

“Sisters and Sisterhood:”

An Analysis of American Sororities, Collegiate Culture, and Second Wave Feminism at Duke
University in the Late Twentieth Century

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Introduction:

On March 12, 1907, Eugenia Tucker Fitzgerald, seventy-three and in ill health, prepared a letter her sorority Alpha Delta Pi in Macon, Georgia. In her last words, “Mother Fitzgerald” implored her beloved fraternal family to heed her warning on the future of women’s education. She wrote,

“*My Dear Daughters,*

[...] It was suggested that [Mr. Rockefeller’s endowment] be used to establish a college or university for women, as there was a complaint that in their desire for higher education they were beginning to crowd the colleges for men. There is danger that in the enlarged opportunities of the present day they may be carried too far in seeking new employments. So long subjected to disabilities, they cannot realize that it is worse to neglect or ignore their sacred duties as mothers, wives, daughters and sisters. It is hoped that they who do so will be in a small number”¹.

Mother Fitzgerald went on to caution her sorority daughters against “the novelty of freedom which has led some astray,” and condemned how “the question of Women’s Suffrage [was] agitating the world.”² Offering a cautionary tale, she warned the girls against embracing independence in this harsh new America which was ill suited to women’s inherent delicacy and fragility. Mother Fitzgerald closed her letter with this comment, “When as a college girl I established the first secret society [...] I dreamed not of its far reaching influence, and I shall continue to be interested in all the branches.”³ Eugenia Tucker Fitzgerald was one of the six founding members of the Alpha Delta Pi women’s fraternity at Wesleyan University established

¹ Sorority Alpha Delta Pi, *The Adelphean of Alpha Delta Pi* (1907). 1. The letter from Eugenia Tucker Fitzgerald was printed in the March 1907 edition of *The Adelphean of Alpha Delta Pi*, the official monthly newsletter published by the women’s fraternity Alpha Delta Pi based out of Wesleyan University.

² *The Adelphean of Alpha Delta Pi*, 1.

³ Alpha Delta Pi., 2.

in 1851. Alpha Delta Pi constituted the earliest documented student women's organization in America which would later be referred to as a women's fraternity and today is known colloquially as a sorority⁴.

Mother Fitzgerald's dying declaration not only raised questions about the future of American sororities but foreshadowed the lasting role these institutions would play in American collegiate history. Educational historians, including as Craig L. Torbenson and Gregory Parks, have demonstrated how with the establishment of colleges during the colonial areas, a "subculture of student college life emerged that still exists today"⁵. Between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, fraternities and subsequently sororities "developed to meet the intellectual and social needs of students"⁶. The earliest fraternities and sororities were primarily dominated by white, Protestant males and females. Sororities, following fraternities' example, developed in the mid nineteenth century as an alternative to colleges' literary societies. They served as secret institutions for literary discussion and social interaction for a select elite on the college campus.

At their foundation sororities served a dual mandate, proving the validity of female coeducation while also upholding the ideals of Victorian womanhood. Historians, such as Barbara Miller Solomon, have noted how women's foray into the collegiate environment during the nineteenth century provoked questions regarding how college women were going to "relate

⁴ Craig L. Torbenson and Gregory Parks, *Brothers and Sisters : Diversity in College Fraternities and Sororities* (Madison [N.J.]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009). Some of the oldest sororities in America are often officially named as fraternities because they were founded as "women's fraternities" before the word "sorority" came into use. Do to the fact that they admit women, and colloquial uses of sorority today, however, they are most commonly referred to as sororities.

⁵ Torbenson, 15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

the purposes of liberal academic study to their duties as women.”⁷ Sororities’ paradoxical directive reflected their attempt to deal with this issue of balancing women’s increased educational opportunities and domestic responsibilities. Sororities were considered educationally progressive institutions during this period, contesting traditional expectations of women up until this point, which had no place for women’s liberal education. The dual mandate, however, simultaneously upheld women’s domestic role, and Mother Fitzgerald’s letter, reminded women that sororities were never intended to challenge “the code of true womanhood.”⁸ While this dual mandate helped launch sororities as the “process of women’s educational advance[d]” over the next century “new questions about the position of women and their education” tested this mandate and affected sororities’ orientation toward educational and social issues⁹.

Over time, local sororities spread in size and geographically in three distinct phases, from 1824 to 1874, again in 1885 through 1929, and most contemporarily between 1975 and 1999. During these periods, sororities transitioned from mere local institutions to truly national organizations through a process of “adoption and augmentation,” by which new sororities and then new chapters were established on college campuses. This process culminated in the creation of the National Panhellenic Conference in 1902 by local sororities to function as a national governing body for sororities. The traditional white sorority, primarily founded during the first and second phases, emphasized the principles of loyalty, scholarship, and citizenship as fundamental to the sorority’s mission according to their official charter. Sociological historians, however, have consistently emphasized the deeper role sororities played as a source of identity in

⁷ Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 27.

⁸ Solomon, 27.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

college life¹⁰. Over time sororities, for both whites and later minorities, became a central feature of the collegiate experience in America, reaching the height of their popularity on campuses in the 1950s.

The 1950s constituted the peak of Greek power on college campuses during the twentieth century. The reign of sororities during this period also coincided with dramatic increases in women's enrollment in college compared with previous decades¹¹. This increased participation brought together different groups of women with different opinions on women's place in society, and by the 1960s the roots of second wave feminism were grabbing hold of college campuses. The rise in women's participation in college led to changes in the character of the traditional American coed who had built sororities and supported their dominant position on college campuses. The 1960s and 70s revealed how the American college campus and status of women was in flux, and how the intersection of the Old Order and New Way placed sororities and second wave feminism on a collision course.

The history of the rise of the modern women's movement in America for political and economic rights between the 1960s and 1980s is well documented, but the intersection of sororities and second wave feminism during this period remains relatively unexplored. Given the relative popularity of sororities, what impact did the presence and popularity of historically white sororities have on the women who were attending college at increasing levels beginning in the 1950s? Although white sororities were founded to dually promote female education and ideas of women's domesticity, by the 1950s were white sororities still espousing both these ideals or had

¹⁰Barbara J. Bank, Sara Delamont, and Catherine Marshall, *Gender and Education : An Encyclopedia*, 2 vols. (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2007).

¹¹ Solomon: Women's enrollment in college as a percentage of young women in the United States between eighteen and twenty-one years of age reached 17.9% during the 1950s. This represented a five percent increase from the 1940s, and fifteen percent increase since 1900.

one particular viewpoint won out within these institutions? Sociologists have long argued that sororities had a substantive impact on the development of student's identity during and long after student's time on campus. Nevertheless, there is little historical evidence on the internal workings of white sororities and the views they internally promoted to their members currently available. Undoubtedly, sororities represented a key part of the college experience during this period, but what influence did they really exert and what did that influence look like? Consequently, what, if any, role might white sororities have played in the development of second wave feminism during the late twentieth century¹²?

Sororities constitute an ingrained part of the American collegiate and social experience. Addressing their larger historical impact represents a complex subject matter, which necessitates extensive research of national and local sorority organizations in order to achieve a holistic portrait. For the purposes of this study, I am utilizing a case study method to investigate the historical role of sororities. This methodology allows for a more detailed analysis of certain sororities' impact, and can provide a foundation on which to build a broader historical investigation of the sorority system. This study analyzes the Duke University Sorority system and its role and relationship to the second wave feminist movement on campus between 1950 and 1985. Duke's Sorority System represents a deeply ingrained facet of student subculture whose origins echo the origins of the national sorority system in America. By studying the internal workings and positions of the Duke Sorority System, the historical value of traditionally white sororities as a topic of women's history in the late twentieth century emerges. In addition, this study considers the relationship between the Duke University Panhellenic Council and the national sorority system, the National Panhellenic Conference, which highlights why Duke

¹² The term "late twentieth century" refers to the time frame between 1950 and 1985 for the purposes of my study.

serves as a useful and important case study for examining sororities' larger historical influence and significance.

Thus far there has been a general lack of scholarship analyzing the impact of white sororities from a historical perspective. Given the popularity of these institutions coinciding with the rise of the second wave feminism movement, a historical examination of these institutions provides a more comprehensive analysis of the factors which affected the dynamics of campus environments and successes of the feminist movement during the late twentieth century. An analysis of the Duke Sorority System illustrated the historical evolution of sororities from their origins to the mid-twentieth century, as over time the paradoxical dual mandate of historically white sororities disappeared as social priorities superseded scholarship aspects. Furthermore, this case study demonstrated how Duke sororities between 1950 and 1985 employed a network of influence within the campus environment, through which these sororities worked to influence women's identity development in favor of the continued domination of a traditionalist and gendered sorority system on campus. While Duke sororities faced increasing opposition through the late 1960s and early 1970s, sororities' ability to structure strategic alliances, control the campus debate, and ride out the storm of student activism and protest allowed historically white sororities to maintain their position of dominance within the Duke campus environment.

Historiography:

Historians and sociologists have both produced scholarship on the development of fraternities and sororities, their impact on participants, and the consequences for American society. The majority of historical scholarship, however, has tended to focus on an examination

of the collegiate Greek system as a whole, or centered on minority organizations, specifically African American chapters. When modern scholarship has specifically examined white sororities it generally addresses the modern issues or problems associated with these institutions today rather than their historical development. Concurrently, a review of the current and relevant scholarship reveals a gap in the historical research regarding the study of student culture and more so women's history where an examination of white sororities is needed. Historians and sociologists both agree on the important role sororities have had on the student subculture of college campuses throughout American history, and yet sororities remain neglected as a subject of women's history.

