

ABSTRACT

My Sisters, Myself: Influences on Sorority Members' Body Image and Identities

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Sororities are distinct organizational settings with a unique ability to influence the construction of identity and the subsequent impact on members' body image. The purpose of this study was to examine the correlation between perceived organizational norms for thinness and body esteem amongst college sorority members. In addition, it examines the effect the process of organization assimilation has on mediating the proposed relationship between perceived organizational norms for thinness and body esteem. Lastly, memorable messages which contribute to the perceptions of organizational norms for thinness are identified and assessed for their impact on organizational members.

My Sisters, Myself: Organizational Influences on Sorority Members'
Body Image And Identities

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Each year over 90,000 college women become members of university sponsored sororities (*NPC Statistical Information June 2009*). For many this is a traditional rite of passage that has been handed down to them from a mother, grandmother, sister, or cousin. They spend years dreaming of the day they can pledge to their favorite sorority, in this way fulfilling a longing to strengthen family bonds. For others they seek out sororities as an alternative family structure. They see these organizations as a way to find a place to belong to a more intimate group within a large campus student body.

In preparation for becoming a member of a sorority, each girl must partake in a rigorous recruitment process to demonstrate her worthiness of being accepted into such prestigious organizations. Stories of the dangers of hazing involved with the rush process have been sensationalized by the news media (Crowder, 2010; Lewin, 2010), but in truth rushing a sorority is no easy process. It requires sacrifice and commitment to become a member. However, once accepted by these organizations, the girls become part of a sisterhood where they form friendships that often last a lifetime.

Former news reporter and writer Alexandra Robbins says this after her time spent undercover researching sororities:

Much of sorority life espouses noble purpose, and the friendships and philanthropy encouraged by these organizations can enhance a girl's college experience, boost her self-esteem, and better her character. But the prevalence of

the aforementioned litany (i.e. sex, conformity, drugs, verbal abuse, mind games, nudity, cheating, eating disorders, rituals, “mean girls,” and secrecy), which still occurs on several campuses nationwide in the name of tradition, speaks volumes about larger issues concerning women, higher education, and female group dynamics. Even halfway into the year, I was plagued by questions... What does membership truly require of the sisters? How does a sisterhood change the way a girl thinks about herself?”(Robbins, 2004, p. 11).

Through this study I attempt to further examine the aforementioned questions posed by Robbins by exploring the unique organizational functions of sororities. Much research has been done to examine the way individuals take part within organizations (Taylor & Trujillo, 2001; Miller, 2008). However, the majority of this research has focused on business organizations and traditional employment contracts. While careers often influence one’s identity, at the end of the day, most people will leave their workplace persona behind and go home – back to the rest of their life where they will resume their alternate identities (i.e. mother, father, sister, son, aunt, friend, spouse, etc.) (Kossek & Lambert, 2005). The entanglements of joining a sorority are not the same. Sorority life is pervasive in that it has the ability to influence multiple areas of one’s life – academic, social, romantic and, in some instances, familial. Sororities can be viewed as volunteer organizations (Schafer, 1979; D. H. Smith, 1999); however, they are more than just a place to spend time volunteering. Members live, eat, sleep, study, and sometimes work within the same environment as their sorority sisters, especially if they live in a sorority house. Since sorority life extends into almost all aspects of life, for many girls their identity is wrapped in their role as a sorority sister. To this end, it is important to examine the aspects and influences that make up this identity.

The process of examining the development of identity is encompassed within social identity theory (SIT). Organizational communication scholar Michael Kramer

summarizes SIT as defining two identities: “(1) personal identities consisting of various individual attributes including physical features, abilities, cognitive and psychological characteristics, and interests; and (2) social identities based on perceptions of belonging to various groups, organizations, or societies” (Kramer, 2010, p. 18). In this study, I examine the creation of social identity within sororities and the impact of this social identity on personal identity, specifically focusing on concepts of body image.

Body image and related messages have been widely addressed within the field of communication primarily from the viewpoint of media messages and the construction of social standards regarding weight and appearance (Botta, 1999; David, G. Morrison, Johnson, & Ross, 2002; Goodman, 2005; K. Harrison & Cantor, 1997; Holmstrom, 2004). For example, Harrison and Cantor (1997) demonstrate how the presence of thinness depicting and promoting characters within the media promote “body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, perfectionism, and ineffectiveness” in women (1997, p. 45). Likewise, Goodman (2005) found that the perceived media pressure toward thinness had the greatest impact on participants’ body image and occurrences of eating disorders.

However, media influence is not the only extrinsic factor contributing to individuals’ constructions of their body image and ideal body norms. Krcmar, Giles and Helme (2008) examined the additional influences of parental and peer norms on the body esteem of young women. They found that women who perceived their parents and peers as placing a greater significance on thinness had lower body esteem. Krcmar and colleagues identify an important variable in the shaping of body image – that of perceived norms. The power of media to influence women’s body image perceptions lies in its ability to shape social norms for thinness and appearance (Berkowitz, 2003; Mark

Nichter & Mimi Nichter, 1991). That is, parental and peer propagation of thinness messages is fundamental to the power of media-generated norms (Krcmar et al., 2008). However, as mediators, peers and parents also possess the ability to contradict media created norms for thinness (Shomaker & Furman, 2007). As such, it follows that other central players within a person's life may also possess the ability to positively or negatively affect the degree to which social norms for thinness influence women.

Sororities are organizations that play a central role in the lives of their members, specifically during the years of undergraduate education. Thus it follows that as organizations they may also establish and promulgate institutional norms that mediate the impact of established social norms on the body esteem of their members. Organizations institute norms that instruct the expectations and behavior of its members (Bullis, 1993). These organizational norms can range from how to perform assigned duties to how one is to dress for their job. Organizational norms can be communicated in a variety of ways through explicit and implicit methods (Kramer, 2004). While spoken rules and norms are the most apparent, unspoken norms often carry more impact (Schall, 1983). As organizational members interact within an organization, they learn the social norms inherent to the organization and integrate them into their role within the organization. This process is known as organizational socialization or assimilation (Feldman, 1976; Jablin, 1987; Schein & Van Maanen, 1979).

In many ways, the process of establishing organizational norms is integral to the organizational assimilation framework, because intrinsic to the concept of organizational socialization is the fact that multiple parties, regardless of their role in the organization, can concurrently influence the instituting of social norms. In terms of sororities, there is

a constant turnover of members, meaning that the parties in charge one year may very well have graduated the next. This creates an environment ripe for change, yet the high value placed on established traditions suggests that many things stay the same (Robbins, 2004). Sororities are organizations founded on tradition. Robbins states, “tradition binds sisters to each other, to their national organization, and to their organization’s history. For some sororities, tradition is embedded in their strict adherence to their group’s rituals” (Robbins, 2004, p. 276). This adherence to tradition can be a positive asset as it serves as a catalyst for the strong bonds of sisterhood, friendship, and commitment to the organization (Paxton & Moody, 2003). However, traditions have also been named as the justification for rituals such as hazing, violence, “boob ranking,” and other abuses (Nuwer, 2001). An emphasis on rituals pertaining to appearance has been linked to higher incidences of disordered eating attitudes and objectified body consciousness among sorority members (Basow, Foran, & Bookwala, 2007). This is an example of ritual norms that have been carried on despite the passing of time and the turnover in established authority. In fact, studies have indicated that the longer a woman lives with and participates in a sorority, the more likely she is to exhibit higher levels of concern with thinness in comparison to her non-sorority peers (Allison & Park, 2004).

Social norms theory postulates that “an individual’s express or rationalization of problem behavior may result from their misperceptions of what is acceptable or normal among their peers or other community members” (Krcmar et al., 2008, p. 113). While it has been suggested that the type of women who are attracted to sororities are those who are predisposed to concerns regarding thinness (Allison & Park, 2004), it is also logical to propose that this high concentration of like-minded and potentially susceptible women

would create an organizational environment that becomes a breeding ground for expectations regarding weight and appearance. These norms, in turn, could heavily influence the body esteem and body dissatisfaction of the women participating in the sorority. Thus, I propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Perceived organizational norms for thinness will be negatively associated with body esteem of young women in sororities.

However, as discussed, organizational norms are identified and internalized during the process of organizational assimilation. The degree to which a person is assimilated within an organization can affect their level of job satisfaction, organizational identification, and propensity to leave (Myers & Oetzel, 2003). Therefore, it stands to reason that the extent of assimilation may also mediate the adoption of social norms. This leads to proceeding research question:

RQ1: Does degree of organizational assimilation mediate a relationship between perceived organizational norms for thinness and body esteem of young women in sororities?

Another consideration of this study is the process by which these social norms for thinness are being communicated. Within the study of organizational socialization is the concept of memorable messages (Knapp, Stohl, & Reardon, 1981; Stohl, 1986). Memorable messages are statements or phrases that are valued by the individual as providing insight as to how to behave within a certain scenario or environment (Stohl, 1986). During the socialization process, newcomers may integrate memorable messages into their concepts of organizational norms. Barge and Schlueter (2004) identified specific memorable messages present during the entry stage of socialization that helped

newcomers learn organizational rules and norms such as being well organized and providing excellent customer service. These messages helped guide employees' concepts of their individual roles within the organization (Barge & Schlueter, 2004). Memorable messages may also be used to instruct norms for thinness. Therefore, I advance the following research question:

RQ2: What are the message content and functions of memorable messages inherent within perceived organizational norms for thinness?

Within my study, I plan to analyze the organizational functions of sororities and how they influence the social identity and body esteem of their individual members using an approach informed and guided by the concepts of social norms theory and organizational socialization. Additionally, I extend social identity theory (SIT) to the study of organizational socialization. As identified by Kramer (2010), SIT has been considerably overlooked as an approach by which to study organizational socialization. In the following section, I will further examine its applicability particularly within volunteer organizations such as sororities. Lastly, I employ a memorable messages framework to identify ways in which social norms for thinness are being communicated within the organizational structure of a sorority.

Significance of Study

The present study contains several significant contributions. First, it advances the literature on the potential impact of social norms on body image as proposed by Berkowitz (2003) as well as the potential for these norms to be mediated by outside influencers such parents and peers (Krcmar et al., 2008). The focus of most research within the communication field has looked at how media influences the creation of social norms and the subsequent impact on body image. Other studies have examined the influence of interpersonal relationships on body esteem. However, it is important to recognize and identify that our relationships can also serve as mediators to externally constructed norms for thinness. Therefore, this study examines the potential for organizations, specifically sororities, to mediate the effect of social norms for thinness on body esteem.

Second, this study advances the discourse on organizational socialization by extending it beyond employment based organizational environments. There currently exists a dearth of literature applying the organizational assimilation framework to volunteers, and none examining the unique organizational setting of college sororities (Kramer, 2010). Sororities provide a distinct setting for organizational study in that they often require large amounts of commitment in time, financial, and emotional investment. They also often are highly integral to members' personal and social lives. This study expands the current application of the socialization process to an organizational setting that redefines the boundaries of organizational membership.

Third, the current study also explores the application of social identity theory (SIT) to the study of organizational socialization. Presently, three theoretical

perspectives have been primarily looked to to examine the process of socialization, including uncertainty management, sense-making and social exchange theory (Waldeck & Myers, 2008). However, some scholars suggest that social identity theory should be considered as a key concept informing methods of socialization (Forward & Scheerhorn, 1996; Kramer, 2010). This study furthers the discourse on the utilization of SIT as an approach to studying organizational socialization.

Lastly, this study investigates the influence of memorable messages on the endorsement of social norms regarding thinness within an organizational setting. The application of memorable messages to the examination of the process of socialization has been used to study the implementation and instruction of organizational norms. This study extends the research in order to recognize messages impacting the realization of organizational norms for thinness and their potential impact on members body esteem. By identifying these messages, the research endeavors to provide a better understanding of what messages women are hearing and internalizing regarding their bodies and what type of impact these messages have. This in turn may provide a plethora of potential benefits for future research and programming to combat body dissatisfaction related issues in young women.

