more about how members enact and engage with leadership through their membership experiences and how it relates to positive organizational change. While my focus is on Panhellenic sorority women, those who advise other FSL groups input is just as vital in my understanding and learning of leadership among chapters. Tonight, my hope is for us to engage in a dialogue about how you have observed leadership and organizational change with the chapter they advise on a volunteer level. Any further questions?

**Leadership Discussion:**

<b>Discussion Questions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What has chapter leadership looked like in the past 3 years?</li> <li>2. What has member leadership looked like in the past 3 years?</li> <li>3. In reference to the first two questions, what leadership qualities are valued in the chapter?</li> <li>4. Describe the way you feel your chapter executive board operates their leadership.</li> <li>5. How do your chapter members interact with chapter leadership?</li> <li>6. Who do you believe has the most influence in creating change in the chapter?</li> <li>7. What do you believe are the biggest challenges that the you advise chapter faces?</li> <li>8. What do you believe are the biggest challenges that Fraternity and Sorority Life faces?</li> <li>9. What is positive organizational change? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Follow up: Do you believe that it can happen in Fraternity and Sorority life here at USD?</li> </ol> </li> </ol>
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**Wrap-up:**

Are there any areas we did not talk about that you think are important for us to know? Do you have any questions about this group or why we held it? Any comments you'd like to make?

**Thank you**

Thank you for coming. We learned a lot today and it was a pleasure talking with all of you. Thank you for sharing your thoughts.

## Appendix H

## Chapter Advisor Survey

## Chapter Member Leadership Questionnaire

1. What is your definition of leadership?
2. What qualities or types of leaders have been elected in positional leadership within your time advising the chapter?
3. Describe the way you feel your chapter executive board operates their leadership.
4. What is the relationship like between the chapter executive board and large chapter membership?
5. What do you believe positive organizational change is?
6. Who do you believe has the most influence in creating change within the chapter?
7. What do you believe are the biggest challenges that your advise chapter faces?
8. Do you believe that it can happen within Fraternity and Sorority Life here at USD?

Please, explain.

## Demographics

1. Panhellenic Chapter You Advise
2. How long have you served as an advisor to the chapter here at University of San Diego?

## Appendix I

## Inter/National Headquarter Interviews

Headquarters Leadership Dialogue Date: Time:	
Outcomes: - Leadership/Education staff members at the headquarters level discuss the philosophy and thoughts of leadership at the chapter and national level.	
Materials Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Email consent form</li> <li>● Interview questions</li> <li>● Zoom meeting set up for recording</li> </ul>

**Introduction:** My name is Kristen Reynolds. I am the Panhellenic Advisor here at the University of San Diego. I want to thank you for taking the time out of your busy day to meet with me to discuss leadership development of sorority women with me.

I mentioned this before but just to remind you, this session is being audio-recorded. I will be using these only to help remind me of what was said today. Your name and identities will not be used for the study, only pseudonyms will be used that include the organization that you work for. Does anyone have any questions or concerns?

**Introduction (Purpose):** Part of my Graduate program here at USD is to complete an Action Research project. My research focuses on the leadership development of chapter members, specifically Panhellenic sorority women. My hope to learn more about how members enact and engage with leadership through their membership experiences and how it relates to positive organizational change. While my focus is on Panhellenic sorority women, recognize the connection to the large sorority experience and the headquarter offices especially in leadership development programs and educational workshops. My hope is for us to learn about how your organization defines and values leadership, how that has changed over the years and how you have seen it show on college campuses. Any further questions?

**Leadership Interview:**

<b>Discussion Questions</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do you as a staff member of your organization define leadership?       <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Follow up: Do you believe that your organization views leadership in the same ways?</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. In what ways, do you hope your organization at the local level values leadership?</li> <li>3. How has your organization adopted its approach to leadership development to higher education today?</li> <li>4. What do you believe are the biggest challenges that Fraternity and Sorority Life faces?</li> <li>5. How would you define positive organizational change?</li> <li>6. Across the nation sorority women are asking for changes to be made, how has the national organization answered this demand?       <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Follow up: How do you see Fraternity and Sorority Life changing over the next year?</li> </ol> </li> <li>7. Who do you believe has the most influence in creating change in Fraternity and Sorority Life?</li> </ol>
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**Wrap-up:**

Are there any areas we did not talk about that you think are important for myself to know?  
 Do you have any questions about this group or why we held it? Any comments you'd like to make?

**Thank you**

Thank you for taking the time out of your day to speak with me! Thank you for your continued dedication to the advancement of women and sorority life.

## Appendix J

Ira Chaleff Five Dimensions of Courageous Followership (Chaleff, 2009 & 2015)

**The courage to assume responsibility**—to take action to forward the mission regardless of whether one receives orders or not

**The courage to support (serve) the leader**—to give priority to the leader's direction if it is forwarding the mission and consistent with basic human values

**The courage to challenge the leader**—to candidly question the leader's assumptions, plans, or behaviors if these are inconsistent with the mission and the values

**The courage to participate in transformation**—to support the leader's efforts to improve his or her leadership and to work at improving your own performance and behavior in relation to the leader

**The courage to take a moral action**—to refuse to participate in an activity viewed as immoral and to take corrective action where possible