The quantity of historical research on the development of American Greek culture is generally limited but the scholarship which is available tends to assume two tracts: Greek institutions own internally produced histories or professional scholarship on Minority Greek organizations. Traditionally, sororities and fraternities produce their own internal histories, redone every few decades, which are available to members and alumni and on rare occasions released for public review. For example, Florence Roth and May Westermann's book *The History of Kappa Kappa Gamma Fraternity, 1870-1930* provides a history of the origins and progression of Kappa Kappa Gamma fraternity from its' official foundation in 1870 through its' nationalization in the early twentieth century. This particular history, similar to other pieces commissioned by individual sororities, focuses on promoting this sorority's particular "mission," in this case principles of leadership and philanthropy. Written and produced by the sorority itself, the impartiality of these sources and the quality of their scholarship is clearly questionable. Nevertheless, a comprehensive examination of sororities' development must skeptically examine these sources which can prove useful in contextualizing sororities within the existing historical

record. Additionally, these internal histories serve a dual purpose as secondary and primary research elements for the purposes of this investigation, lending insight into the viewpoints sororities promoted to their members over time.

In researching the history of American sororities, more verifiable and perhaps credible sources emerge in the few historical works produced on the development of the American Greek system. Nicholas L. Syrett's book *The Company He Keeps: A History of White College Fraternities* represents an important source for establishing the historiography on this subject. The book explores the history of white fraternities from the antebellum period through to the contemporary era as an example of gendered ideologies in American history. Syrett's central argument revolves around the role fraternities have played in "historically defining masculinity."¹³ He suggests that both the fundamental ideology and day to day activities of fraternities promoted conventions of masculinity among members, which in turn extended from the college campuses into society at large.

Moreover, Syrett suggests that as women began to assert their autonomy in public and education in American society, male fraternities endorsed "virile masculinity that took womanhood or femininess as its foil"¹⁴. His argument implies that the American Greek system perpetuated the existence of complimentary and rigid gender roles for male and female members. Although Syrett's work is an important source on the Greek fraternities influence on sororities, this book does not provide a sufficient examination of sororities to accept the validity of Syrett's theory on this analysis alone. His arguments, however, do point to the need for further research, into the concept of gender within the American sorority system. An examination of the gendered

¹³ Nicholas L. Syrett, *The Company He Keeps: A History of White College Fraternities*. Chapel Hill: : University of North Carolina Press, 2009, 4.

¹⁴ Syrett, 7.

history of white sororities can help determine whether sororities similarly reinforced traditional ideas of femininity, or conversely opposed these conceptions.

Syrett's work is particularly salient to my discussion, nonetheless, as it emphasizes the impact fraternities and their masculine viewpoints have had in American society beyond the fraternity house walls. He suggests that fraternities and sororities have "affected the outsiders' lives as well as their own [members]" and play a crucial role in "structure[ing] college life [on and] of campus"¹⁵. He presents evidence of fraternities and sororities social superiority on campus which operates to "ensure strict conformity to the collegiate ideal," as defined by these Greek institutions¹⁶. Syrett's work articulates how Greek institutions have a clear and important "significance in U.S. Society" beyond the college environment, which needs further historical examination.

Similarly, the historical scholarship on American Greek culture demonstrates a connection between American Greek culture and the state of class, race, and gender in this country¹⁷. Craig L. Torbenson and Gregory Parks book *Brothers and Sisters : Diversity in College Fraternities and Sororities* suggests that white fraternities and sororities not only enforced gender conventions but also enforced strict race and class based exclusionary policies. Their book details how the vast majority of traditional white fraternities and sororities prohibited racial diversity among its members, and during the first wave of establishing these organizations 94.4% were strictly for white, Protestant males¹⁸. Furthermore, Torbenson and Parks argue that although this racial exclusion was not unique to Greek organizations among the social institutions during this period in American history, "the fraternities gave the behavior new

¹⁵ Syrett, 10.

¹⁶ Ibid., 188.

¹⁷ Ibid., 55.

¹⁸ Torbenson and Parks. 25.

opportunities” among the next generation¹⁹. Torbenson, Parks, and Syrett’s works similarly argue that American Greek culture not only embraced racial separatism, but perpetuated the growth of racial exclusion by educating students’ to believe in the virtue of this principle.

These scholars’ negative opinion on the historical legacy of white fraternities and Greek organizations, they exclude the minority chapters of fraternities and sororities from this opinion. In actuality, the tone of scholarship on minority fraternities and sororities differs greatly from the generalized portrait of the white American fraternity. This distinction points to the second strand of Greek culture historiography which focuses on minority Greek culture, most prevalently the African American organizations. The majority of scholarship available today on the Greek system, and in particular sororities, tends to center on the development and impact of minority chapters. *The Divine Nine: the History of African American Fraternities and Sororities* by Lawrence C. Ross, Jr. represents one such example. Within his book Ross argues that African American fraternities and sororities are “part of the larger history of all African Americans.”²⁰ Contrasting the negative picture of white Greek institutions, Ross argues that the African American fraternities and sororities actually represented largely positive institutions which promoted “philanthropy, self-improvement, and excellence” consistent with “the vision of their respective founders”²¹.

Ross’s work not only offers a contrasting image of American Greek culture, but raises questions about why such different scholarly opinions emerge on white verses minority fraternities and sororities. Are historians’ divergent opinions on white and minority Greek cultures’ impact due to the separate racial makeup of these separate chapters or rather might

¹⁹ Ibid. 20.

²⁰ Lawrence C. Ross, *The Divine Nine : The History of African American Fraternities and Sororities* (New York, NY: Kensington Books, 2000), 23.

²¹ Ross, 5.

these different opinions be these institutions' differing historical foundations? Ross argues that distinct from white Greek culture, the "individual" and "unit" are separate and equally important entities within African American chapters. While scholarship on their white counterparts has continuously argued that their remains an overarching emphasis on conformity in historically white sororities²². Ross's work is an important historical piece in the historiography on African American fraternities and sororities, but perhaps its most significant value for my study is in highlighting the lack of a comparable scholarly source for individual white Greek institutions.

A significant portion of Ross's discussion points to the role African American Greek culture viewpoints had on the trajectory of African American development. Similarly, Paula Giddings' *In Search of Sisterhood: Delta Sigma Theta and the History of the Black Sorority* presents an individual case study of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority which attempts to address the role of this sorority in African American women's history. Giddings states that "the sorority has always been an important source of leadership and training for Black women," and holds "legitimacy to represent and speak for a significant constituency of Black women."²³ In addition, Giddings argues that this historical legacy does not apply to Black sororities' "White counterparts."²⁴

Giddings' conclusions, however, are questionable due to the lack of supporting evidence provided on white sororities. Without a strict examination of the comparable historical importance of white sororities verses African American sororities it would seem premature to dismiss the idea that white sororities' leave a similar historical footprint. While Giddings' research provides a useful model for constructing a study of white sororities, for the purposes of

²² Ross, 34.

²³ Paula Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood : Delta Sigma Theta and the Challenge of the Black Sorority Movement*. 1st ed. (New York: Morrow, 1988), 17-22.

²⁴ Giddings, 19.

my research, her conclusions more draw needed attention to the fact that this question has been virtually left unexamined in current scholarship regarding white sororities' more so than concrete conclusions on white sororities historical importance.

Although the current historical scholarship has a clear hole in research on white sororities, the quantity of sociological research on this topic is markedly greater. White sororities' impact has been continuously addressed in sociological research in studying American gender roles, but this research has yet to draw historians' attention to white sororities as an unexplored element of American women's history. The vast majority of current scholarship on historically white sororities is found within the sociological field, and generally concentrates on the sociological makeup of sorority members and internal culture of the university. Traditionally sociological interpretations of Greek culture and sororities in particular, have focused on the exclusive, communalistic, and even oppressive pressure these institutions place on American women.

John Finley Scott's 1965 article on "The American College Sorority:" represents one of the earliest sociological studies of sorority culture, and helped generate an entire subfield of research on sororities as a sociological topic. Scott argued that the college sorority while "academically disesteemed," still held sociological relevance as an "agent of ascriptive groups, maintaining normative controls over courtship"²⁵. Moreover, Scott highlighted how sororities were integral elements in student culture, but "are known only by their effects" while little is discussed on their "internal structure and little more on their relationship to the envioning society"²⁶. Consequently, the sociological community since the mid twentieth century has

²⁵ John Finley Scott, "The American College Sorority: Its Role in Class and Ethnic Endogamy," *American Sociological Review* 30, no. 4 (1965). 514.

²⁶ Scott, 517.

examined the sociological value of these institutions, and argued that their governing “motives” were rooted in reinforcing traditional ideas of femininity²⁷.

A more recent work, Alan DeSantis’ *Inside Greek U.: Fraternities, Sororities, and the Pursuit of Pleasure, Power, and Prestige* underscores how sociologists built on Scott’s theories to produce a wealth of sociological scholarship which both confirms and expands his original hypotheses. DeSantis, similar to other sociological scholars, presents an oppressive image of white Greek organizations and the role they play in “shaping the gender identities of its members” and in fostering long-term identity²⁸. DeSantis’ investigation uses personal interviews and statistical analysis, as evidence of how “fraternity and sorority members negotiate their gender roles and identities through their daily performances,” as learned roles come to dictate self-identification²⁹.

Judith Butler’s article “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” offers similar opinions on gender in women’s identity. Butler suggests that “gender is in no way a stable identity [...]; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*.”³⁰ She points to how women have come to “perform” gendered identities as a result the “construct[ion] of that identity as a compelling illusion, an object of belief.”³¹ Butler discusses how gender roles for women have been “compelled by social sanction and taboo” within American institutions, and similarly DeSantis observed that “sorority women are encouraged to be interdependent, not individualistic” reinforcing traditional ideas of feminine

²⁷ Ibid., 527. d

²⁸ A. D. DeSantis, *Inside Greek U.: Fraternities, Sororities, and the Pursuit of Pleasure, Power, and Prestige*: University Press of Kentucky, 2007, 15.

²⁹ DeSantis, 11.