Organization of Study

This chapter introduced the current study and discussed how it contributes to communication theory, research, and practice, as well as furthering the understanding of body image related issues. The next chapter will provide a review of current interdisciplinary literature pertaining to body image, body esteem, and social norms. It will also examine and identify areas for growth within current communication theories

and processes. Chapter 3 will provide an overview of the experimental design of the study and the processes for collecting and analyzing data. Chapter 4 will provide the results of the study and the last chapter will further examine and discuss the implications of the experimental findings. It will also identify limitations and explore dimensions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

The following chapter presents a review of the present interdisciplinary literature informing this study. First, I discuss the wide variety of literature which has defined and examined the concepts of body image, body satisfaction, and body esteem, specifically, looking at what external factors have been identified as contributing to the proliferation of body image related disorders. Next, a further examination of the literature regarding social norms will serve to enlighten the distinct role they play in impacting constructions of body image. Following is a discussion of theory and methods surrounding the study of organizations and their ability to establish and mitigate norms which impact their members. Lastly, I incorporate the study of memorable messages as a method of identifying messages which inform the propagation of norms.

Body Image, Body Satisfaction, and Body Esteem

Body image is a personal assembly of ideas related to the makeup and status of one's physical appearance. In his seminal work *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body: Studies in the Constructive Energies of the Psyche*, Paul Schilder (1950) defines body image as "the picture of our own body which we form in our mind, that is to say, the way our body appears to us" (1950, p. 11). More recently, Shomaker and Furman (2007) define it as "a multidimensional construct incorporating attitudes and self-perceptions about one's physical appearance" (2007, p. 871). Body image includes concepts such as body esteem, body satisfaction or dissatisfaction and weight.

Body satisfaction is a measure of the degree of satisfaction a person feels in relation to their body (Grogan, 2008). In contrast, body dissatisfaction is defined as a negative discrepancy between the standards one has set for physical appearance and the reality of how they view their appearance. In other words, it is the negative feelings associated with failing to meet the goals for one's physical appearance. It has commonly been attributed to a causal relationship with bulimia and other disordered eating patterns (Rosen, 1990; Wiederman & Pryor, 2000). It has also been heavily associated with instances of depression (Adams, Katz, Beauchamp, Cohen, & Zavis, 1993; Franko & Striegel-Moore, 2002; Kostanski & Gullone, 1998). Approximately 2% of the female population battle with eating disorders, while depression affects nearly one in five women (Krcmar et al., 2008). Women are most susceptible to these problems during adolescence and young adulthood; however, many of these issues will continue to be a struggle throughout their lives. In relation to body satisfaction, body esteem reflects the impact of self-evaluations of physical appearance on self-esteem. Research has demonstrated that overweight children, adolescents, and adults commonly have lower body esteem than do peers of average weight (Allon, 1979; Hendry & Gillies, 1978; Mendelson, White, & Mendelson, 1996), and this is especially true for females (Dwyer, J. J. Feldman, Seltzer, & Mayer, 1969; Mendelson & White, 1985).

Research has revealed that anywhere from 3% (Mintz & Betz, 1988) to 19% (Powers, Schulman, Gleghorn, & Prange, 1987) of college aged women have bulimia, 1% to 2% have anorexia (Mintz & Betz, 1988), and as many as 61% display characteristics of eating disordered while not meeting the criteria for an eating disorder (Mintz & Betz, 1988). A study done by Lafrance, Zivian, and Myers (2000)

demonstrated that young women often view themselves as overweight and consider a larger shape body shape to be found unattractive by men in comparison to a thinner ideal body. This display of high prevalence of body dissatisfaction among young women is concerning due to the potential risk for the development of future disordered eating patterns or other physical and mental health issues. It is, therefore, necessary to discuss and identify the factors that contribute to these unhealthy thought patterns.

Societal standards for body size are a key component influencing women's body image. Unfortunately, these standards are continually advancing an ideal that is increasingly difficult to achieve. Women are constantly bombarded with images in television, magazines, movies, and online of women who represent the epitomized physical ideal. To demonstrate, the average model is 5'11" and 120 pounds, while the average American woman is 5'4" and 140 pounds (Wolf, 2002), and according to Smolak (1996), "most fashion models are thinner than 98% of U.S. American women." A majority of models are more than 20% underweight, exceeding the 15% underweight diagnostic weight criteria for anorexia (Owen & Laurel-Seller, 2000; Spitzer, Henderson, & Zivian, 1999). This creates an unachievable standard for women and potentially spurs a litany of body dissatisfaction related issues.

Body image scholars have traditionally focused on four sources of appearance-oriented messages: parents, peers, romantic partners, and the media. Of the four, media messages have been the most widely explicated within the communication field. A study conducted by Myers and Biocca (1992), found that watching ideal body image commercials affected women's perceptions of their body image after as little as 30 minutes of viewing, demonstrating the extreme plasticity of body image within the mind.

In a recent study, Goodman (2005) used a structural equation model to investigate the intersect of multiple sources influencing body image. She found that “media pressure and peers’ dieting talk and behaviors were the greatest influence of thinness awareness, thinness internalization, and social comparison, which in turn influenced body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, and eating behaviors” (p. 194). Likewise, Sheldon (2010) demonstrated that among women who read and compare themselves with women in magazines, those who also felt pressure from family and peers to be thin had lower body esteem. McCabe and Ricciardelli (2001) reported that amongst adolescent peer groups, females were more likely to be the target of messages to lose weight especially from other female friends.

Krcmar, Giles, and Helme (2008) examined interpersonal norms in peer and familial relationships and their effect on body esteem. They found that interpersonal norms had a significant relationship with esteem. When parents or peers expressed their valuing of thinness, young women exhibited lowered self esteem. They also determined that interpersonal norms have a mediating effect on messages regarding body appearance. Thus, while media messages regarding standards for thinness played an influential role in body dissatisfaction, the degree of influence was negated or reinforced by perceived norms for thinness communicated by peers and family members. In sum, their study keenly demonstrates the role multiple factors play in fostering negative body esteem by exacerbating the importance of physical appearance and thinness and diminishing the importance of instead of health and self-confidence based on non-physical attributes (i.e. intelligence, talents, abilities) (Krcmar et al., 2008). The following section continues the

discussion on the establishment and enactment of norms and their influence, particularly in relation to body image and connected issues.

Social Norms Theory and Peer Norms

As discussed in the previous section, social norms have the power to influence thoughts and behaviors regarding body image. Social norms theory presents the idea that “an individual’s expression or rationalization of problem behavior may result from their misperceptions of what is acceptable or normal among their peers or other community members” (Krcmar et al., 2008, p. 113). Social norms provide guidelines which control behavior based on perceptions of what is normal or expected in a given situation. These observations allow a person to bypass their own personal judgment regarding the benefits of a behavior and conform to an idea or behavior because they believe it is what is expected of them to fit in with a certain culture.

The literature highlights two types of norms: injunctive and descriptive (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990). Injunctive norms are perceptions about the acceptability of a given behavior (i.e., judgments concerning whether most people would consider it to be right or to be wrong). Descriptive norms are simpler because they exclude moral judgments; they are based simply on perceptions of the prevalence of a given behavior. This creates norms based on the pervasiveness of conduct without considerations of right or wrong. Essentially, this is the proverbial sheep-like mentality of “if everyone is doing it, it must be a sensible thing to do” (Cialdini et al., 1990, p. 1015).

Social norms have been linked with a number of problem behaviors such as binge drinking and illegal substance use (Pedersen, Larimer, & Lee, 2010), teen smoking (Eisenberg, 2003), and gambling addictions (Neighbors et al., 2007). Social norms have

also been affiliated with body image problems. Connor-Greene, Striegel-Moore, and Cronan (1994) found that women who perceived their university campus as comprising a greater prominence on looks and appearance were more likely to be preoccupied by their weight. Social pressures toward a value of thinness are often linked with body dissatisfaction and lowered body esteem (Sanderson, Wallier, Stackdale, & Yopyk, 2008). People look to social norms to dictate their behavior as part of innate desire to fit in and be part of a group. Crandall's (1988) study examined the effects of social norms on eating behavior in two sororities. Results demonstrated that women who did not adopt the prescribed norm regarding binge eating had fewer friends and decreased status within the sorority.

One reality that must be taken into consideration when studying social norms on thinness is that people's perceptions of social norms are not always accurate observations of reality. In a study conducted by Sanderson, Darley, and Messinger (2002), they found that college women commonly misperceived norms for eating and exercise on their campus, "believing that other women weighed less, had a thinner ideal body shape, and exercised more for attractiveness and weight loss than they actually did" (2002, p. 996). Sanderson and her colleagues found that women who perceived that they deviated from this norm and considered themselves heavier than their peers demonstrated more signs of eating disorders. Other studies have identified norms for femininity and attractiveness involving women modifying their public eating behavior in order to fit with these norms (Mori, Chaiken, & Pliner, 1987). Based on these observations, women may perceive that other women eat less than they actually do and therefore feel pressure to adapt to this

norm of eating. In essence, previous studies suggest that people's judgment on norms can be exaggerated by misperceptions stemming from observations of public behavior.

However, perceptions of norms are not always based purely on observations of behavior. When it comes to norms for thinness, what people say can be just as important as their behavior. One common form of verbalizing social norms for thinness is referred to as fat talk. Fat talk, as defined by Nichter and Vuckovic, is "a ritualized form of speech that serves to communicate mood and feelings, define social status and role, call for support, or affirm group membership.... [women] can use fat talk to redefine her own body image, to test how others perceive her, or to affect the perception of others" (Sault, 1994, p. 106). Stice, Maxfield, and Wells (2003) found that women who were exposed to thinner women talking about their need to lose weight (i.e. fat talk) experienced greater body dissatisfaction. Fat talk is becoming a pervasive norm amongst women. In a study conducted by Ousley, Cordero, and White (2008), they found that college women participants engaged in talk about eating and exercise habits at least weekly and that women exhibiting signs of eating disorders talked about it almost daily. They also found that the most prevalent form of fat talk was the discussion of other people's appearance. This focus demonstrates the pervasiveness of comparison with peers as an integral source for developing social norms.

When examining social norms within sororities it is important to recognize and differentiate between two types of social norms present within this setting. Most studies focusing on the influence of social norms on body esteem and related behaviors have focused on peer norms. However, sororities are not simply peer groups but are also organizations. This makes sororities a unique organizational setting where both peer

norms and organizational norms abound. As demonstrated, peer norms are highly based on comparisons with friends and others in order to establish ideas about ideal body image and related behaviors. However, as I will explicate in the following section, organizations foster norms in a different fashion.

Social Identity Theory, Organization Norms, and Socialization

Much of the extant literature surrounding organizational norms is contained within discussions of organizational socialization and assimilation. Organizational socialization is a term originating in the management literature and defined by Schein and Van Maanen (1979) as “the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role” (p. 211). Communication scholars (Jablin, 1987; Jablin & Putnam, 2000; Kramer, 2010; Myers & Oetzel, 2003) have built on Schein and Van Maanen’s research by looking at the broader construct of assimilation which includes “both explicit and implicit attempts by organizations to influence their employees (socialization), and corresponding attempts by employees to influence their organizations (individualization)” (1979, p. 712). It is during the processes of assimilation that newcomers to an organization begin to learn organizational norms and expectations for their role within the organization¹.

While many management scholars focus on the socialization (i.e. top down) aspect of the assimilation process, Jablin (1987) emphasizes the need for communication scholars to also consider the individualization (i.e. bottom up) aspects of the model, as often the ability of smaller members in an organization are overlooked in regards to their

¹ Within the body of communication literature, the terms socialization and assimilation are sometimes used interchangeably. The current research will focus on the term assimilation as encompassing both the socialization and individualization processes identified by Jablin (1987).

capacity to influence organizational norms. Individualization is an essential process for both the newcomer and the organization, since it provides for the continuity of organizational norms and values, helps the new member adapt to their role within the organization, and ensures their commitment to the future of the organization (Cable & Parsons, 2001).