³⁰ Judith Butler. “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution.” H. Bial, *The Performance Studies Reader* (Routledge, 2004). 154-167. 154.

³¹ Butler, 155.

delicacy and even incapacity³². Moreover, in regard to white sororities DeSantis' study provides compelling evidence to suggest that white sorority's ideals of femininity and gender construction have overpowered any intellectual role for these institutions. Although Judith Butler's scholarship does not specifically allude to sororities when looking at her work in comparison with DeSantis' conclusions obvious implications for the role of sororities begin to emerge which require further study. Furthermore, an investigation with a historical methodology provides a different perspective on the historical continuity and change in the nature of sororities.

To a certain extent white sororities have been studied as part of the development of gender ideologies by historians and sociologists within current scholarship. Historians, however, have yet to examine historically white sororities as a current of women's history in America. Evidence on the role sororities play in reinforcing gender roles, however, creates questions regarding how these institutions reacted to and were impacted by movements for women's social, political, and economic enfranchisement. Further study to assess the role of white sororities as a potential influence on women's broader historical development during second wave feminism is therefore necessary. The collection of historical research on women's development, however, has tended to ignore sororities instead focusing on providing a generalized picture of women's collegiate experience. For example, Stephanie Coontz's book *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* builds on the collection of women's history scholarship in order to offer a contemporary analysis of women's social and political revolution.

Coontz's observations on the impact of women's coeducation and collegiate experiences concentrates on women's individual perseverance and progress in the face of patriarchal and

³² Butler, 155.; DeSantis, 118.

conventional societal oppression. Coontz argues that while early instances of female collegiate attendance in the early twentieth century represented a “conscious defiance of society’s expectations of her role, by the 1950s “college became much more compatible with getting married and becoming a mother.”³³ Coontz holds that this shift in the purpose of women’s education reflected a change in the younger generation of women’s attitudes provoked by earlier generations were “appalled by the changes they saw in the postwar period.”³⁴ She maintains that this conformity to traditional ideas of womanhood reflected a somewhat bizarre, product of women’s choice, reinforced and perpetuated by patriarchal dominance. Furthermore, she argues that the 1960s women’s movement “appealed” to college women because of this perceived subjugation³⁵. Their “frustration and anger” bubbled to the surface amid the heightened tensions of the 1960s and was intensified by the rise of an active student culture and protest movement³⁶.

While Coontz does emphasize the important role women’s collegiate participation had on women’s enfranchisement, she refrains from a more descriptive or in-depth investigation of the actual environment on college campuses which perpetuated this bizarre behavior in the 1950s. Coontz’s book reflects the typical model of much of women’s history which addresses the female collegiate experience but from one specific point of view, the protest model. Although Coontz suggests the shift women’s behavior in the 1950s towards educational purpose was baffling, other scholars have pointed to this change as indicative of the increased emphasis on femininity and domesticity in America in the postwar period. Barbara Solomon’s book *In the Company of Educated Women* describes how the 1950s characterized a “time of social

³³ Coontz, Stephanie. *A Strange Stirring : The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s*. New York: Basic Books, 2011, 106-107.

³⁴ Coontz, 111.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

³⁶ *Ibid.*,

conformity” in which single women became cast as “deviants” to the accepted social order of the period³⁷. Solomon argues that this social emphasis on conformity brought women back into primarily the domestic sphere, as “college women had to make a choice between marriage and career, the large majority chose marriage unquestionably.”³⁸

Women’s motivations behind a college education during the 1950s shifted according to larger societal trends, as career life came to have “virtually no appeal” during “the period in which the feminine mystique held sway.”³⁹ Elaine Tyler May’s work *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* similarly concurs with Solomon’s analysis of the 1950s. Solomon and May both disagree with Coontz by arguing that women’s position towards education and career during this period was not bizarre but rather fitting their own historical background. May holds that the women “of the 1950s [were] eager to establish secure families with the traditional gender roles that had been so seriously threatened during their childhoods in the 1930s.”⁴⁰ Women’s embrace of strict gender roles, furthermore, echoed their recognition and response to both “the limited employment opportunities open to them” and “the stigma facing working wives.”⁴¹ These women’s behavior therefore represents a conscious decision during this period to “embrace the homemaker role as significant, important, and fulfilling.”⁴²

These separate works depict how assumptions about gender and the purposes of higher education for women have changed over time given certain historical conditions. The ways in which women and society have defined women’s emancipation differs at separate moments in

³⁷ Solomon, 195.

³⁸ *Ibid.*,

³⁹ Solomon, 195.

⁴⁰ Elaine Taylor May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (Basic Books, 2008). 54.

⁴¹ May, 54.

⁴² *Ibid.*,

history. With this point in mind, a historical analysis of historically white sororities and their role on second wave feminism can provide a better understanding of how women themselves and different institutions are defining emancipation within the given historical context. This shift and increased focus on femininity and domesticity during the 1950s coincided with the apex of sorority popularity in America. While this correlation may be more coincidental than probative, a further examination into the involvement of sororities on college cultures and their impact on women in general should be attempted before the book on women's history in the late twentieth century is closed.

Women's history has become a well-documented topic of historical research, with historians offering both complimentary and contradictory opinions on women's development in American society. Nevertheless, one of the most popular and prevalent institutions in America which has interacted with a majority of college-educated women since the 1950s, has yet to be explored as a significant topic of women's, educational, or general history. The current scholarship in both the historical and sociological fields provides a limited view of traditionally white sororities which is insufficient for drawing conclusions on the historical role and validity of these institutions. While the scholarship on African American Greek institutions offers a possible model for further research, and raises questions regarding the significance of white Greek culture on American history in general. Historically white sororities constitute an untapped historical topic, which demand further historical examination in order to truly understand the narrative of American women's history.

The Origins and Evolution of Duke Sororities:

Four years after Mother Fitzgerald's death bed warning to her sorority daughters of Alpha Delta Pi, the sorority opened the first sorority chapter at Duke University in 1911 and ushered in a system which would entirely change university dynamics and power⁴³. Duke University was founded as Trinity College in 1838 in the antebellum South, the private college emerged as an institution for white, Protestant, affluent students and developed a reputation as a Southern Ivy for the select elite. While a self-described part of the Southern predominantly male education system, Duke University's transition from local Southern college to nationally prestigious university is owed entirely to women.

While Trinity College first admitted women beginning in 1864, women were denied degrees and restricted to day student status rather than fulltime enrollment. When Washington Duke provided a hundred thousand dollar gift to Trinity's endowment in 1896 creating Duke University, this financial contribution was contingent on the university "open[ing] its doors to women, placing them on an equal footing with men"⁴⁴. By 1923, female graduation had increased to two hundred thirty-five, and subsequently the Duke Endowment in 1924 created the Women's College as a coordinate part of Duke University⁴⁵. Moving into the mid-twentieth century, Duke University represented a largely coed university but a private, conservative, segregated institution dominated by a white student body, Southern traditions, and Greek culture.

The Duke University's sorority system grew up amid the second phase of sorority expansion in American history, establishing organizations for justifying coeducation predating even the creation of an official women's college at the university. The Duke Sorority System

⁴³ The Omicron Chapter of Alpha Delta Pi women's fraternity opened at Duke University in 1911

⁴⁴ Pyatt, Tim. "Retrospective." *Duke Magazine*, Volume 92, No. 6. November-December 2006, 2.

⁴⁵ In 1924, in honor of his father Duke Washington, James B. Duke donated forty million dollars to establish the Duke Endowment to fund the hospitals, orphanages, Methodist Church, and four colleges, including Trinity College. Subsequently, Trinity College President William Preston Few insisted that Trinity College be renamed Duke University, its contemporary moniker.

grew exponentially in the early twentieth century with the Duke University Panhellenic Council serving as the governing body for the campus sororities. By 1950, Duke maintained thirteen traditionally white, protestant sororities which composed their Panhellenic Council, and reported to the National Panhellenic Conference⁴⁶. Moreover, sororities represented a popular institution within the Duke campus environment, averaging fifty-seven percent participation among female students between 1947 and 1966⁴⁷.

The 1950s at Duke University was termed *The Decade of the Greek* on campus by popular vote in the campus newspaper, the *Duke Chronicle*. Sororities and fraternities not only enjoyed historical highs in participation, but captivated mainstream campus discussion and debate. A historical retrospective in the *Duke Chronicle* described Duke in the 1950s as “Fraternities, sororities, and homecoming queens dominated the headlines [...] in other words, business as usual.”⁴⁸ Greek rushing, events, and social activities ruled the student press; for example “Greek Dateline” a monthly column celebrating Greek members’ engagements and pinnings was an anticipated and popular publication not just for Greeks but on campus in general during this period⁴⁹. Duke sororities maintained student and administrative support during this decade and signified the dominant force within the campus environment.

⁴⁶Duke University, Panhellenic Council. Panhellenic Council Records, 1938-1996 (Bulk 1960-1996), Univeristy Archives at Duke University, Constitution for the Duke University Panhellenic Council (Spring 1965) (Box 1: Folder 2).

⁴⁷ Sorority System Debate 1947-1966 (Box 3: Folder 27).

⁴⁸ “1932-1977: The More Things Change....,” *The Summer Chronicle*, 9 June 1982. 6. The Duke Chronicle is the daily, student run press at Duke University. It was first published in 1905 and continues to function as the main university newspaper through today. *The Summer Chronicle* was the summer publication of the *Duke Chronicle*.

⁴⁹ The “Greek Dateline” was a monthly column running in the *Duke Chronicle* on the last Friday of the month throughout the 1950s and until the end of the 1962 school year. The column announced the dating status, pinnings, and engagements of sorority and fraternity members at Duke during this period. *Pinning* is a commonly used term on college campuses during the 1950s and 60s to classify committed relationships between sorority and fraternity members—specifically when a fraternity member gives a sorority member his Greek pin.