Sororities are one such organization where each member has a chance to affect the whole of the organization. This is primarily due to a constant turnover of leadership as well as the wide variety of roles and responsibilities each member shares. As previously discussed, in some ways sororities function as extended peer groups as they are by nature made up primarily by peers. However, sororities also have external structures and guidelines informed by their campus panhellenic association, their national affiliate organization, as well as the National Panhellenic Conference. Today there are currently 26 national sororities that are included within the National Panhellenic Conference (*NPC Statistical Information June 2009*). This presence of both strong socialization and individualization influences uniquely situates sororities within the organizational scholarship.

In many ways sororities function similarly to volunteer organizations. At present, there is a dearth of published studies on organizational assimilation in volunteer-based organizational contexts. Volunteers function similarly to employees in that they must learn their roles and responsibilities, develop functional organizational relationship, and understand the values and culture of the organization (McComb, 1995). However, Kramer (2009) contends that “unique characteristics of volunteers, such as their motivations for volunteering, the nature of their tasks and relationships, and rewards

other than financial remuneration, suggest that socialization of volunteers deserves specific attention” (2009, p. 3). Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2004) developed the volunteering stages and transitions model (VSTM) to describe the process of organizational socialization within voluntary organizations. This model includes five stages which are similar to those included in prevailing organizational socialization models: (a) nominee, (b) newcomer, (c) emotional involvement, (d) established volunteering, and (e) retiring.

The communication discipline draws from several established theories to inform the study of organizational assimilation. The most commonly used theory is uncertainty reduction (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) which posits that when people experience uncertainty about someone or something, they seek information in order to reduce uncertainty. Within organizational settings, new members often experience uncertainty as to their role within the organization, and therefore seek out information regarding organizational norms and values to elucidate their function and position in relation to other organizational members (Morrison, 1995). Established members also experience uncertainty during scenarios of change or turnover within an organization (Kramer, 2010).

While uncertainty reduction certainly plays a role in socialization of members to volunteer organizations such as sororities, the present study is more appropriately informed by social identity theory (SIT) (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel, 1978). For the most part SIT has not been considered as a major theory informing the study of organizational socialization. It was not included in Waldeck and Myers (2008) detailed examination and explication of theories guiding organizational socialization models.

However, some scholars consider SIT to be central to the concept of assimilation (Forward & Scheerhorn, 1996). In examining organizational socialization and assimilation within volunteer organizations and sororities in particular, I propose social identity theory as a central theory informing this research. One variable unique to volunteering is that it is inherently social. People volunteer for a variety of reasons and motives, but central to them all is a desire to contribute socially. Some people volunteer to widen their social network, others choose causes that allow them to advance social justice, and some choose to volunteer to increase their social status (Chinman & Wandersman, 1999). However, one way or another, how they choose to volunteer is a reflection upon their identity.

Accord to Ashforth and Mael (1989), social identity theory encompasses the idea that people classify others based on their group and organizational affiliations. However, they also use this classification system to help form their own sense of identity. Identity can be divided into two parts: (a) personal identity which is formed by physical, mental, and emotional characteristics and abilities, and (b) social identity consisting of perceptions of belonging to social groups. Personal and social identity are highly intertwined with both parts having the ability to affect the other. When a person identifies strongly with a particular group, they integrate the organizational norms and values of this group into their own personal identity and may view the successes and failures of the group as their own (Kramer, 2010). One important concept within SIT is the notion that perceptions of identity are constantly changing because people are constantly changing. People change jobs, places, and organizational affiliations and as they do so they must adapt their identity.

For girls entering sorority membership this is particularly true. Many are in their first or second year of college which is already a considerable identity shift. Within the span of a few months they graduate from high school, move out of their parents' homes, often moving hundreds of miles away, and begin an entirely new stage of life in a new place, with new people, and new standards – all while discovering their new identity as an adult (Compas, Wagner, Slavin, & Vannatta, 1986). Many girls look to sororities as a way to find a group where they can belong, and in doing so choose to incorporate the sorority into their new identity (Stets & Burke, 2000). The new environment that college life presents creates a certain receptiveness in young women that allows for them to be absorbed into the sorority culture, norms and values. Therefore, sororities are organizations with a unique ability to influence their members during a crucial identity shaping stage in a young woman's life. What follows is a discussion of methods used to identify distinct messages present within sororities which inform members as to their role and function in the organization.

Memorable Messages in the Study of Organizational Socialization

An essential aspect of understanding the capacity of sororities to influence members' body images lies within the messages being communicated. As discussed in the previous section, during the process of organizational socialization members will often encounter uncertainty and will seek information to resolve this uncertainty (Morrison, 1995). During this information seeking process, the messages encountered will often delineate the values, norms, and expected behaviors within the organization (Brim & Wheeler, 1966). Using a discursive approach to the organizational socialization process focuses on the communicative aspects which mediate the individual-

organizational relationship. According to Barge and Schlueter (2004) these “discourses are embedded with assumptions regarding who can speak, about what, when, through what medium, and with what intent that structure a set of obligations and opportunities for the performance of relationships and identities for organizational newcomers as they enter the organization” (p. 237).

One prominent element within these discourses is the notion of memorable messages. Knapp, Stohl, and Reardon (1981) identified memorable messages as “messages which may be remembered for extremely long periods of time and which people perceive as a major influence on the course of their lives” (p. 27). Memorable messages often serve as guidelines for human conduct and behavior. Stohl (1986) identified four functions that memorable messages serve: (a) providing information regarding the norms, rules, expectations, values, requirements and rationality of organizational culture which offer a structure for sense-making and a guide for appropriate organizational behavior; (b) providing information regarding specific enculturation performances by outlining the applicable circumstances; (c) providing information pertaining to the importance of social network linkages to organizational socialization; and (d) expressing the importance of informal communication with organizational member of higher status.

Using memorable messages to examine the discourse of assimilation into a sorority serves as an aid to further inform the research of this study. Specifically, this study focuses on memorable messages related to appearance and body image. This helps to explicate the processes of establishing and retaining potential organizational norms pertaining to thinness and/or related appearance behavior. The examination of

memorable messages is studied in light of the previously discussed research on “fat talk” and its use and purpose within social groups. Overall, the present study aims to uncover the nature and extent of sororities’ influence on social norms regarding body image and subsequently their members’ body esteem.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

This chapter will discuss the research design of the study including explication of the construction of the survey and processes of administration. The following methodological considerations will be addressed: 1) participants, 2) study design and procedures, 3) operationalization of variables, and 4) statistical tests used to analyze results.

Participants

Subjects were 216 female undergraduate students currently enrolled in a mid-sized, private university in the southwestern United States. Subjects were recruited from the various panhellenic sororities on campus. The female participants were mostly homogenous in regards to race with 89.8% reporting Caucasian ethnicity, 3.2% Hispanic, 0.5% Native American, 0.9% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1.4% other. No participants identified themselves as Black/African American ethnicity². All students were over 18 years of age, with a mean age of 19.86 reported ($SD = 1.14$). The subjects represented a fairly equivalent number of participants from each classification with 21.3% freshmen, 31.5% sophomores, 23.6% juniors, and 19.4% seniors. Data was also collected on the longevity of membership in the sorority with 30.6% being in their first year, 29.2% second year, 19.9 third year, and 16.2% fourth year. Lastly, 14.8% identified themselves

² 4.2% of participants chose not to complete the demographic portion of the survey

as having held a leadership position within the sorority and 81.0% as not holding a leadership role. Appendix B contains the participant informed consent form which accompanied the survey that was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board as well as the National Panhellenic Council's research oversight committee. Identifying information was only collected for the purpose of notifying organizations which offered members incentives (e.g., participation credit) for study participation; this information was not included in the data set in order to ensure the confidentiality of participants.

Study Design and Procedures

This study was an experimental survey, utilizing network sample-administered questionnaires. The survey was designed and administered using a reputable online survey distribution resource. The survey consists of 85 multiple choice Likert-type questions, three open-ended questions and one multiple choice question as a follow up to the open-ended questions. See Appendix A for a complete copy of the survey instrument.

Sorority leaders were contacted through the Panhellenic council on campus, the sororities' overarching institutional body, about the study. Sorority leaders were informed of the purposes and benefits of the study and were asked to elicit the involvement of their sorority members. Members participating in the survey did so on a completely voluntary basis. Leaders could elect to award service credit to members participating in the study (Four of the nine organizations chose to offer credit to participants).³

All Panhellenic sorority members were provided a link to the survey via a sorority listserv email which they could elect to take over a three-week time period. Subjects

³ Other opportunities for credit were also available as to not privilege participants more than others.

completed the survey at their own discretion and on their own time as to assure necessary privacy. After the three-week time period, all data was downloaded from the survey website and uploaded to SPSS statistical data management software. Identifying information was removed and given to the appropriate parties for distribution of credit. Afterward, this information was destroyed to ensure the confidentiality of participants.

Quantitative Variables & Analytical Procedures

Perceptions of the Presence of Organizational Norms for Thinness

Perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness were assessed using a 30-item scale modeled after Krumar et al.'s (2008) measurement of peer and parental norms. Participants were surveyed on the strength of their perceptions of various organization-specific social norms regarding thinness and related behaviors for obtaining thinness. This scale is comprised of five sub-constructs of peer and parental norms: acceptability norms ($\alpha = .745$, $M = 19.157$, $SD = 3.532$), thinness norms (i.e. priority of thinness, $\alpha = .800$, $M = 21.935$, $SD = 4.259$), encouragement norms ($\alpha = .730$, $M = 22.384$, $SD = 2.659$), communicative norms ($\alpha = .856$, $M = 17.5833$, $SD = 4.689$), and behavior norms ($\alpha = .868$, $M = 33.769$, $SD = 5.363$). These norms were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) to respond to statements such as "Being thin is important to my sorority." Each subconstruct norm was individually tested for its relationship to body esteem; additionally these subconstructs were aggregated as an overall thinness norm and then tested for its relationship with body esteem.

Body Esteem

Body esteem was measured using an adapted version of the Body-Esteem Scale for Adolescents and Adults (BESAA) (Mendelson, Mendelson, & White, 2001). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always) to statements such as, “I am preoccupied with trying to change my body weight.” This adapted version of the BESAA contained 21 items including three subscales for measuring self-evaluations of body image: body esteem appearance (general feelings about appearance, $\alpha = .92$), body esteem weight (satisfaction with weight, $\alpha = .94$), and body esteem attribution (evaluation of others’ opinions about one’s body and appearance, $\alpha = .81$). The three sub-constructs were aggregated as a sum of body esteem and then tested for its correlation with perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness. Overall the complete scale maintained good reliability ($\alpha = .95$, $M = 71.36$, $SD = 14.88$), consistent with the findings from Mendelson et al. (2001).

Organizational Assimilation

Organizational assimilation was tested to examine any mediating effects on the potential relationship between organizational norms for thinness and body esteem. Assimilation was measured using a modified version of Myers and Oetzel’s (2003) Organizational Assimilation Index (OAI). The OAI recognizes six areas of organizational assimilation. Five of these dimensions were used in the present study including familiarity with others ($\alpha = .801$, $M = 10.296$, $SD = 4.147$), organizational acculturation ($\alpha = .801$, $M = 13.296$, $SD = 4.249$), recognition ($\alpha = .823$, $M = 11.347$, $SD = 4.014$), involvement ($\alpha = .774$, $M = 12.796$, $SD = 3.943$), and adaptation/role

negotiation ($\alpha = .656$, $M = 14.162$, $SD = 3.945$). The sixth dimension of job competency was removed from the present study because the participants did not necessarily have job-like roles or functions within the sorority. Participants responded to statements using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Statements were modified from the OAI to apply to a sorority setting, and the original 61-item index was reduced to 34 items. The index was abridged to manage survey length and exclude items that did not apply to sorority organizations (e.g., “I avoid conversations with my coworkers whenever possible.”).

In addition to the aforementioned variables of interest, subjects were asked to provide simple demographic information about themselves, including age, race, classification, longevity in organization, and whether or not they held a leadership position.

Statistical Tests

Hypothesis one addresses the potential relationship between perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness and body esteem. Associations between these variables were analyzed using tests for correlation and linear regression. In addition, research question one examines organizational assimilation as a mediating variable. To test for mediation, a Sobel test for mediation was employed (Baron & Kenny, 1986; MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002).

Memorable Messages Data and Analytical Procedures

Lastly, participants were asked to identify memorable messages regarding thinness within their sorority experiences. Memorable messages were identified and measured using a modified version of Barge and Schlueter’s (2004) survey of memorable

messages. Barge and Schlueter employed a field-descriptive methodology for administering a survey of memorable messages. The current research modifies the questions from this survey to identify messages regarding thinness. Questions asked participants to describe a memorable message received in a sorority setting which significantly impacted their thoughts or ideas regarding body image. Questions focus on three key concepts: message content, message function, and source. Of the total number of subjects (n=216), 169 participants responded to the memorable message questions. Of this number, the responses of 42 participants were removed due to incomplete answers or lack of relevancy to the open-ended question prompt (e.g. “NA,” “I’ll never know all the ways I’ve touched a sister’s life,” etc.). In total, 127 memorable messages were coded with responses considered as a whole due to the overlapping nature of information. In addition, a multiple choice question regarding the message source was included to identify potential trends in type of organizational member relaying influential messages regarding thinness.

A content analysis of the content, function and impact of the memorable message responses was coded into 14 categories using an inductive method (Taylor & Trujillo, 2001). Rather than imposing an etic coding scheme onto the data, the coder approached the data inductively because there is limited scholarly insight into the qualitative dimensions of organizational messages to members regarding thinness. The unit of analysis was each individual’s aggregate response to the three open-ended questions (typically coded at the level of complete sentence or phrase). After establishing the initial coding categories, the chief coder met and discussed the categories with another researcher who was familiar with the data set. From this discussion, duplicate categories

were eliminated, the dimensions of the remaining coding categories were refined, and some additional categories were developed, resulting in 13 ultimate categories for analysis which follow. A coding book which fully outlines the categories can be found in Appendix C.

Valence of Message. Messages were considered for the overall valence of the message content. Messages were coded as being positive (i.e., complimentary/affirming), negative (i.e., critical/derogatory), or neutral.

Aesthetic Focus of Message. Content of message was examined for the presence of three distinct aesthetic aspects: body weight, outward adornment (e.g., clothing, accessories, etc.), and physical characteristics (e.g., hair, muscle tone, smile). These categories were not exclusive, meaning that the response may be coded on multiple elements.

Specificity of Message. Responses were considered for the specificity of the circumstances and setting wherein the message was received. Messages were coded as having either high specificity (i.e., detailed contextual elements) or low specificity (i.e., minimal or no contextual details).

Health Appeal of Message. Due to a considerable number of messages that mention the importance of health, messages were additionally examined for whether there was an emphasis on health and well-being (e.g., “Being healthy I more important than being thin.”) or, alternatively, a focus on superficial appearance (e.g., “You are so thin and pretty.”).

Message Refers to Sexual Desirability. Messages were evaluated for implicit or direct references to sexual desirability associated with attractiveness. Items were coded as low (i.e., did not reference sexual desirability), medium (i.e., indirect reference to sexual desirability; e.g., “You’re beautiful.”) or high (i.e., clear-cut reference to sexual desirability; e.g., “You look sexy in that dress.”)

Reference to Fitting a Social/Cultural Archetype. Another message feature that was present in the data was references to fitting or conforming to social archetypes. This included messages that suggest that the target meets a culturally subjective standard of beauty (e.g., “You’re so pretty;” “You always look so put together”). Messages were categorized as low (i.e., did not reference a social/cultural archetype), medium (i.e., equivocal reference to widely held social values; e.g., “You are beautiful inside and out”), or high (i.e., reference to common social archetypes or culturally specific norms; e.g., “All ZBZ girls are so hot!”).

Target of Message. Messages were also assessed for the stated or implied target of the message in order to better understand the circumstances in which messages are being delivered. Items in this category included respondent exclusively (e.g., “My big

sister told me she thinks I'm pretty), respondent and others (e.g., "Everyone is told to dress well to represent the sorority"), others exclusively (i.e. not including respondent; e.g. "I heard one of the older girls tell a sister her pants were too tight"), or cannot determine message target.

Perception of Message by Recipient. Messages were additionally examined for the way the respondent perceived the message. Items in this category included positive reception (e.g., "It made me feel good to hear that"), neutral reception (e.g., "I didn't really think that much about it"), or negative reception (e.g., "I didn't like hearing that").

Degree of Impact on Recipient. Messages were also coded based on their reported level of impact on the recipient. Degree of impact was assessed as being low (i.e., little or no impact; e.g., "It didn't really affect me"), medium (i.e., moderate or temporary impact; e.g., "It really brightened my day), high (i.e., considerable impact on ideas or behaviors; e.g., "It really changed the way I think about food and dieting").

Valence of Impact on Respondent. Coding also took into consideration the valence of the message impact on the recipient. Valence of impact was assessed as being positive (i.e., constructive effect on respondents emotions/behavior; e.g., "I stopped worrying so much about my weight"), neutral (i.e., minimal impact or uncertain directionality of the impact; e.g., "I didn't know how to feel about that comment"), or negative (i.e., negative effect on respondents emotions/behavior; e.g., "It made me feel badly about myself").

Behavior Impact. Responses were evaluated for whether or not messages impacted the behavior of the recipient. Items in this category included yes (i.e., did impact respondents behavior), no (i.e., did not impact respondents behavior), or cannot determine (i.e., possibly impacted behavior but response did not specify).

Nature of Behavior Change. If it was determined that the message impacted the behavior of the recipient, the message was additionally assessed for three areas of impact. Items in this category included impact on diet (e.g., "I started eating less"), impact on exercise (e.g., "I started exercising more"), and impact on superficial enhancements (e.g. "I started waking up earlier to do my hair and make-up"). These categories were not exclusive, meaning that the response may be coded on multiple elements.

Impact on View of Sorority. Lastly, messages were evaluated for impact on the respondent's view of their sorority. Items in this category included positive (i.e., increased favorable opinion about the sorority), neutral (i.e., did not specify impact), or negative (i.e., decreased favorable opinion about the sorority).

Message Source. One multiple choice question was asked regarding the source of the memorable message. Items in this question included a peer who joined the sorority at the same time as the respondent, a sorority member with an executive position, the big sister of the respondent or another big sister, a sorority member who had been a member longer than the respondent, a person outside the organization, or other.

The researcher served as primary coder and used the master category book to code all data. A secondary coder was also provided the coding scheme and conducted an analysis of 12% of the data. Using Cohen's Kappa, the overall intercoder reliability for this random assignment of the data was .862. The following three categories were removed due to lack of intercoder reliability: specificity of message, message refers to sexual desirability, and reference to fitting a social/cultural archetype.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The following chapter presents a summary of the results of the study. It addresses the quantitative analysis of the relationship between perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness and body esteem proposed in hypothesis one and examines organizational assimilation as a potential mediator of this relationship (RQ1). In addition, it includes a qualitative analysis of the content and function of memorable messages which exemplify perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness.

Social Norms and Body Esteem Variance

Hypothesis one related to the potential effects of perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness on members' body esteem. Specifically, it was predicted that perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness would be negatively associated with the body esteem of sorority members. Variables were defined using reliable scales for measuring body esteem and perceptions of social norms for thinness. To test the hypothesis, correlations were computed between the five variables for perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness and body esteem. As predicted, all of the variables for perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness were inversely related to body esteem (see Table 1). Encouragement norms displayed the largest negative correlation with body esteem ($r = -.32$). All correlations were significant at the .001 level or higher.

Table 1
Correlations between Perceptions of the Presence of Organizational Norms for Thinness and Body Esteem

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mean	SD	α
1. Body Esteem	-						3.39	.71	.95
2. Thinness Norms	-.25	-					2.34	.71	.80
3. Acceptability Norms	-.21	.65	-				2.17	.68	.75
4. Encouragement Norms	-.32	.44	.48	-			1.52	.53	.73
5. Communication Norms	-.23	.55	.68	.46	-		2.48	.94	.86
6. Behavioral Norms	-.21	.48	.64	.50	.67	-	1.78	.67	.87

$p \leq .001$ for all variables

To test if perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness were a predictor of body esteem a linear regression analysis was performed. The regression controlled for demographic variables including age, classification, longevity in sorority, leadership status, and ethnicity. The aggregate of perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness was found to be significantly negatively related to body esteem ($\beta = -.335, p < .001$; see Table 2), confirming the hypothesis. The sample multiple correlation coefficient was .369, indicating that approximately 14% of the variance of body esteem in the sample can be accounted for by perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness.

Next, a multiple regression analysis was performed with all five perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness as predictors. The linear combination of the five social norm measures was significantly related to body esteem ($R^2 = .123, F(5, 210) = 5.901, p < .001$). Of the measures, encouragement was again the most strongly related to negative body esteem (stan. $B = -.258, p < .001$). Acceptability norms and

behavior norms demonstrated a minimal positive relationship with body esteem (stan. $B = .050, p < .001$; stan. $B = .010, p < .001$, respectively). Table 3 presents indices to indicate the relative strength of the individual predictors.

Table 2
Regression of the Aggregate of Perceptions of the Presence of Organizational Norms for Thinness and Demographic Variables on Body Esteem

Predictor Variables	$B (s.e.) / \text{Stand. } B$	t
Perceptions of Organizational Norms	-.410 (.09) / -.335	-4.81*
Age	-.161 (.09) / -.260	-1.80
Sorority Year	.063 (.11) / .096	.583
Classification	.169 (.13) / .251	1.278
Leader (1= yes, 2 = no)	-.183 (.14) / -.094	-1.329
Ethnicity	.059 (.08) / .050	.730
R^2	.136	-
F	5.244*	-

* $p < .001$

Table 3
Regression of the 5 Variables of Perceptions of the Presence of Organizational Norms for Thinness on Body Esteem

Predictor Variables	$B (s.e.) / \text{Stand. } B$	t
Thinness Norms	-.127 (.09) / -.127	-1.46
Acceptability Norms	.052 (.11) / .050	.477
Encouragements Norms	-.343 (.10) / -.258	-3.30
Communication Norms	-.065 (.08) / -.086	-.873
Behavior Norms	.010 (.10) / .010	.104
R^2	.123	-
F	5.90*	-

* $p < .001$

In addition, each of the five variables for perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness was run as individual regression models controlling for demographic variables. Thinness norms (i.e., priority of thinness) was found to be significantly negatively related to body esteem ($\beta = -.265, p < .001$; see Table 4). Unlike

in the previous analysis, acceptability norms (Table 5) and behavior norms (Table 6) were found to be significantly negatively related to body esteem ($\beta = -.231, p = .001$; $\beta = -.228, p = .002$, respectively). Encouragement norms were again found to be the most negatively related to body esteem ($\beta = -.324, p < .001$; see Table 7). In addition, communication norms were also found to be significantly related to body esteem ($\beta = -.301, p < .001$; see Table 8). These results demonstrate that encouragement norms and communication norms are better single predictors of negative body esteem than thinness norms, acceptability norms, and behavior norms.