Nevertheless, the Duke Sorority System, although statistically popular, faced significant institutional and grassroots opposition on campus beginning in the late 1950s and escalating during the 1960s. This opposition became officially known as “The Duke Sorority System Debate,” and contested the place and purpose of the Duke Sorority System on campus and formally continued through 1966⁵⁰. This debate pitted nonaffiliated female students who contested the “superficiality” of the sorority system against sorority representatives who defended sororities’ role in “uphold[ing] university rules, standards, and traditions.”⁵¹ The Sorority System Debate not only characterized the first historical record of organized opposition to sororities on campus, but highlighted the two different camps of opinion which would dominate the debate over the Duke Sorority System through the 1980s.

By the late 1960s, national political controversy and the rise of student activism models on university campuses shook the conservative core of Duke University on which the sorority system had been built. Beginning with campus demonstrations for the desegregation of Duke University in the early 1960s, the racial homogeneity and discriminatory traditions of the Duke Sorority System were subsequently targeted as the epitome of “exclusion” and even “evil” which propelled racial discrimination and separation on campus⁵². The late sixties ushered in a wave of activist and reform movements and organizations on campus which attacked the ‘imperialism’ of Greek organizations; and argued on the need for individual student autonomy and independence from these historically regressive and arcane organizations⁵³.

⁵⁰ Sorority System Debate 1947-1966 (Box 3: Folder 27).

⁵¹ “Student Leaders Urge Calm Reappraisal of System as Abolition Movement Grows,” *Duke Chronicle*, 19 October 1951, 2. ; “Panhellenic Rush Booklet, 1960-61: The Hows and Whys of Rushing,” Printed Matter: Handbooks, 1948-1969 (Box 3: Folder 41), 1.

⁵² Sid Moody, “Bigots, Snobs, Conformists, or Solid Campus Leaders; ‘Greeks’ Remain Unvanquished,” *Duke Chronicle*, 28 April 1963, Features Section, 1.

⁵³ Moody, 1.

General student activism at Duke was eventually accompanied by a second wave feminist movement on campus and rise of women's liberation groups, who agitated for women's social, political, and economic incorporation into college life and larger society. Throughout the late 1960s and early 70s, several different feminist organizations condemned sororities on ideological rather than organizational grounds, arguing that women's problems demanded a collective response and that the divisions among women promoted by sororities damaged that goal. Second wave feminism at Duke challenged sorority solidarity as historically detrimental to actual solidarity among women, and held that what Duke women needed were not sorority sisters but true sisterhood.

The growth of a historical pattern of opposition to sororities during this period revealed how sororities had moved away from their founding principles by the mid twentieth century. Although founded under a dual mandate of promoting female education and ideas of women's domesticity in the early twentieth century, over time a social concentration overshadowed the scholarship focus of historically white sororities. An examination of the Duke Sorority papers and public relations materials demonstrated the significant shift in the balance between sororities' educational and social priorities which had occurred by the mid twentieth century.

The *Constitution for the Duke University Panhellenic Council* (Spring 1965) established "maintaining on a high plain fraternity life and inter-fraternity relationships within our college" as the "primar[y]" role and "purpose" of sororities⁵⁴. Furthermore, the description of this "purpose" within the Constitution focused on social responsibilities of sororities such as, "to cooperate with the college administration in the maintenance of high social standards"⁵⁵. While

⁵⁴ Constitution for the Duke University Panhellenic Council (Spring 1965) (Box 1 : Folder 2), 1.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 2.

education was not entirely ignored within the Constitution, noting sororities' interest in "further[ing] fine intellectual accomplishments and sound scholarship," the emphasis on education is comparatively minor⁵⁶. Taken as a whole, the Constitution, the guiding document for sororities at Duke, presented sororities' scholarship role as subordinate to their social purpose. Additionally, sorority leaders through the early 1970s reaffirmed this idea in letters to current and prospective members, stating "the theme of sororities is to provide an alternative to the pressures of academic competition."⁵⁷

Sorority public relations materials at Duke mirrored this uneven relationship between social and scholarly aspects of sororities. Sorority handbooks and newsletters produced between 1950 and 1980 consistently marketed sororities as social rather than educational institutions. Publications such as *The A-B-Cs of Duke Sororities* or *Take a Peek at a Greek* stressed "the chance to make new friends and share new experiences [as] the purpose of sororities in the first place."⁵⁸ These publications did note the presence of "scholastic standards" for sororities, but their primary emphasis was on bare minimum maintenance of the 2.0 grade point average required by university administration not the Panhellenic Council⁵⁹. These guides indicated that while all educationally oriented activities, such as study breaks, were "strictly voluntary," participation in social events were mandatory for membership⁶⁰. Consequently, between 1950 and 1980 educational concerns were subordinated to the social elements of Duke Sorority operations, enforced through official regulations and penalties laid down by the Panhellenic Council and sustained by a systemic sorority marketing campaign.

⁵⁶ Ibid.,

⁵⁷ "Draft Letter." (Undated), Correspondence, 1970-71 (Box 2: Folder 17), 2.

⁵⁸ Printed Matter: *Take A Peek at a Greek*, 1978-1979 (Box 3: Folder 44), 4.

⁵⁹ *The A-B-Cs of Duke Sororities* (1956), Printed Matter: Handbooks, 1948-1969 (Box 3: Folder 41), 1.

⁶⁰ Printed Matter: *Take A Peek at a Greek*, 1978-1979 (Box 3: Folder 44), 4.

While primary sources indicated a disproportionate relationship between social and educational concerns within the Duke Sorority System, was this relationship part of a larger trend within the national sorority system? While the evidence might have suggested the possibility for a national trend, when looking at Duke University Sororities as a case study, the recognition of a regional lens to this study needs to be addressed. During this period Duke University employed regional admission quotas which advantaged students from Southern states⁶¹. Therefore, the degree to which the views espoused by the Duke Sorority System reflected trends in Southern institutions and opinions during this period versus the national sorority positions should be considered.

While regional influences undoubtedly played a role in the specifics of Duke Sorority opinions, as a local Panhellenic organization the policies and practices of the Duke Sorority System were continuously subject to approval and revision by the National Panhellenic Conference. The presence and actual role of the NPC remains a historical question in evaluating the broader historical implications of the Duke Sorority System. As women's collegiate opportunities increased sororities began to spread to college campuses throughout the late nineteenth century, provoking local sororities' arguments on the need for a unifying, governing body for sorority administration. In response, the National Panhellenic Conference was formed in 1902 to address these disparities between local and national sorority priorities⁶². The NPC laid

⁶¹ Duke University. Women's College Records : 1928-1974. Univeristy Archives at Duke University. Admission Policies, 1944-1971 (Folder 1 of 2). Women's College Admissions Office (Box 1: Folder 1). The Duke University Women's College Records on Admission between 1944 and 1971 operated on a regional quota system which mandated specific percentages within the total women's admissions for different geographical locations. The North Carolina and South Eastern regions (defined as Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana) had the highest quotas, and students from these states made up roughly sixty to seventy percent of the women's college student body.

⁶² Louise Leonard, "National Panhellenic Conference: A Historical Record of Achievement," 3. This concept for a National Panhellenic Council or Conference traces back to the 1890 Kappa Kappa Gamma Convention which suggested "invit[ing] the women's college fraternities to meet in a Panhellenic Convention [...] to discuss methods of fraternity cooperation"⁶². This meeting acknowledged comparative problems and suggested improvements but no

down a standardized set of national objectives for sororities and qualifications for membership, which required comporting with the NPC by-laws. In addition, local sororities voted the NPC oversight powers, including discretionary power over membership and the right to make “recommendations” on individual sororities’ discussions and legislation⁶³. The National Panhellenic Conference oversaw individual College Panhellenics, and circulated *The NPC Manual of Fraternity Education* as an “informative handbook” detailing proper sorority administration⁶⁴.

The administrative authority retained by the NPC creates a strong case for a correlation between local sorority practices and national sorority policies during the late twentieth century. Further examination of National Panhellenic Conference materials in comparison with Duke and other individual Panhellenics would be necessary, however, to definitively establish whether the shift from a dual educational and social mandate to a supremely social orientation constituted a national trend. Nevertheless, we should remain aware of the hierarchical relationship between the national sorority organizations and their local affiliates when analyzing the implications of the Duke Sorority System’s practices and policies as suggestive of sororities’ larger historical patterns and influence.

“Sorority Women for Sororities:” A System of Influence:

implementation efforts or commitment to a continuous national organization was achieved at this point. In May 1902, seven organizations, Alpha Phi, Pi Beta Phi, Kappa Alpha Theta, Kappa Kappa Gamma, Delta Gamma, Gamma Phi Beta, and Delta Delta Delta, formed the first interfraternity association and the first intergroup organization on college campuses. The National Panhellenic Conference had expanded to thirty-one member organizations by 1955.

⁶³ Leonard, 11.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 15.

The rise the Sorority System Debate during this period constituted a response to sororities' transition away from the dual mandate. This debate illuminated not only the historical shift which sororities had undergone, but also how over time their purpose had come to conflict with the ideologies underlying progressive and feminist movements. While sororities' dual mandate may have been appropriate for defining women's emancipation in the nineteenth century, by the mid-twentieth century the inherent conflicts of this mandate had compromised sororities' ability to act as both social and scholarly institutions under current structure.

Mother Fitzgerald's word of warning echoed how definitions of women's role have changed over time and how the tug and pull of the old sorority establishment and new ideas about women's place periodically came into conflict. The 1960s and 70s constituted one of the biggest episodes of conflict at Duke University. The late 1960s witnessed a wave of activist and reform movements and subsequently the rise of student liberation organizations at Duke.