Table 4
Regression of Thinness Norms and Demographic Variables on Body Esteem

Predictor Variables	<i>B (s.e.)/ Stand. B</i>	<i>t</i>
Thinness Norms	-.260 (.07)/ -.265	-3.878*
Age	-.159 (.09)/ -.257	-1.752
Sorority Year	.051 (.11)/ .078	.464
Classification	.146 (.14)/ .217	1.083
Leader (1= yes, 2 = no)	-.213 (.14)/ -.109	-1.524
Ethnicity	.007 (.08)/ .006	.083
<i>R</i> ²	.103	-
<i>F</i>	3.847*	-

* $p \leq .001$

Table 5
Regression of Acceptability Norms and Demographic Variables on Body Esteem

Predictor Variables	<i>B (s.e.)/ Stand. B</i>	<i>t</i>
Acceptability Norms	-.241 (.07)/ -.231	-3.263*
Age	-.164 (.09)/ -.264	-1.782
Sorority Year	.045 (.11)/ .069	.405
Classification	.157 (.14)/ .233	1.154
Leader (1= yes, 2 = no)	-.217 (.14)/ -.111	-1.532
Ethnicity	.032 (.08)/ .027	.381
<i>R</i> ²	.085	-
<i>F</i>	3.089**	-

* $p \leq .001$, ** $p < .01$

Table 6
Regression of Behavioral Norms and Demographic Variables on Body Esteem

Predictor Variables	<i>B (s.e.)/ Stand. B</i>	<i>t</i>
Behavioral Norms	-.237 (.08)/ -.228	-3.177*
Age	-.167 (.09)/ -.270	-1.816
Sorority Year	.034 (.11)/ .052	.052
Classification	.190 (.14)/ .282	1.389
Leader (1= yes, 2 = no)	-.179 (.14)/ -.092	-1.252
Ethnicity	.012 (.08)/ .010	.139
<i>R</i> ²	.082	-
<i>F</i>	2.992*	-

* $p < .01$

Table 7
Regression of Encouragement Norms and Demographic Variables on Body Esteem

Predictor Variables	<i>B (s.e.)/ Stand. B</i>	<i>t</i>
Encouragement Norms	-.425 (.09)/ -.324	-4.787*
Age	-.140 (.09)/ -.226	-1.565
Sorority Year	.072 (.11)/ .110	.663
Classification	.100 (.13)/ .148	.751
Leader (1= yes, 2 = no)	-.216 (.14)/ -.110	-1.571
Ethnicity	.041 (.08)/ .034	.504
<i>R</i> ²	.135	-
<i>F</i>	5.210*	-

* $p \leq .001$

Table 8
Regression of Communication Norms and Demographic Variables on Body Esteem

Predictor Variables	<i>B (s.e.)/ Stand. B</i>	<i>t</i>
Communication Norms	-.225 (.05)/ -.301	-4.249*
Age	-.159 (.09)/ -.257	-1.762
Sorority Year	.041 (.11)/ .063	.377
Classification	.192 (.13)/ .284	1.428
Leader (1= yes, 2 = no)	-.248 (.14)/ -.127	-1.789
Ethnicity	.039 (.08)/ .033	.478
<i>R</i> ²	.116	-
<i>F</i>	4.368*	-

* $p \leq .001$

Organizational Assimilation as a Mediating Variable

The next analyses tested the research questions addressing organizational assimilation as a mediator of the relationship between perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness and body esteem. To test for mediation, Baron and Kenny's (1986) strategy of assessing mediational effects through multiple regression analyses was employed. In this method, the dependent variable (i.e., body esteem) is predicted from the independent variable (i.e., organizational norms for thinness) alone and then with the mediating variable (i.e., organizational assimilation) is included, as well. First, a regression analysis was run in which body esteem was predicted by organizational norms for thinness, followed by a second regression analysis in which the mediating variable of organizational assimilation was added. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), mediation effects can be inferred when inclusion of the mediator reduces the predictive value of the independent variable alone.

The mediational role of organizational assimilation was evaluated using the Sobel test for mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986; MacKinnon et al., 2002). For the purpose of these analyses, thinness norms (i.e., priority for thinness), acceptability norms, encouragement norms, communication norms and behavior norms were summed to create a score of participants' total perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness. The results supported the mediational effect of organizational assimilation on the link between organizational norms for thinness and body esteem (Sobel test = -3.78, $p < .001$).

In Figure 1, regression path analysis demonstrates organizational assimilation mediates the relationship between organizational norms for thinness and body esteem,

with perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness being a predictor of organizational assimilation, and organizational assimilation being a predictor of body esteem. The Sobel test statistic shows organizational assimilation to be a significant partial mediator of the relationship between perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness and body esteem.

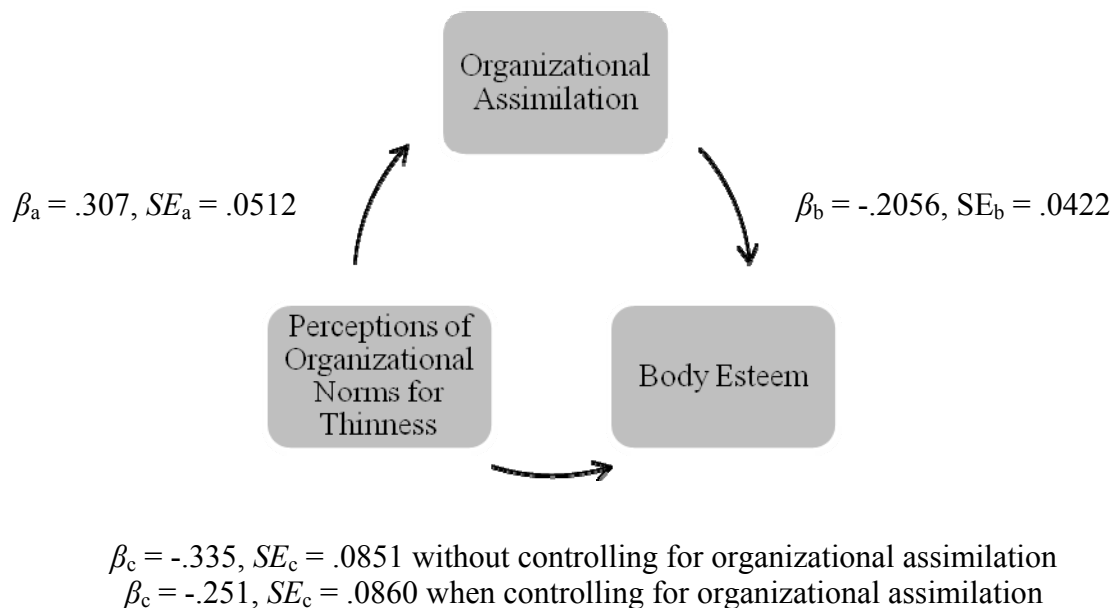


Figure 1 Mediation Regression Analysis for Perceptions of the Presence of Organizational Norms for Thinness and Organizational Assimilation on Body Esteem

Memorable Messages

Research question two inquired about the content and function of memorable messages which evoke perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness. Messages were coded using an inductive coding process to identify key themes and categories present within the data. The following content categories for memorable messages were derived from the data for all open-ended questions. Table 9 presents a summary of message content and function.

Table 9
Content and Function of Memorable Messages

CATEGORY	ITEM	# OF INCIDENTS
Valence of Message	Complimentary, Affirming (+)	79
	Judgmental, Evaluative (-)	16
	Neutral	32
Aesthetic Focus of Message	Reference to body weight	52
	Reference to outward adornment	16
	Reference to physical characteristic	14
Health Appeal of Message	Reference to health, well being	24
	Reference to appearance	90
Target of Message	Respondent exclusively	65
	Respondent and others	28
	Others (not directly including resp.)	0
	Unknown	33
Perception of Message by Respondent	Viewed favorably	108
	Neutral	8
	Negative, adversely	10
Degree of Impact on Respondent	Low	9
	Medium	98
	High	19
Valence of Impact on Respondent	Favorable	105
	Neutral	10
	Negative	10
Impacted Behavior	Yes	27
	No	14
	Cannot determine	84
Nature of Behavior Change	Eating habits	12
	Exercise habits	11
	Superficial enhancements	8
Valence of Impact on Respondent's View of Sorority	Positive	67
	Negative	4
	Neutral / did not specify	55

Valence of Message. Messages were assessed for the overall valence of the message content. Overall the messages were decidedly positive in nature ($N = 79$) including complimentary or affirming significance (e.g., “I was told that I’m beautiful both inside and out”). Very few ($N = 16$) were reported as being judgmental or

negatively evaluative, while some ($N = 32$) contained neutral messages with neither a decidedly positive or negative valence (e.g., “Being healthy is the only way to be happy, AND dieting is going to get you nowhere”). Using Cohen’s Kappa, the overall intercoder reliability for this category was .796.

Aesthetic Focus of Message. Content of message was examined for three specific aesthetic elements: body weight, outward adornment (e.g., clothing, shoes, etc.), and physical characteristics (e.g., hair, eyes, muscle tone). These categories were not exclusive, meaning that the response may be coded on multiple elements; thus, nine messages were coded as including references to multiple themes. The largest number of references was to body weight ($N = 52$) including some type of weight orientation (e.g., “Oh my gosh! You look so good! Have you lost weight?”). Messages also referred to outward adornment elements such as clothing ($N = 16$; e.g., “The size on the tag isn’t what matters, it’s that you feel good in what you are wearing”). A third categorized aesthetic focus was to physical characteristics such as hair style/color or muscle tone ($N = 14$; e.g., “I was told my hair always looks nice”). Using Cohen’s Kappa, the overall intercoder reliability for this category was .878.

Health Appeal of Message. Messages were examined for whether there was an emphasis on health and well-being or, alternatively, a focus on superficial appearance (e.g., thinness, beauty, attractiveness). Multiple subjects ($N = 24$) identified messages exemplifying the promotion of health and well-being such as, “My sorority encourages being fit and healthy and active.” Conversely, other messages focused solely on the aesthetic benefits of weight control ($N = 90$, e.g., “This girl in my new pledge class said

that she wants to eat like me so she can be the same size as me”). Using Cohen’s Kappa, the overall intercoder reliability for this category was 1.00.

Target of Message. In order to better understand the circumstances in which messages are relayed, responses were also analyzed for the suggested target of the message. Some messages were clearly and exclusively intended for the respondent herself and were coded as such ($N = 66$, e.g., “The older members told me they like the color of my hair”). Messages where additional members were clearly included along with the subject were coded as targeting the respondent and others ($N = 28$, e.g., “My sisters encourage others to work out”). No responses were included that clearly related messages not intended for the subject; however, many were unclear as to whom the message was targeted ($N = 33$, e.g., “You [sic] body is a temple, treat it well”). Using Cohen’s Kappa, the overall intercoder reliability for this category was .575.

Perception of Message by Recipient. Coding also included assessments for the way messages were received by the recipient. Messages that were coded as being positively received included explanations by participants about how the message made them feel good ($N = 109$, e.g., “It definitely boosted my confidence level and helped me feel a sense of belonging in the sorority”). Overall, the vast majority of messages were perceived positively. Messages that were perceived as being negative included explanations where the respondent was clearly unhappy or in disagreement about the message ($N = 10$, e.g., “I felt attacked for being the size I am”). Some messages were also perceived as having a neutral reception ($N = 8$, e.g., “The words of others don’t typically have any bearing on my view of myself”). Using Cohen’s Kappa, the overall intercoder reliability for this category was .868.

Degree of Impact on Recipient. Messages were categorized based on their reported level of impact on the recipient. Responses where the participant noted a considerable shift in their emotions, ideologies, or behaviors were coded for a high degree of impact ($N = 19$, e.g., “I work out more and enjoy working out more because it is with my sisters”). When moderate changes or temporary effects were noted, messages were categorized as having a medium degree of impact ($N = 99$, e.g., “Makes me self conscious of my size at times”). Messages where there was no significant change noted were coded as a low degree of impact ($N = 9$, e.g., “It was funny. Things don’t really impact me very much. I do what I want”). Using Cohen’s Kappa, the overall intercoder reliability for this category was .727.

Valence of Impact on Respondent. Coding also took into consideration the valence of the message impact on the recipient. Overall, the vast majority of messages had a favorable impact on the respondent, resulting in increased self confidence and/or healthy behavior changes ($N = 106$, e.g., “I learned that being happy, healthy, and having close friends that love you are more important than fitting in my jeans from high school and being thin”). When there was minimal impact or uncertain directionality of the impact, messages were coded as neutral ($N = 10$, e.g., “I couldn’t tell if it was a compliment or not”). Instances where the impact of the message was clearly harmful or emotionally destructive were coded as negative ($N = 10$, e.g., “It has made me almost obsessive about my body and weight ever since I heard how much she makes fun of heavier girls”). Using Cohen’s Kappa, the overall intercoder reliability for this category was .844.