During a panel on student activism at Duke University in 1968, Clarence Whitfield argued that the second half of the 1960s at Duke was characterized by "four issues which prompt[ed] campus activism and unrest" at Duke⁶⁵. Two of these issues "racial strife in the nation" and the War in Vietnam represented campus reactions to larger national protest movements. While the third issue "student's desire for a voice in the serious affairs of the day," personified the student activism movement captivating college campuses during this era⁶⁶. Correspondingly, these movements precipitated the development of progressive student organizations such as the Black Solidarity Committee for Community Improvement, Duke

⁶⁵ Duke University. Student Activism Reference Collection, 1934-Ongoing. University Archives at Duke University, Vietnam War 1961-69 (Box 2: Folder 1), 2. References a panel on 'Student Activism' hosted by Clarence E. Whitfield (Director of Information Services at Duke) on August 9, 1968 dealt with state of student activism at Duke during the late 1960s.

⁶⁶ Vietnam War 1961-69, (Box 2: Folder 1). p.2.

Chapter of the National Anti-War Fund, and Topical and Real University Education (TRUE) organization. The fourth source of campus activism at Duke was rooted in a movement on campus that believed “that ‘the establishment’ must be overthrown, that the existing structures must be torn down” within the university, referencing and eventually targeting Greek institutions⁶⁷.

Along with the development of a student activism movement, the late 1960s and early 1970s at Duke also witnessed the advent of second wave feminism on campus. The main features of this movement focused on promoting collegiate women’s self-determination and autonomy, “end[ing] the sexual exploitation of women” on campus, and an elimination of “tradition-bound institutions” which “institutionally oppressed” women in order to form a collaborative coalition of Duke women for change⁶⁸. Additionally, as second wave feminist really took off at Duke between 1969 and 1970, the movement perpetuated the development of numerous women’s liberation organizations on campus. These organizations ranged from the more activist model, Female Operation 11, to the more moderate Directions for Educated Women (DEW)⁶⁹.

Activist women’s organizations impacted the campus dynamic and Duke women by propelling administrative and ideological changes. These organizations achieved substantive changes in the University’s social policies in terms of female students’ rights compared with males, such as ending gendered curfews for women and restrictions on mixed sex interactions. These groups secured female students’ access to important services at Duke, for example the Abortion Loan Program for Duke Women. They also influenced women’s awareness and impacted campus debate on issues including, “equalization of job opportunities for women,

⁶⁷ Ibid.,

⁶⁸ Weston, 9

⁶⁹ Ibid.,

better child care facilities, an end to strictly defined roles for women and men, and an end to sexual exploitation of women.”⁷⁰ Simultaneously, these groups challenged the place and purpose of oppressive and institutional campus organizations, arguing that these institutions divided women and hindered women’s ability to come together to attain political and economic rights on campus and in greater society.

Duke sororities, however, still enjoyed favorable participation percentages and institutional support within and outside of the Duke administration. Moreover, these sororities exerted a clear and concerted influence on campus between 1950 and 1980. Duke sororities’ web of influence during this period can best be broken down into a three pronged system of influence within the Duke campus environment of: structural, administrative, and ideological power. While psychologists have repeatedly demonstrated the influential power of sororities in their ability to impact women’s identity formation, historians have yet to fully explore how sororities saw themselves as impacting women during this period⁷¹. Within this next section, I will explore how sororities’ long term pattern of influence signified a historical campaign to solidify women’s commitment to the sorority institution by denying the need for reform and the validity of second wave feminism.

The first prong of sorority influence, structural influence, demonstrated how Duke sororities impacted campus dynamics, building a wall against reform through a program of structured alliances and selected response. Sororities utilized their structural power to enforce divisions among women, while carefully addressing criticisms against the sorority institutions in a manner which allowed them to control campus debate. These sororities promoted a system of

⁷⁰ Ibid.,

⁷¹ Scott.

separation among women on campus, between members and nonmembers, which nurtured an *us vs. them* mentality on campus that hampered both internal and external reform efforts.

Additionally, sororities endorsed a plan of selective hearing and reaction when addressing feminist criticisms against these institutions, offering historical evidence for certain policies while simply not dignifying other accusations at all. In doing so, Duke sororities during this period employed structural influence as a mechanism for to preserving their own survival through the challenges of second wave feminism on campus.

The Duke sororities enforced a system of division among university women, which constructed a barrier between members and nonaffiliated women on campus. Sororities utilized labels of “Members” and “Independents” to distinguish between women who joined and refrained from sorority participation⁷². These labels served as a mechanism for defining members and nonmembers as different from one another within the campus environment. Furthermore, the Duke Panhellenic Council and individual sororities institutionally reinforced these divisions by strictly regulating relationships between members and nonmembers until the 1970s. Sorority manuals laid down strict rules for interactions between “Members” and “Independents” which had to be followed by sorority women or they were faced with punishment and possibly dismissal.

The use of the terminology “Independent” by Duke sororities held greater significance than merely as a differentiating label. The underlying meaning sororities’ assigned to the “Independent” designation implied negative implications for this status on women, personally and within the larger context of society. Within rush materials, such as “Letters to Freshmen,”

⁷² “Letters to Freshmen (1961),” Duke University, Panhellenic Council. Panhellenic Council Records, 1938-1996 (Bulk 1960-1996), University Archives at Duke University, Sorority System Debate 1947-1966 (Box 3: Folder 27), 1.

Duke sororities' painted the portrait of the "Independent" Duke coed. These letters described the "Independent" as: a woman who either refrained from rushing sororities depriving herself of the "bonds of sisterhood" but maintained her individuality or as the girl who sororities stated "suicided" mid-way through rush opting not to become a "Member."⁷³ Sororities' use of this strong, suggestive language perpetuated negative associations with the idea of "Independent" status. Sorority leaders during the 1960s strongly implied to members but more importantly prospective freshmen how "Independent" status meant not just isolation but possibly social death.

The significance of Duke sororities' structural influence further emerged in how sororities' turned Duke feminist organizations own ideas against them. Sororities' choice of language incorporated the same rhetoric of Duke feminist organizations on campus during this period. During the early 1970s, Duke feminist organizations implored women to "seek out individual alternatives," declaring their own autonomy and right to self-determination in campus symposiums and student editorials⁷⁴. Sororities misappropriated this terminology for their own purposes and generated negative connotations not just with "Independent" status, but the entire movement for increased liberation as well by performing "psychological gymnastics."⁷⁵

The Sororities' employment of this system of separation perpetuated the idea of an *us vs. them* struggle on campus between women who were "Members" versus those who were "Independents." Testimonials from individual sorority members stressed how this division was ingrained within collegiate identity, as "membership [...] [gave] you a group to which you can

⁷³ "Rush 1971-1972: Duke Panhellenic Council Report," Rush, 1971-1987 (Box 1: Folder 27), 2.

⁷⁴ Linda Cisler, "Unfinished Business: Birth Control and Women's Lib," *Ruby Magazine*, 3 October 1972, 12. *Ruby Magazine* started by Duke University students in the Fall of 1972. The *Ruby* was produced bimonthly as a substitute to an edition of the *Duke Chronicle*, with each issue of the magazine centering on one specific issue or subject. This article was released in the 2nd issue which was devoted to the abortion question at Duke.

⁷⁵ "Selectivity: 'Personal Right' Becoming 'Moral Wrong,'" *Duke Chronicle*, 22 September 1967, 2.

belong” and how “becoming a sister in a homogeneous Greek group, [women were] welcomed into the larger Panhellenic circle on [Duke’s] campus.”⁷⁶ Conversely, the “decision to remain independent” was not characterized as inherently wrong but had strong consequence⁷⁷. These women lived as individuals, distinct, different, and ultimately alone. The implications of this system underscored how collaboration between members and nonmembers was implicitly discouraged, and more so why reform of the Duke Sorority System historically suffered from a lack of institutional support. This system fostered a set of alliances which isolated Duke women from one another based on their sorority status, and which allowed sororities to continue operating on their original foundation by denying the possibility of grassroots reform movements.

Along with enforcing an identity system on campus, Duke sororities also exercised structural influence on the trajectory of campus debate during the late 1960s and 1970s. Sororities’ utilized a program of selected hearing and response to deal with the wave of criticism directed toward these institutions during this period. Sororities shrewdly defended their actions where they could and ignored other criticisms altogether by relying on their historical entrenchment at Duke to carry them through. It should be noted, that neither public nor private statements from the Duke Panhellenic Council outwardly acknowledge this as sororities’ endorsed strategy, but a historical analysis of the campus debate waged in the *Duke Chronicle* during this period presents a strong pattern of evidence for this case. Growing criticism of the Duke Sorority System during the late 1960s and early 1970s did not merely question the usefulness of sororities but illustrated a growing belief in sororities as educationally and socially detrimental to women. While the *Duke Chronicle* served as the stage for celebrating the Greek

⁷⁶ “Letters to Freshmen (1961)”, Sorority System Debate 1947-1966 (Box 3: Folder 27), 3.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

system during the 1950s, during the 1960s it became the forum for attacking Greek institutions, sororities in particular. The vast majority of articles and editorials featured during this period argued that sororities “distract the real purpose of a college—to educate” and were wholly “undemocratic” organizations which “tie knots of conformity” through celebrations of “selectivity.”⁷⁸ This commentary signified the commonly critical tone of Duke sororities not just from organizations, such as the Community Council of Woman’s College (CoCoWoCo) and Female Operation 11, but on the campus at large.

Duke sororities, however, did not respond to this popular criticism with a point-by-point refutation of the charges against them. Instead, sororities addressed criticism in three ways: publicly refuting the most extreme claims, reframing the question on certain claims, and ignoring other claims entirely. Firstly, the Duke Panhellenic Council beginning in 1967 publicly refuted the most extreme claims, such as accusations of sororities’ as “dehumanizing,” by turning to historical justification⁷⁹. The Panhellenic Council pointed to sororities’ historical legacy as familial institutions, founded in principles of “true sisterhood” to rebuke these characterizations⁸⁰. Similarly, sororities’ defended the “selectivity” of their institutions by reaching outside the unfavorable echo chamber of the college campus during this period, and instead pointing to historic American traditions. The Panhellenic Council asserted that “selectivity” was *the American way* and a central part of life beyond college, upholding “selectivity as a necessary part of life itself, and selectivity as a vital part of the sorority system.”

⁸¹ Relying on their interpretation of *historical truths*, sororities’ rejection of these most extreme

⁷⁸ Moody, 1.

⁷⁹ “Sororities Defend Selectivity Against Dehumanization Charges,” *Duke Chronicle*, 22 September 1967, 1.

⁸⁰ “To Freshman Women,” *Duke Chronicle*, Editorial, 13 October 1967, 2.

⁸¹ “Sororities Defend Selectivity Against Dehumanization Charges,” 1.

criticisms provided them cover on other practices they found harder to justify in the current historical context.

The second way sororities dealt with criticisms involved reframing questions of their guilt by pivoting claims which the local Panhellenic could not defend to the national organizations. This tact was particularly used by the traditionally white sororities at Duke during the desegregation of the university and growing Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Criticism of white sororities' discriminatory policies challenged these institutions for perpetuating racial separatism on campus. When the Panhellenic Council or individual sororities were challenged on their policies, these organizations utilized the press to reframe the issue from a question of their discrimination to a problem of national sorority policy which these institutions were beholden to. National sorority institutions the NPC included rejected these accusations by arguing that national adoption of explicitly nondiscriminatory pledges or by-laws "would involve surrender of their policy of 'local autonomy.'" ⁸² This back and forth divestment of responsibility allowed sororities to avoid integrationist efforts, and perpetuated unanswerable questions of who actually holds power within the holistic sorority system, local institutions or national organizations.

Finally, sororities structured campus debate by simply disregarding certain criticisms entirely, relying on their historical place within the university system to ride out contemporary reform movements and second wave feminist ideologies. On certain issues, such as claims that sororities were regressive, traditionalist, and oppressive institutions, the Duke sororities did not offer a public response. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the *Duke Chronicle* was dominated by editorials condemning sororities' role in making women "the first victims of automation," encouraging conformity to "plastic people," and complicity in repressing women,

⁸² Dave Shaffer, "Kappa Delta Goes Local," *Duke Chronicle*, 29 September 1967, 2.

as “oppression of women is institutional, not individual.”⁸³ Duke sororities employed a policy of unflinching silence and refused to acknowledge or address these criticisms. Their decision to not distinguish these accusations accompanied by the downturn of the reform movement on campus towards the late 1970s left sororities victorious in controlling the campus debate and avoiding any meaningful reform.

Within the current scholarship psychologists have stressed the influential power of white sororities in “shaping the identities of their members,” but this study demonstrates how the source of sororities’ influence is just as much historical as it is psychological⁸⁴. The Duke Sorority System exemplified how sororities’ power within the campus environment was connected to their historical roots. The history of sororities at Duke paralleled the history of women at Duke and this legacy vested these institutions with a structural and administrative stake in campus dynamics. The second prong in Duke sororities’ system of influence, therefore, was administrative influence. The sorority system at Duke predated the formation of an official Women’s College at Duke, and as a result sororities were not only present but intimately involved in the foundation of the administrative bodies which governed campus relations.

Sororities retained historical influence and support from both University administrators, including the majority of University presidents and Women’s College presidents between 1950 and 1985, as well as powerful student organizations, such as the Women’s Student Government Association (WSGA) and up until the late 1960s the *Duke Chronicle*. Sororities’ historical tenure provided them an influential seat at the table in deciding certain changes and reform on campus.

⁸³ “Dean Ball Feels Coeds Need Goals,” *Duke Chronicle*, 14 September 1968, 1. ; “Coed Sit-in,” *Duke Chronicle*, 4 December 1967, 4. ; Celeste Weston, “Women’s Liberation Movement Advanced as Several Different Groups Begin Organizing,” *Duke Chronicle*, September 15, 1970. 9.

⁸⁴ A. D. DeSantis, *Inside Greek U.: Fraternities, Sororities, and the Pursuit of Pleasure, Power, and Prestige*: University Press of Kentucky, 2007, 15.

For instance, the Duke Panhellenic Council maintained a delegate to the panel which weighed in on the question of Duke's desegregation in 1962⁸⁵. In addition, sororities' long history on the Duke campus provided them an influential power position within university administration in the Duke University Board of Trustees. The Duke Board of Trustees was largely composed of sorority and fraternity alumni, who provided sororities' important support in resisting challenges to their place and position during this period. Ultimately, sororities' administrative influence granted an institutional advantage and historical protection which allowed them to outlast the reform movements of the 1960s and 70s.

Sororities exerted structural and administrative influence, but the final prong of sorority influence, ideological influence, epitomized how sororities saw themselves as influencing women's identity formation in order to secure the continued domination of the sorority system within the campus environment. Between 1950 and 1985, Duke sororities attempted to promote ideological values which supported the historical concept and inherent importance underlying the sorority system. The foundations of historically white sororities up to this point were predicated on the principals of gendered ideology, traditionalism, collective identity, and some degree of homogeneity. Accordingly, the character of sororities' ideological influence on the Duke campus during this period advocated these concepts.

Duke sororities' utilized their role as social institutions during this period to uphold and perpetuate the historical appropriateness of gendered roles for women within the contemporary campus climate. Sorority publicity materials from the 1950s through 1970s emphasized gendered ideas and portraits for women at Duke University, coupling strategic language with associated images of women which suggested the notion of a preferable, domesticated role for women. The

⁸⁵ "Meeting Minutes: February 13, 1961," Minutes-Presidents' Meetings, 1957-1964 (Box 1: Folder 11).

language of these sorority materials similarly implied limitations to women's development, for example in her speech to the freshmen pledge class in 1971 Martha Jean McVay emphasized how sororities cultivated women's "talents" and "interests" rather than fostering opportunities and were expressly "not goal-directed."⁸⁶ This pointed language was utilized by numerous university presidents and was compounded with visual representations of women in traditional roles. Sorority handbooks, such as *Take a Peek at a Greek*, portrayed women as mother figures in images caring for children or as sexual objects of men's attention in beauty pageants or sorority socials. The pairing of the gendered rhetoric with the blatant visual demonstrates the Duke Sorority Systems' intention to publicize and endorse a particular role for sorority women during this period.

Simultaneously, sorority policies required sorority women to practice traditional, domesticated roles for women. An editorial "Sisters All" in the *Duke Chronicle* from October 1970 regarding the fundamental problems with sororities deplored how,

"Women, at Duke and in larger society, [were] viewed alternatively, but exclusively, as sex objects, baby sitters, as housekeepers, as supporters of their men, and, for that matter, as more sensitive, more-artistic, as weaker than men."⁸⁷

A review of Duke Sorority practices and procedures from this period indicated that sororities actively sought these images because they comported with the historical narrative of the sorority institution. Duke sororities' required members to attend social functions in order to "teach [women] practical skills" and prescribed specific rules for social interactions, including the use of supervised dating⁸⁸. Meanwhile, sororities wielded ideological influence through their advising sessions between Panhellenic leadership and sorority women, in which members were

⁸⁶ Martha Jean McVay, "Speech to the Class of 71'" (1967), Speeches, 1956-70 (Box 3: Folder 32), 1.

⁸⁷ "Sisters All," *Duke Chronicle*, Editorials, 16 October 1970, 5.

⁸⁸ *Greek Women* (1967-68), Printed Matter: Handbooks, 1948-1969 (Box 3: Folder 41), 10.

counseled women on the “ever-present crises of an emerging women’s life.”⁸⁹ These sessions were intended to help women triumph in “the challenge to become a woman” by “acquiring more graciousness, poise, tact, and ease in social situations.”⁹⁰

Informal sorority symposiums and activities compounded these official policies, and encouraged sorority women to view themselves as future wives and mothers. For example, an edition of the *Panhellenic Newsletter* from 1966 announced “while most of our time now is devoted to papers, exams [...] the Phi Mu’s will hear from Dr. Bennett on the marriage ceremony tonight.”⁹¹ This entry symbolized a typical newsletter entry, which praised how “[a] sorority gathered in East Duke for an informal discussion on ‘Choosing a Mate!’”⁹². Sororities’ community service activities, similarly, promoted the ideas of motherhood such as working at children’s hospitals and the official charity of the Duke Panhellenic Council in which the council “adopted” a foreign child for a number of years⁹³.

While the Duke Sorority System had historically worked to influence women’s identity formation, in 1968 the National Panhellenic Conference passed a resolution which suggested the addition of similar practices for all local sorority organizations. The Conference passed a resolution on “social standards” mandating that “National Panhellenic Conference Chapters [...] establish for their groups a set of rules [for] social conduct of their members”⁹⁴ The NPC action indicated the desire for sororities’ to take the lead in influencing the conduct of women in favor of a uniform, commonly agreed upon standard. Moreover, this resolution indicated a national

⁸⁹ McVay, 2.

⁹⁰ Ibid.,

⁹¹ *Pan Hellenic Newsletter* (1966-67), Printed Matter: Panhellenic Newsletter, 1955-1969 (Box 3: Folder 43), 3.

⁹² *Panhel Dispatch* (1962-63), Printed Matter: Panhellenic Newsletter, 1955-1969 (Box 3: Folder 43), 2.

⁹³ “Meeting Minutes: December 7, 1953,” Minutes-Presidents’ Meetings, 1951-1957 (Box 1: Folder 10).

⁹⁴ *1968 NPC Manual of Information*, National Panhellenic Conference, 1962-1970 (Box 2: Folder 40), 33.

mandate upon local sororities, providing further evidence of a correlation between local sorority practices and national sorority trends.