Behavior Impact. Responses were evaluated for whether or not messages impacted the behavior of the recipient. Messages that described a clear change in behavior were coded as having impacted behavior ($N = 27$, e.g., “I started to pay attention to what I ate and started to ride my bike more”). When respondents made it clear that the message did not change any behaviors, responses were coded as no impact ($N = 14$, e.g., “I haven’t changed anything”). The majority of messages made no direct reference to a change in behavior and were, therefore, coded as undetermined ($N = 85$). Most respondents who reported message impact referred to emotional or social changes and not specific behavior changes (e.g., “I feel comfortable with the way my hair looks so it makes me more comfortable in social situations if I think my hair looks nice”). Using Cohen’s Kappa, the overall intercoder reliability for this category was .688.

Nature of Behavior Change. Messages that noted specific behavior changes were assessed for three specific types of non-exclusive (i.e., some responses were coded on multiple elements) appearance related behaviors. Respondents who noted the message impacted their diet or eating patterns were coded as having a change in eating habits ($N = 12$, e.g., “I just increased the physical activity and decreased the number of sweets I ate”). When messages included an impact on physical activity, they were coded as having a change in exercise habits ($N = 11$, e.g., “I have tried to remain more healthy and work out on a regular basis”). Some respondents reported making changes to the way they dress, style their hair, or wear their makeup; such responses were coded as a change in superficial enhancements ($N = 8$, e.g., “Wake up earlier to put on my makeup and pick out outfit”). Using Cohen’s Kappa, the overall intercoder reliability for this category was .924.

Impact on View of Sorority. Lastly, messages were evaluated for impacting the respondent’s opinion about the sorority they belong to. Responses that indicated that the participant felt more favorably about their sorority after receiving the message were coded as positive ($N = 68$, e.g., “We all need each other and this has encouraged me and my sisters to love each other for exactly what we see and for what each girl uniquely adds to the group”). Messages where the respondent denoted they felt less favorably about their sorority after receiving the message were categorized as negative ($N = 4$, e.g., “Sorority life, for the most part, is not a good place to be when recovering from a eating disorder”). Messages where there was no clear shift in opinion regarding their sorority were coded as neutral/did not specify ($N = 54$). Using Cohen’s Kappa, the overall intercoder reliability for this category was .792.

Message Source. One multiple choice question was asked regarding the source of the memorable message. Table 10 illustrates the responses. Messages sources were fairly diverse with the largest number coming from a peer in the sorority.

Table 10
Sources of Memorable Messages

Source	Response Percent	Response Count
A peer who joined the sorority at the same time I did	24.2%	50
A sorority member with an executive position	19.8%	41
My big sister or another big sister	10.6%	22
A sorority member who has been a member longer than me	17.9%	37
A person outside the organization	9.2%	19
Other	18.4%	38

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore aspects of organizational assimilation and the influence of social norms on body image and identities of university sorority members. Sororities are distinct organizational settings with a unique ability to influence the construction of identity and the subsequent impact on members' body image. This is accomplished through processes of organizational assimilation and the authority of accompanying social norms. In addition, the current research explored the use of memorable messages as part of the organizational assimilation process used to express social norms.

The following chapter presents the results of the current study. First, it addresses the significant relationship between perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness and body esteem, and the implications of this relationship. Secondly, it discusses the confirmed mediating impact of organizational assimilation on the aforementioned relationship. Lastly, it provides an analysis of three major themes in the memorable message data: the continuing emphasis on physical appearance through positive messages, the negative impact of messages on women viewed as "too thin," and the use of memorable messages to portray an enduring need to belong.

Social Norms, Body Esteem and Personal Identity

Central to the development of this study, and notably the first hypothesis, is the idea that organizations hold the ability to impact member body image, a meaningful

component of an individual's identity. Results demonstrate that perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness display a significant negative association with body esteem. As a component of body image, body esteem is a notable contributor to the formation of personal identity. Therefore, it can be concluded that through the establishment of organizational norms for thinness, sororities are able to influence the personal, as well as the social identity of their members.

Many women look to a sorority as a way to help establish a new social identity informed by a sense of belonging to group (Risman, 1982). One study participant referenced this connection the following way, "I just transferred to Baylor, so I am essentially starting over...I now have a group of people on this campus that genuinely cares for me and my wellbeing. It also let me know that I am now connected to people here on campus." For many members, sororities provide immediate gratification for their desire to ascertain their position within the college social system. The tenets of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) support these notions, suggesting that people are classified by others based on their affiliations with various groups and organizations and that these classifications inform one's personal identity. Because of the intertwined nature of social and personal identity, sororities also are able to influence members' perceptions of body image, a central component to the construction of personal identity (Dittmar, 2009).

As evidenced in the results for hypothesis one, the present study supported this notion at least in part by examining the relationship between group norms regarding thinness and one's personal body esteem, a component of body image. Low body esteem is a result of discrepancies between what a person desires to look like and how one feels that she appears. Destructive feelings accompanying low body esteem can influence a

person's overall self esteem and perspectives of personal identity (Lowery et al., 2005). Hypothesis one addressed the influence of perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness on body esteem. Social norms regarding thinness and their contribution to body esteem have been examined in previous studies (e.g., Krcmar, Giles, & Helme, 2008). While most social norms are promulgated and disseminated by broader cultural influences such as media, interpersonal relationships have the ability to influence the impact of these norms by either enforcing or negating their effects. The present study asks how organizations can influence the enactment of their own norms and expectations for thinness in a sorority setting. Results support hypothesis one by demonstrating that perceptions of organizational norms for thinness indeed have a significant yet moderate negative relationship with body esteem. That is, the results revealed that sorority members who perceived that their organization placed more value on thinness had lower body esteem. Additionally, respondent perceptions that the organization encourages members to engage in dieting and exercise (i.e., encouragement norms) demonstrated a stronger relationship with low body esteem. This finding suggests that encouragement toward dieting and exercise, even when well intentioned, can have a negative impact on body esteem.

In this current culture, dieting and exercise have become almost synonymous with health. Magazines, television, websites, books, advertising all combine to create a windstorm of messages that as a nation we need to eat less and work out more. This ideology is also reflected in our day to day conversations where it is common to hear people discussing the latest diet they've tried or exercise routine they've begun. All of these actions are purposed toward the promotion of healthier lifestyles. However, health

is not solely a physical concept. Complete health involves incorporating elements of emotional, social, mental and spiritual health. The results of this study demonstrate that while encouraging dieting and exercise may help to promote physical health, it is often at the detriment of emotional and social health. An intensive focus on low body weight as an indicator of health is what leads to a drive for thinness associated with eating disorders. Organizations who undertake health promotion campaigns need to take into consideration incorporating messages which encourage physical health without sacrificing self-esteem.

It is also notable that out of the five variables included in the perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness scale, encouragement norms most readily addresses perceptions of spoken messages as opposed to observed actions or behaviors. This demonstrates the way the words of others have a unique ability to impact self-esteem particularly in relation to body image. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize the imbued value within even the most seemingly harmless messages, particularly in relation to weight-loss.

Overall, these results indicate that organizations, particularly ones like sororities which are integrated in multiple areas of members' lives (i.e., personal, social, professional, and educational) have a real capacity to impact the identity development of their members. In addition, it demonstrates the ability of social norms, specifically organizational norms, to contribute to the formation of body image. This is particularly relevant in light of Berkowitz (2003) assertion that perceptions of social norms, regardless of their accuracy, can lead to enacting unhealthy behaviors such as excessive exercising and extreme dieting. This study extends the application of Berkowitz's social

norms theory to apply to specific organizational norms demonstrating that organizations have the ability to develop their own norms, in this case regarding thinness. This is an ability organizations, sororities in particular, should take into consideration by examining the prevalence of organizational norms for thinness. The next section examines the mediating effect of organizational assimilation on the influence of perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness on body esteem.

Organizational Assimilation as a Mediator

The first research question explored the potential for organizational assimilation to mediate the relationship between organizational norms for thinness and body esteem. Organizational assimilation examines the process by which a person learns the expectations, values, and culture of an organization (Schein & Van Maanen, 1979). When a woman joins a sorority she is quickly presented with the values and traditions of the organization, and through this she learns how to function within her sorority. Additionally, she learns what is expected from her in order to fit into the sorority, and; among these expectations, potentially include implicit or explicit organizational norms for thinness.

Results demonstrate that the degree to which a member has assimilated into an organization mediates the influence of social norms on body esteem. Thus, it follows that the more integrated the sorority member is into the organization, the more accurately she perceives the presence of organizational norms for thinness which, in turn, influences her body esteem. These results indicate that organizational assimilation has the ability to impact the extent to which a member perceives and experiences organizational norms, in this case norms for thinness. This concept of organizational assimilation as a mediator of

the impact of organizational norms could be extended and applied to other areas of research, particularly in light of current health concerns such as smoking, excessive drinking, and other high risk behaviors.

Past research has focused on the ability of organizations to assimilate members to organizational context specific expectations (Jablin, 1987; Kramer, 2010; Schein & Van Maanen, 1979). This may include construction of vocational or professional identities (Ashforth, Sluss, & Harrison, 2007; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). However, the current study demonstrates that the process of organizational assimilation can also impact the forming and enacting of personal identity, including concepts surrounding body image. This serves as further confirmation of the idea that organizations hold the unique ability to impact the identities of their members. In addition, not only do organizations, such as sororities, influence the formation of identity, they also impact the individual health of employees. The following section addresses memorable messages present within sorority organizations which address the existence of organizational norms for thinness.

Memorable Messages between Sisters

Research question two addressed the expression of social norms for thinness in memorable messages. Memorable messages are statements or events that are significant to an individual as they provide insight as to how to behave within a certain scenario or environment (Stohl, 1986). Memorable messages may also be used to address accepted norms and priorities for thinness. The participants in the present study were asked to share memorable messages communicated within their sorority regarding weight and appearance. Analysis of the content and function of these messages points to three issues

that will be addressed in turn regarding the discursive enactment of organizational norms for thinness.

The first issue pertains to the predominantly positive valence of the memorable messages. Of the participants who provided messages, 63% of the messages involved some type of compliment or affirmation (e.g., “Most people are very encouraging about how people look at social events. This creates a positive environment that allows members to feel comfortable”). In fact, only a small portion of messages included any kind of direct criticism (13% of total messages). This suggests that sorority organizations are focusing prominently on the positive body-related attributes of their members. Further, the self-reported degree of impact that these positive messages have on some of their members is noteworthy. Many respondents describe how simple compliments such as a fellow sorority member complimenting their appearance significantly influenced their confidence and self esteem (e.g., “It builds up your confidence. It makes you feel worthy and that you are doing ok with how you are living your life. Encouragement can go a long way”).

This finding suggests that although members are expressing messages on positive terms, they are still implicitly stressing the importance of physical appearance. The fact that members consistently recalled specific instances where they received a compliment of this nature from a sorority sister points to the significant import placed upon these appearance-related messages (e.g., “When someone told me I looked really pretty and tan at an event last spring”). Messages regarding outward beauty were consistently considered an impetus to changes in self esteem, body image, and identity. For example, one respondent stated, “I never really considered myself attractive until the end of high

school and I had low confidence in my looks when I came to college. Being in the sorority has boosted my self esteem and made me feel more comfortable with my looks.” Even respondents who said their sorority did not prioritize looks often mentioned that this ability to be accepted despite not fitting a stereotype for beauty enabled them to feel more confident about the way they look (e.g., “The things I think are imperfect might, to someone, be the things that make me unique or endearing, or even cute”). This element of the data demonstrates the potential power that perceptions of appearance bear in shaping member self esteem and identity. In sum, while the majority of messages were affirming in nature, they demonstrated an enduring emphasis on the importance of outward beauty.

A second issue is that being thin is not always necessarily considered a positive thing. Several participants mention being criticized for being too thin such as in the following example:

I have been relatively thin my whole life. Since I have received my bid to my sorority I feel worse about being thin. Comments are always made to me that I am too thin, or they wish they were as thin as me. I get picked on for being thin and sometimes even have people angry that I am so thin and they “can’t” be. I never know what to say to these comments. I was made this way and I don’t want to be picked on or have people envy me. It makes me feel horrible and very unhappy with myself.