In addition, Duke sororities during this time period engaged their ideological influence in a campaign to infuse collegiate women's identity formation with an appreciation for the historical principals of traditionalism and collective identity. For example, sororities utilized internal marketing, such as in handbooks, and external editorials to project positive connotations with sorority traditions, and traditionalism in general. Sororities during this period contextualized Greek institutions within the larger American narrative, capitalizing on the Cold War context, linking the fraternity tradition with the democratic tradition in America. Local and national sorority publications revised the founding dates for Greek organizations to 1776, and emphasized how the "fraternity tradition date[d] back to the founding of our republic."⁹⁵ Consequently, sorority letters between 1968 and 1970 emphasized that these institutions should be attempting to foster views of sorority traditions as a part of the "Founders" vision of America⁹⁶.

In addition, within these letters sororities' employed careful language choice which described the sorority tradition as the embodiment of "fellowship," "bonds of friendship," and "sisterhood."⁹⁷ In this manner, sororities at Duke worked to produce positive connotation with sorority traditions but also with traditionalism as a larger concept. Editorials by sorority members, such as Gayle Lee's "Judge Greeks Fairly" in 1967, rebuffed the idea that "social reform movements," and concurrently reform in general, were good things compared traditionalism. These editorials negatively characterized reform movements which "in their cultural revolution voice[d] their personal disdain for purely recreational fun" or denounced

⁹⁵ "Letter: August 3, 1962," Public Relations, 1968-1970 (Box 3: Folder 16), 3.

⁹⁶ "Letter: August 3, 1962," Public Relations, 1968-1970 (Box 3: Folder 16), 3.

⁹⁷ Gayle Lee, "Judge Greeks Fairly," *Duke Chronicle*, Editorial, 2 October 1967, 2.

sororities simply because they “didn’t fit into their personal Utopian ideals for social reform.”⁹⁸ Duke sororities’ efforts juxtaposed the notion of tradition as good versus reform and revolution as bad, influencing how sorority members developed opinions about women’s liberation groups at Duke.

In the same manner, Duke sororities also advocated positive connotations with the idea of collective identity for Duke coeds. These same marketing materials and editorials highlighted the “bonds of congeniality, loyalty, and high ideals” which “bound” sorority women together in a common identity⁹⁹. Susan Persons’ speech to the Duke Panhellenic Council in the late 1960s encapsulated the sorority philosophy: “each woman is a Greek as well as an individual sorority member,” reinforcing a notion of collective identity¹⁰⁰. While Duke’s women’s liberation groups during the late 1960s focused on “the issue of self-determination for Duke women,” sororities offered a contrasting value system in which individualism was not the goal, community was¹⁰¹.

While the historical foundations of Duke’s white sororities rested in the concepts of women’s domestication, traditionalism, and collective identity, to a certain extent it also rested in the idea of homogeneity. These sororities were originally founded as organizations for white, protestant collegiate women. Accordingly, this racial and religious component influenced the development of these institutions as historically homogeneous; but to what degree did the Duke Sorority System during this period actively seek to endorse racial and religious homogeneity to sustain sorority dominance?

⁹⁸ Gayle, 2.

⁹⁹ Susan Persons, “Letter to Freshmen from Panhellenic President,” (Date Unknown), Speeches, 1956-70 (Box 3: Folder 32), 1.

¹⁰⁰ Persons, 1.

¹⁰¹ “Majority Rule,” *Duke Chronicle*, Editorial, 19 March 1971, .2.

Sororities at Duke have never been explicitly discriminatory, that is to say these sororities constitutions and by-laws did not officially exclude membership by certain religious or racial groups. Nevertheless, the thirteen traditionally white, protestant sororities which composed the Duke Panhellenic between 1950 and 1985 did utilize informal policies of discrimination which favored a racially and religiously homogenous sorority organization. While sororities did not have discriminatory clauses, they did enlist a “reference system,” for membership which required a letter of recommendation from alumni, presumably all white alumni, up until the 1970s¹⁰². Additionally, sororities’ by-laws prevented them from penalizing alumni or current members for their “personal opinions” in deciding which women received invitations for sorority membership¹⁰³.

Inter-View, an anonymously published magazine at Duke in the 1980s, addressed this question of sorority homogeneity even after full integration of the university. This magazine published an interview with Lisa Dixon, the vice President of the Panhellenic Council, who stated that “the current system of sorority rush [...] promotes segregation. The tradition which is the basis for the establishment of black sororities is different from that of whites.”¹⁰⁴ Moreover, a Greek member stated that “that segregation was not inherent in the fraternal system but that he was not sure fraternities would ever become integrated,” while Dixon suggested some sorority women “want to keep the two systems separate.”¹⁰⁵ Neither the Panhellenic Council nor any

¹⁰² Membership Statements on Non-Discrimination, 1965 (Box 2: Folder 36), 4.

¹⁰³ Membership Statements on Non-Discrimination, 1965 (Box 2: Folder 36), 4.

¹⁰⁴ *Inter-View* (Issue No. 3: October 1982). Duke University, Student Activism Reference Collection, 1934-Ongoing. Univeristy Archives at Duke University, *Inter-View* (Newsletter), 1982-1984 (Box3 : Folder 5), 2. *Inter-View* was an anonymous newsletter printed by a self-described biracial coalition at Duke University which addressed the topic of “Black-White relations at Duke University” in order “to promote an awareness and understanding of the way in which considerations of color affect our relationships with our peers, professors... the intention is to explore a more subtle and less actively hostile dorm of racial separatism which seems to run beneath the surface of manual, if not all, of the various formal and informal groups on campus” (1) The magazine operated between 1982 and roughly 1984 at Duke.

¹⁰⁵ *Inter-View* (Newsletter), 1982-1984 (Box3 : Folder 5), 2.

individual sorority offered a response or disagreement with these observations in their sorority publications or the Duke Chronicle. These informal policies in collaboration with the historical homogeneity and testimonials, consequently, create important questions as to whether by influencing homogeneity sororities turned “sisterhood at Duke into nothing more than an elaborate eugenics system” as Stephen Harrigan suggested in his review of the Duke Sorority System in 1982¹⁰⁶.

The analysis of Duke sororities’ three pronged system of influence illustrated how these organizations maintained a clear and concerted pattern of influence in the Duke campus between 1950 and 1985. Moreover, an examination of the sorority system of influence underscored how sororities’ saw themselves as impacting women’s identity formation during this period. Sororities utilized their influence to promote ideological values which reaffirmed sororities’ historical foundations, thereby generating a base of support for sororities continued dominance. While the evidence demonstrated how sororities’ maintained a clear sphere of influence, it should be acknowledged that the sorority system did not represent the sole force influencing women at Duke during this period. Furthermore, the role and impact other groups, women’s liberation organizations in particular, should be considered when assessing collegiate dynamics.

Collision and Coexistence: Sororities and Second Wave Feminism:

This case study of Duke University has thus far established the influence both sororities and activist student organizations held within the campus environment between 1950 and 1985. In order to fully understand the historical implications of these organizations and their

¹⁰⁶ Stephen Harrigan, “Waiting for a Reaction from Duke Women,” *Duke Chronicle*, Featured Column, 19 October 1982, 11.

relationship to one another during this period, an examination of how these groups influenced not just campus dynamics but one another is necessary. The final section of this case study addresses how Duke's sorority system was affected by a collision with second wave feminism and challenges from women's liberation organizations during the 1970s. Moreover, this section deals with how sororities' impacted the successfulness of the second wave feminist movement at Duke, and what this impact suggests about sororities' larger role in the development of the national women's movement of the 1970s and early 80s.

The second wave feminist movement at Duke targeted many institutions on campus, but in particular it called for the elimination of the sorority system. The rise of this movement at Duke coincided with, and contributed to, a widespread and continuous campus call during the late 1960s and early 1970s for significant reform and even the total abolition of the Duke Sorority System. With this collision of historically white sororities and activist organizations and declining sorority participation, Duke sororities appeared to be on the brink of extinction going into the mid-1970s. In actuality, however, the second wave feminist movement's impact on the Duke Sorority System proved to be nominal rather than profound.

Second wave feminism was not entirely unsuccessful in influencing the Duke Sorority System. This movement did help generate a popular campus debate which destabilized the unchallenged position of dominance sororities enjoyed on campus during the 1950s, and forced sororities' to address certain campus criticisms against their "selective" and "undemocratic" practices¹⁰⁷. The rising current of negative opinion also pushed the Duke Panhellenic Council to hold and participate in multiple discussions and panels on "the value of Duke's sorority system"

¹⁰⁷ "Sororities," *Duke Chronicle*, 23 October 1970, Editorial, 3.

and the best way to reform “outdated” procedures between 1967 and 1972; all internal sorority reform bills, however, failed to pass in the Panhellenic Council¹⁰⁸.

The second wave feminist movement also achieved mild success in changing sorority procedures and affecting participation percentages. A main point of women’s liberation organizations’ case against Duke sororities was their rushing policies, specifically the “selectivity” and first semester timing of rushing which bombarded freshmen with sororities “when they should be making a concentrated effort to establish regular study habits and confident beginnings.”¹⁰⁹ As a result of these organizations protests, after the 1967-68 school term the University administration mandated that sororities’ could only use second semester rushing. Additionally, women’s groups agitating also had a depressive effect on sorority participation, to a degree. Between 1969 and 1970, the number of sorority rushes dropped by six percent and overall participation in sororities on campus fell to forty-three percent, down from an average of fifty-seven percent just two years earlier¹¹⁰.

Perhaps the most important influence the second wave feminist movement had on the Duke Sorority System was in fostering internal divisions within the sorority system and among sorority members, if only temporarily. The nature of these divisions centered on debates regarding the need and ability to reform the current Duke Sorority System. The Duke Panhellenic Council conducted official internal debates on the sorority system between 1967 and 1972, which produced anonymous polls of Duke sorority women which showed that “almost half

¹⁰⁸ Kris Ryan, “Duke Sorority System Subject of Discussion,” *Duke Chronicle*, 4 December 1969, 8.

¹⁰⁹ Duke University, Panhellenic Council. Panhellenic Council Records, 1938-1996 (Bulk 1960-1996), University Archives at Duke University, Rush: 1966 -1968 (Box 1: Folder 26), 2.

¹¹⁰ Nancy Stewart, “East Rushees Fall in Number,” *Duke Chronicle*, 3 February 1970, 1.

of the sorority sisters voting [on rushing reform] want[ed] a change.”¹¹¹ At the same time, a schism developed among sorority members over whether the local Duke chapters should break with their national affiliates.

An underground sorority reform movement emerged within the Duke Sorority System which argued that “detaching [Duke sororities] from a growing national sentiment against national sororities” was Duke sororities’ only “chance for survival.”¹¹² This movement was spearheaded by the S.O.S. (Save Our Sororities) group, an anonymous group of sorority women in the late 1960s committed to substantive sorority reform. S.O.S. wrote letters to the Duke Panhellenic and editorials in the *Duke Chronicle* arguing that national organizations discretionary powers and discriminatory policies prevented individual Panhellenics from exercising “freedom to shape” their own sororities and become progressive institutions¹¹³. During this period, a select number of Panhellenic Council members and sorority leaders adopted this belief, but never arrived at a consensus which resulted in a motion to sever the relationship.

These cracks in sorority solidarity further widened at the close of the 1960s with two high profile resignations of sorority leaders. Between 1967 and 1970, two Panhellenic Council Presidents, Bunny Smalls (1967) and Jan Kennerty (1970), resigned their offices after failing to reform the Panhellenic Council. Moreover, Smalls and Kennerty both cited their belief in the Duke Sorority System’s unwillingness and refusal to allow any reform of “parochialism” and “obsolete remnant[s]” of sorority policy as the primary reason for their resignations¹¹⁴. These resignations represented landmark moments in Duke Sorority System history, as for the first time

¹¹¹ Jack Johnson, “Most Women Favor Rush Timing Change,” *Duke Chronicle*, Special Report, 20 November 1967, 2.

¹¹² “S.O.S. on Sororities,” Newspaper Clippings: 1963-71 (Box 3: Folder 2), 1.

¹¹³ “S.O.S. on Sororities,” Newspaper Clippings: 1963-71 (Box 3: Folder 2), 1.

¹¹⁴ Janis Johnson, “Panhel President Quits Sororities,” *Duke Chronicle*, 20 September 1967, 1.; “Text of Kennerty’s Letter,” *Duke Chronicle*, 23 October 1970, 4.

not one but two sorority leaders, presidents, declared the sorority system at Duke as fundamentally unchangeable. While these resignations ignited a firestorm of controversy on campus, their greater importance is in highlighting how the second wave feminist movement ultimately failed to significantly impact the Duke Sorority System.

The second wave feminist movements only tangible successes were changing the timing of rush and a slight dip in participation. Furthermore, the impact of these successes disappeared by the 1970s. Although sororities capitulated in changing the schedule for rushing, this represented a superficial reform which allowed sororities to avoid the true heart of the issue, their selectivity policies; and the change to rush timing never really yielded any meaningful results. The decline in sorority participation over the course of five years ultimately represented simply a blip in historical sorority participation, and by the late 70s the crisis on campus had subsided and sororities at Duke saw a resurgence in popularity and uptake in rush numbers.

The Panhel Presidents' outgoing statements echoed the truth about the Duke Sorority System during this period, it was to a large degree unchangeable. While second wave feminism may have helped puncture the veil of sorority solidarity, these divisions really only represented minor cracks in the Duke Sorority System which never gained enough momentum to seriously challenge sorority leadership. Sororities' implementation of a three pronged system of influence afforded them a structural and administrative advantage over these disjointed organizations in the battle over the reformation or elimination of sororities. Sororities' policy of selective hearing and reaction, allowed them to largely avoid addressing their social policies and simply wait out second wave feminism.

The instability of women's liberation groups and lack of a central, unifying feminist organization limited the success of second wave feminism at Duke. While numerous women's liberation groups sprang up on campus during this period, these organizations often disappeared after a year or two. Additionally, the varying philosophies adopted by different women's groups ran the gambit from moderate to full blown radical feminist ideology. These groups did not just fight sororities but one another over differing strategies for reforming campus life. The individual groups could not compete with the institutional history and administrative support sororities retained at Duke. Subsequently, the decline in feminist activism at Duke by the mid-1980s coincided with the resurgence of sororities as majority participatory institutions on campus. A Duke panel on the "History of Duke Women" in 1973 best articulated the impact of Duke sororities on the successfulness of second wave feminism on campus; as Professor of women's history Eve Silberman argued that historically sororities symbolized the "status-quo" on campus, and in the end "the status quo has always won when a vote was taken."¹¹⁵

Duke sororities' impact on the successfulness of second wave feminism on campus provokes questions regarding the implications of this case study evidence in a larger national context. Was the relationship between the Duke Sorority System and the campus feminist movement symbolic of the existence of a relationship between the sorority institution and the women's movement of the late twentieth century on a national level? And if so, what role did the sorority play in the development of this movement?

This study represents a specific case study of the historical development of sororities and the relationship between sororities and second wave feminism at Duke University. Nevertheless, this case study has also documented the presence of dichotomy within the sorority institution

¹¹⁵ Eve Silberman, "Panel Discussion Focuses on History of Duke Women," *Duke Chronicle*, 16 February 1973, 11.

between national authority and local administration. Primary source materials from Duke and the National Panhellenic Conference illustrated a historical pattern of interactions between national organizations and local sororities during this period. In addition, evidence from correspondence between the Duke Panhellenic and NPC underscored how Duke sororities took direction from the NPC in crafting their policies and responding to racisms of their practices based on their hierarchical relationship. Does this evidence indicate that in truth the NPC rather than the Duke Sorority System were the main policy actors involved here?

Although this evidence points to the possibility for sororities' national role, a broader investigation is necessary before offering any conclusions on sororities' relationship to second wave feminism on a national stage. This study does demonstrate that the question of the role of NPC is the essential issue in establishing historical support for sororities broader historical role beyond Duke University. Future research examining sororities through a national lens, therefore, should look into sorority newsletters from various regions, responses from women's organizations on a national level, and a more detailed history of the NPC to understand the network of influence at play here.

Conclusion:

Mother Fitzgerald's warning to Alpha Delta Pi in 1907 encapsulated how the women's movement was challenging historic understandings of the purpose of the sorority system in America. Sixty years later, the sorority women of Duke University faced a similar conflict when facing the rise of the second wave feminist movement on campus. An examination of the Duke Sorority System, however, underscored the changes sororities had undergone since their origins

during the nineteenth century. The time for the paradoxical dual mandate for promoting educational and social priorities had disappeared, and instead sororities prioritization of a social concentration over scholarly actually enhanced their ability to exert influence within the campus environment.

This examination of the Duke Sorority System displayed how sororities maintained a clear and concerted influence on campus. The sororities as Duke utilized structural, administrative, and ideological influence to foster a campus dynamic which favored sororities. Sororities utilized their structural influence as a mechanism to build a barrier against reform movements during this period, enforcing the polarization of women on campus through a program of division. Simultaneously, sororities' policy of selective hearing and reaction allowed them to structure campus debate so criticisms never posed a legitimate threat to sororities' continuation. Similarly, Duke sororities' historical entrenchment afforded them administrative influence provided them power and support to outlast reform movements on campus.

Additionally, sororities' ideological influence demonstrated how sororities saw themselves as impacting collegiate women's identity formation as a part of a campaign to sustain Duke sororities' historical dominance on campus. Sororities attempted to promote ideological values among women which reaffirmed the historical underpinnings of the Duke Sorority System, including gender norms, traditionalism, collective identity and homogeneity. These white, protestant organizations worked to transition their historical roots into contemporary values among sorority women thereby ensuring their continued purpose and preeminence on campus.

The rise of the student activist movement and the second wave feminist movement, however, highlighted another force on campus impacting women's identity formation. Subsequently, these movements propelled the growth of student activist and women's liberation organizations which both influenced women's attitudes but fundamentally challenged the sorority system at Duke. Furthermore, these different groups did not simply influence women but impacted one another as well. An historical analysis of this period conveyed how second wave feminism ultimately exerted a nominal influence over sorority operations despite provoking widespread campus opposition of these institutions. Conversely, sororities' structural and administrative power within the campus environment and historical legacy at Duke allowed them to limit the successfulness of second wave feminism by outlasting the reform movement.

Nevertheless, regardless of which force won the battle for the hearts and minds of Duke women, the historical interactions between the Duke Sorority System and second wave feminism raises important questions revolving around the relationship between sororities and the national women's movement. While the Duke University case study, does not provide sufficient evidence to draw conclusions about this broader historical relationship between sororities and second wave feminism this study does offer powerful questions which need further research.

Within American society today sororities are most often equated with modern issues or problems, such as hazing or alcohol abuse, which are negatively impacting more recent generations. If the historical legacy of sororities is acknowledged and studied, however, this recognition could significantly impact twenty-first century views. An appreciation for the historical importance of sororities can foster a reassessment for the power of sororities within and beyond the college environment. The historical value of sororities may provoke a reassessment of our past and future examination of the forces involved within women's

movements in America. A historical investigation of sororities at Duke epitomized the collision of sororities and progressivism on college campuses, yet over time this collision gave way to coexistence as the intractability of sororities in conjunction with their historical roots allowed the “status quo” to prevail¹¹⁶.

¹¹⁶ Silberman, 11.

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