While there is a plethora of literature regarding drive for thinness and body esteem (Allison & Park, 2004; David et al., 2002; Hendry & Gillies, 1978; Lafrance et al., 2000; B. K. Mendelson, D. R. White, & M. J. Mendelson), very little research can be found examining body esteem issues among women who are characteristically or naturally thin (i.e., women who have unsuccessfully attempted to gain weight). This is a gap in the literature which, as demonstrated by the previous quote, represents a legitimate area for

further inquiry. Such criticisms of an individual's thinness may foster negative feelings regarding the person's body image and self esteem.

This unique dimension of the study's results suggests that low body esteem is not wholly confined to women who wish they were thinner; further, women who are overweight are not the only ones who are criticized for their size. As such, this study at least in part questions the prevailing notion of a "thin ideal" and negates the (American) cultural opinion that you can't be too thin.

Motivations for these criticisms of thinness can only be speculated. Perhaps the speaker is jealous or spiteful. Or perhaps the individuals who voice these perceived criticisms are genuinely concerned about the wellbeing of the message target. Despite the motivation, however, it is clear that these messages perhaps are not being conveyed in a productive manner. Thus, this issue deserved further attention in both scholarly and professional veins of inquiry..

A final issue highlighted in the memorable message analysis addresses the strong motivation to find a place to "fit in" in order to gain the security of belonging to a group. For many, the comfort of having a group to belong to was the primary motivation and benefit of joining a sorority (e.g., "This message and the actions of the older girls in my sorority that day let me know that I will be okay here and that I now have a group of people on this campus that genuinely cares for me and my wellbeing. It also let me know that I am now connected to people here on campus"). Others commented on their desire to "fit in" with a group of girls (e.g. "[The message] made me more confident I could fit in").

This desire to “fit in” was a consistent theme in the data; supported not only by messages where respondents explicitly acknowledged their need to belong, but also in messages where respondents reported that they responded positively to compliments which reinforced the idea that they abided by a social norm. The following example demonstrates this longing for and reinforcement of body-related social norms:

I remember when I was initiated into my sorority my freshman year, I was always complimented on my hair and how pretty I was. My pledge class nominated me to compete in the Baylor Beauty Pageant. I was at a perfect weight for my height... I found this nomination to be so meaningful because I felt that I was just the ideal sorority girl. I was flattered about the nomination. It really was a huge compliment for my pledge class to vote on me to compete in this pageant. I was on cloud 9 when I received the message that I was going to be a part of this event. It helped me have a place in my organization as the well rounded pretty girl and that was a moment that I still remain proud of.

This example illustrates the way messages regarding weight and appearance have the ability to shape not only the body image but also the identity of the recipient. Respondents consistently expressed their belief that messages they received which complimented their appearance affirmed they belonged to the group. This suggests memorable messages expressed regarding weight and appearance have a considerable ability to impact body image and identity.

Sororities are organizations that have an extraordinary ability to impact the way members think about their bodies and their identities. They, therefore, also possess an opportunity to significantly influence the standards by which their members judge and perceive various expectations and norms regarding thinness and appearance. This potentially affords sorority organizations the unique capacity to positively impact women’s standards for beauty. The following section discusses limitations of the current study, opportunities for future research, and prospective applications of the findings.

Limitations and Future Research

One potential limitation of the current study stems from the distinct university setting in which the Panhellenic sororities were sampled. Unlike many college campuses, the present study was conducted within a university that bars Greek organizations from maintaining communal houses. While many organizational members may choose to live together, they do not experience the large group setting of sorority houses where numerous members share a roof. This undoubtedly impacts the dynamics of organizational assimilation, as well as the perceptions of members regarding thinness related behaviors (i.e., binging, purging, excessive dieting/exercise) which are more readily observed in a shared living space. Future research could apply the current study to a campus where sorority members reside in a common house to investigate the potential impact of proximity on degree of perceived norms for thinness.

Another limitation of the study was the lack of racial diversity. Members of Panhellenic sororities are primarily white/Caucasian. Demographic data from the present study demonstrated that none of the participants were black/African American, for example. Future research should expand to sororities with members of other races to investigate body image issues amongst various ethnicities. The current research explored perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness within a fairly homogenous cultural setting. As different cultures and subcultures produce their own sets of unique cultural values (Ford, 2006), it is important to broaden examination of social norms to incorporate a wide variety of racial, geographical, religious, and socio-economic based cultures.

Additionally, organizational research examining sororities should be expanded to understand the unique dynamics of these powerfully influential organizations. Sororities' inimitable influential ability lies within the distinct nature of these organizations. That is sororities present an opportunity to belong to a seemingly elite group of women during a time when women are just beginning to develop a sense of their adult identity. In addition, part of the power of these organizations lies in the context in which they reside. Sororities are able to impact multiple areas of members' lives in way that is to some extent all-consuming. Similar to military, prison, boarding schools and other settings where the organization impacts personal and social, as well as professional/educational life, the scope of sororities' influence is what allows them to distinctly impact members' identity on multiple levels. As demonstrated, this unique ability to impact the identity of their members also extends to concepts of body image.

Future research should address issues such as gender, femininity, potential job skills training and experience, interpersonal relationships, power struggles, and the impact of leaving a sorority. Research has demonstrated the large number of successful and influential people who arise from Greek organizations (DeSantis, 2007). Thus, it is important to explore how these organizations additionally shape and influence the trajectory of their members' future professional and vocational identities.

Contributions of the Current Research

The present study contains several significant contributions. First, it further explores the influence of social norms on body image as proposed by Berkowitz (2003). The extant research literature has identified the ability of multiple factors including media messages, social comparison, and relationships with peers and parents to influence

perceptions of social norms for thinness and body image (Botta, 1999; Dittmar, 2009; Goodman, 2005; Krcmar et al., 2008; Lafrance et al., 2000; Ousley et al., 2008; Rosen, 1990) However, the current study recognizes that organizations, in this case sororities, can also serve as mediators to externally constructed norms for thinness. This demonstrates the ability of organizations to contribute to individual's perceptions of social norms regarding thinness through the discursive creation of organizational norms.

Second, this study advances the discourse on organizational assimilation through an application of the framework to the unique organizational setting of sororities. At present, the majority of organizational literature has focused on employment based organizations (Kramer, 2010). Sororities are distinct organizations in that they have the ability to influence multiple areas of members' lives. The current research demonstrates how sororities impact members' lives through the mediating effects of organizational assimilation on the relationship between perceptions of the presence of organizational norms for thinness and body esteem. This effect suggests that sororities may also strongly influence other areas of members' physical, emotional, and social health through processes of organizational assimilation.

Third, the current study also explores the application of social identity theory (SIT) to the study of organizational assimilation. SIT has been an under addressed theoretical lens by which to understand the processes and impact of organizational assimilation (Forward & Scheerhorn, 1996; Kramer, 2010). As evidenced in the current study, organizations and the degree of assimilation was found to influence sorority members' body image, an essential component of identity. In addition, memorable message data revealed the importance sorority members place on a sense of belonging to

a group. Thus it follows that organizational assimilation can also be looked at to explain the processes by which members cultivate an identity within their sorority.

Lastly, this study investigates the influence of memorable messages on the endorsement of organizational norms for thinness within sororities. The application of memorable messages to the examination of the process of socialization has been used to study the implementation and instruction of organizational norms (Barge & Schlueter, 2004; Knapp et al., 1981; S. W. Smith, Ellis, & Yoo, 2001; Stohl, 1986). This study extends the research by identifying organizational messages which members perceive as impacting their personal concepts of body image. Memorable messages identified by members reveal that sororities play a central role in members' development of perceptions of norms for appearance and thinness, as well as the subsequent influence of these messages on body esteem. This demonstrates the importance of sororities recognizing the messages they explicitly and implicitly send to members regarding appearance, as well as the potential for these organizations to positively influence members' beliefs and expectations concerning body image and related health choices.

Sororities possess a unique ability to impact the beliefs and ideas of their members regarding weight, appearance and identity through the discursive construction of organizational norms. In light of the noteworthy number of leaders and influential people (76% of U.S. Senators, 85% of Fortune 500 executives, and 18 U.S Presidents since 1877 (DeSantis, 2007)) who arise from these organizations, it is essential that sororities recognize and examine the messages they are sending regarding body image and norms for beauty. Additionally, it can be speculated that due to the successfulness and realm of influence of their members after leaving sorority life, sororities may also

possess the potential to impact beliefs of outlying cultures. Sororities could be a prominent voice calling for a shift in the way Americans socially construct cultural expectations for beauty (“Reflections: Body Image Program,” n.d.).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Sample Questionnaire

Sorority Members' Perceptions of Body Image and Weight

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be completing the following questionnaire for graduate student Jenna Reno. The survey will ask you questions about your sorority affiliations, your feelings about your role in the sorority, your perception of attitudes about weight and dieting, and your feelings about your own body. Your help in this process is greatly appreciated.

Your answers to this questionnaire will be kept *strictly confidential*. The only way for anyone to know your responses will be for you to tell them. When your results and those of other participants are combined and entered into the analysis program, they will not contain any personally identifying information that can connect the data to you. To further protect your confidentiality, survey results will be handled only by the researcher and those on the research committee. The results of the study may be published, but only the combined data from all participants will be made public. **Please include your name and sorority only if you wish to receive credit for participation.**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time. *By completing the questionnaire, you will be signifying your consent to participate in this project.* If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Baylor University's Committee for Protection of Human Subjects in Research at 254-710-2236. Thank you for helping with this study.

Sincerely,

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Perceptions of Body Image and Thinness in Sororities

This is a study about involvement in sorority organizations and influence on body image and perceptions of thinness. You will be asked questions about your involvement and feelings about belonging to a sorority. Some questions will focus on your feelings and perceptions about your own and other members' body image, exercise, and dieting behaviors.

Once you have completed this questionnaire you have finished the study. Please do not discuss the questions or share the answers with your fellow sorority members until after they have also completed the questionnaire. The information you provide will help organizational communication researchers to better understand the dynamics of organizational functions of sororities, as well as their potential influence on body image of their members. *Thank you for your participation!*

Attitudes about sorority affiliation

Please read the following questions keeping in mind your experiences with your sorority.

1. Respond to the following statements using the following scale:

- 1 – Strongly Agree
- 2 – Agree
- 3 – Neither agree or disagree
- 4 – Disagree
- 5 – Strongly Disagree

<i>Familiarity with Others</i>	Strongly Agree					Strongly Disagree				
I consider my sorority sisters friends.	1	2	3	4	5					
I feel comfortable talking to my sorority sisters.	1	2	3	4	5					
I must work up the courage to talk to a sorority leader about a problem.	1	2	3	4	5					
I have shared my problems with some of my sorority sisters.	1	2	3	4	5					
I spend time outside of sorority activities with some of my sorority sisters.	1	2	3	4	5					
My big sister in my sorority and I talk together often.	1	2	3	4	5					
I feel like I know my sorority sisters pretty well.	1	2	3	4	5					

<i>Acculturation</i>	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree
I know what is expected to succeed in my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5
I know who I should talk to about a sorority related problem.	1	2	3	4	5
I understand the standards of the sorority.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel more stressed than I should at sorority activities.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel very comfortable in my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5
I am tense at sorority functions.	1	2	3	4	5
I can see how my sorority contributions benefit others.	1	2	3	4	5
I know the values of my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5

Recognition

My contributions are appreciated by my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5
My sorority sisters tell me when I do something well.	1	2	3	4	5
My sorority leaders listen to my ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
I think my big sister values my opinions.	1	2	3	4	5
My sorority leaders do not recognize the good work I do for the sorority.	1	2	3	4	5
I think I would be missed if I quit.	1	2	3	4	5

Involvement

I talk to my sorority sisters about how much I like it here.	1	2	3	4	5
I question why we do things the way we do in this sorority.	1	2	3	4	5
I volunteer for duties that benefit the organization.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not prefer to take on more responsibility.	1	2	3	4	5
I talk about how much I enjoy my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel involved in the organization.	1	2	3	4	5

Adaptation and Role Negotiation

I think I have adapted to my sorority's expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
I question why we do things the way we do in my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel like I have too many responsibilities in my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel I have to adapt to too many sorority standards.	1	2	3	4	5
Adapting to the organization's ways has helped me.	1	2	3	4	5
I have offered suggestions for how to improve my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5
I would like to change some of the organization's standards.	1	2	3	4	5

Perceptions of body image and thinness norms

2. In this section please think about the attitudes and behaviors of the women in your sorority regarding exercise and dieting. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement by selecting a number from one to five:

<i>Thinness</i>	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree
My sorority thinks being thin is important.	1	2	3	4	5
I consider most members of my sorority to be thin.	1	2	3	4	5
Thinness is a priority for my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5
Women in my sorority care more about being healthy than being thin.	1	2	3	4	5
Thinner women are seen as more successful in my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5
In order to do well in my sorority it helps to be thin.	1	2	3	4	5
					5
<i>Acceptability</i>					
My sorority sisters think bingeing and purging is acceptable.	1	2	3	4	5
Most women in my sorority would do anything to be thinner.	1	2	3	4	5
My sorority sisters think restricting calories is necessary to be thin.	1	2	3	4	5
Most women in my sorority exercise to be thin.	1	2	3	4	5
Most women in my sorority exercise to be healthy.	1	2	3	4	5
At sorority functions, most sorority members eat very little.	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Encouragement</i>					
Members of my sorority encourage me to diet.	1	2	3	4	5
Members of my sorority encourage me to exercise more often.	1	2	3	4	5
Members of my sorority push me to be thinner.	1	2	3	4	5
My sorority sisters want me to be healthy no matter what I weigh.	1	2	3	4	5
My sorority sisters suggest purging to get rid of extra calories	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Communication</i>					
Members of my sorority make comments about my weight.	1	2	3	4	5
Members of my sorority make comments about their weight.	1	2	3	4	5
Members of my sorority make comments about other people's weight.	1	2	3	4	5
My sorority sisters often mention a desire to lose weight.	1	2	3	4	5
My sorority sisters talk a lot about dieting and exercise.	1	2	3	4	5

<i>Behaviors</i>	Strongly Agree					Strongly Disagree				
Some women in my sorority regularly binge and purge to lose weight.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Many women in my sorority regularly diet to lose weight.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Most women in my sorority frequently exercise to purge food.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Some women in my sorority use laxatives to lose weight.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Most women in my sorority binge and purge to lose weight.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
At least half of the women in my sorority regularly exercise to purge food.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
At least half of the women in my sorority commonly diet to lose weight.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Many women in my sorority use laxatives to lose weight.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

Personal Body Image

3. For the following statements indicate HOW OFTEN you agree with the following statements. Circle the appropriate number beside each statement.

Never = 1 Seldom = 2 Sometimes = 3 Often = 4 Always = 5

	Never				Always
I like what I look like in pictures.	1	2	3	4	5
Other people consider me good looking.	1	2	3	4	5
I am proud of my body.	1	2	3	4	5
I am preoccupied with trying to change my body weight.	1	2	3	4	5
I think my appearance would help me get a job.	1	2	3	4	5
I like what I see when I look in the mirror.	1	2	3	4	5
There are lots of things I'd change about my looks if I could.	1	2	3	4	5
I am satisfied with my weight.	1	2	3	4	5
I wish I looked better.	1	2	3	4	5
I wish I looked like someone else.	1	2	3	4	5
People my own age like my looks.	1	2	3	4	5
My looks upset me.	1	2	3	4	5
I'm as nice looking as most people.	1	2	3	4	5
I'm satisfied with how I look.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel I weight the right amount for my height.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel ashamed of how I look.	1	2	3	4	5
My weight makes me unhappy.	1	2	3	4	5
My looks help me to get dates.	1	2	3	4	5
I worry about the way I look.	1	2	3	4	5
I think I have a good body.	1	2	3	4	5
I look as nice as I'd like to.	1	2	3	4	5

Memorable Messages

Memorable messages are significant messages that people remember for a long time and have a considerable impact on our lives. They may be words of advice told to us by a friend or family member, messages communicated by a person we admire or who holds a position of authority, or even actions we observe that change the way we think about things.

4. Based on the explanation above, please describe a memorable message (i.e. words of advice or an important event) occurring since receiving your sorority bid that had a **SIZABLE AND SIGNIFICANT** impact on your ideas regarding your appearance and weight. The message should be one that you received from another member of your sorority or within the context of a sorority event.

5. Why did you find this message meaningful?

6. In what way did this message have an impact on your organizational or personal life?

7. The message was sent by: (CHOOSE ONE)

- a peer who joined the sorority at the same time I did
- a sorority member with an executive position
- my big sister or another big sister
- a sorority member who has been a member longer than me
- a person outside the organization
- other, please specify: _____

About You

Age: _____

Classification:

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

Years as a sorority member:

- First year
- Second year
- Third year
- Fourth year

Do you hold an executive leadership position within the sorority:

- Yes
- No

Ethnicity:

- Black/African American
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Native American
- Hispanic
- Caucasian
- Other

Please complete the following ONLY if you wish to receive credit for participation. This information will be held strictly confidential and will not be included in the study results.

Name: _____

Sorority (if receiving service credit): _____

Course / instructor name (if receiving extra credit): _____

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form for Subjects

Title: Organizational Influences on Sorority Members' Body Esteem

Conducted By:	Jenna Reno Master's Student Dept. of Communication Studies Baylor University (763) 443-9851 Jenna_Reno@baylor.edu	Lacy G. McNamee, Ph.D. Faculty Sponsor Dept of Communication Studies Baylor University (254) 710-4698 Lacy_McNamee@baylor.edu
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This form asks for your participation in a research study and provides you with information about it. Please read this information and feel free to ask the researcher any pertinent questions before deciding whether to participate. As your participation is entirely voluntary, you may refuse or withdraw your participation at any time without penalty or consequence to your relationships with Baylor University or your affiliated sorority. To do so, simply tell the researcher you wish to stop participation or do not complete the questionnaire associated with this study. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this form for your personal records.

The purpose of this study is to examine functions of perceived organizational norms regarding body weight and their relationship with and effect on body image. This study will examine norms for body weight in relation to three variables. First, this research will seek to identify the effect of perceived norms for weight on body esteem. Second, this research will examine how an individual's assimilation within the organization potentially mediates these effects. Third, this research will also seek to identify significant organizational messages related to body image.

If you agree to take part in this study, you may participate in the following way:

- **One-time Survey:** As a participant in this study you will be asked to complete an online survey with questions pertaining to the areas identified above.

The duration of this study will occur over 2 weeks, and the questionnaire will require approximately 20-30 minutes for completion.

Risks associated with taking part in this study are minimal. Such minimal risks include:

- Loss of confidentiality of responses (Note: see "Assurance of confidentiality and privacy" below for complete information on the steps taken to avoid this risk).
- Psychological harm due to addressing potentially sensitive issues for the participant.

There are no physical risks associated with participating in this study. If you wish to discuss the risks listed above or the potential for any other unforeseen risks, you may contact Jenna Reno at the phone number and email listed at the top of this form.

Benefits of participating in this study include receiving service credit from your organization or extra credit in an undergraduate course upon completion, as well as, learning more about the

communication dynamics related to body image in panhellenic organizations. At the end of this study, the researcher will present a summary of her findings and recommendations to organizations participating in the study. For example the researcher may provide strategies for how organizational members can be more aware of the way they talk about body image-related issues and the pressures related to these discourses. As identifying information is kept only for the purposes of service or course credit the researcher will not divulge results pertaining to specific individuals or organizations. (Note: There is no financial compensation for participating in this study).

Assurance of confidentiality and privacy. In order to maintain complete privacy and confidentiality, the researcher has implemented positive procedures to protect against any loss or breach of these rights. Under no conditions will these protections be compromised. *Pertaining to privacy*, participants will be provided a link to an online survey and will be allowed to complete it at their own convenience.

Pertaining to confidentiality, identifying personal information including names and specific sorority affiliation will be used for providing sorority or course credit ONLY and will not be included in research data ensuring *strict confidentiality*. Files and data will be kept securely in the researcher's possession, and data will be used for research purposes only. Only the authorized researcher, thesis review committee, and Institutional Review Board at Baylor University have the legal right to review your research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. In the event that this research will be published, your organization will be notified prior to publication, and any publications will exclude information that will make it possible to identify you or your organization as participants.

The use of an online survey tool to collect data may entail additional risks to confidentiality. The researcher will be using a respected, top online survey program to collect data in order to safeguard against this risk. Results from the online survey will be gathered directly and only by the researcher. No other persons or parties will have access to the online survey results.

Contacts and Questions: If you have questions, desire additional information, or wish to withdraw your participation, please contact the principal investigator (Jenna Reno). Her phone number and e-mail address are listed at the top of this form. If you have questions about your rights as a participant or wish to report complaints, concerns, or questions about this research please contact Baylor's University Committee for Protection of Human Subjects in Research. The chairman is Michael E. Sherr, One Bear Place #97334, Waco, Texas 76798-7334, Phone number (254) 710-4483.

Statement of Consent:

I read the above information and have sufficient information to make a decision about participating in this study. I initialed the individual aspects of participation that I consent to (please initial in the provided space):

I consent to completing a one-time survey: _____

Signature of Participant:

Date:

Signature of Investigator:

Date

APPENDIX C

Memorable Messages Coding Book

CATEGORY	ITEM	EXAMPLE	# of incidents
Valence of Message	Complimentary, Affirming (+)	"You look really great."	79
	Judgmental, Evaluative (-)	"You're too skinny"	16
	Neutral	"The expectation to be thin or 'hot' is unspoken."	32
Aesthetic Focus of Message	Reference to body weight	"You are so thin"	52
	Reference to outward adornment	"That dress looks really good on you"	16
	Reference to physical characteristic (i.e. hair, eyes)	"You have such great hair"	14
Specificity of Message	Low (e.g., general comment about appearance/weight)	"You're so pretty"	105
	High (e.g., specific comment regarding app / specific event)	"That dress makes you look fat"	22
Health Appeal of Message	Reference to health, well being	"Exercise is important for our health"	24
	Reference to appearance	"Its important to dress always look good"	90
Message Refers to Sexual Desirability	Low (e.g., no direct reference to sexual desirability)	"I love your hair"	54
	Medium (e.g., pretty)	"You look beautiful"	59
	High (e.g., references to "hotness")	"That dress is so sexy on you"	14
Ref. to Fitting a Social/Cultural Archetype	Low	"It doesn't matter what you look like. It's what's inside that counts"	29
	Medium	"You're really pretty"	62
	High	"All ZBZ girls are thin and pretty" "You are so skinny!"	36

(continued)

CATEGORY	ITEM	EXAMPLE	# of incidents
Target of Message	Respondent exclusively	"My big sister told me..."	65
	Respondent and others	"At a meeting we were told..."	28
	Others (not directly including respondent)	"I heard her tell another girl..."	0
	Unknown	No context specified	33
Perception of Message by Respondent	Viewed favorably	"I liked hearing that"	108
	Neutral	No perception specified	8
	Negative, adversely	"I was offended"	10
Degree of Impact on Respondent	High	"I really changed the way..."	19
	Medium	"I feel good whenever I think about it"	98
	Low	"It didn't really affect me"	9
Valence of Impact on Respondent	Favorable	"It made me feel really good about myself"	105
	Neutral	"It didn't really affect me"	10
	Negative	"It made me feel bad about myself"	10
Impacted Behavior?	Yes	"I started eating better", "I stopped exercising so much"	27
	No	"It didn't change my habits"	14
	Cannot determine		84
Nature of Behavior Change	Eating habits	"I stopped dieting all the time"	12
	Exercise habits	"I started working out more"	11
	Superficial enhancements (hair, clothing, makeup)	"I spend more time doing my hair"	8
Valence of Impact on Respondent's View of Sorority	Positive	"It made me really appreciate my sisters"	67
	Negative	"This is a problem in sororities"	4
	Neutral / did not specify		55

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