Chapter One

Introduction

Mental health is an important part of college students’ educational experiences. Poor mental health can affect academic achievement, student retention, and graduation rates. As more students seek counseling, mental health issues are fast becoming a new focus of higher education administrators (Kitzrow, 2003).

Colleges and universities are beginning to pay more attention to mental health and counseling issues among students. On the part of counselors and administrators, there is a greater understanding of young adult development and a desire to avoid legal consequences that can occur if the mental health of students is not addressed (Cooper, 2000).

In addition to administrators and counselors addressing mental health and counseling issues, students have many experiences and characteristics that result in poor mental health and prompt them to seek counseling. The first year of college, in particular, is a sensitive time for the mental and emotional health of college students.

First-year students deal with issues like negative peer interactions, separation from family, feeling overwhelmed, poor academic performance, and financial worries. Consequently, they are likely to experience a decline in mental health during the first year (Sax, Bryant, & Gilmartin, 2002). The depression often experienced in the first year of college can also lead to poor coping skills in stressful situations (Arthur, 1998). Moreover, reported emotional health in freshmen has dropped consistently from 1985 to 1995 (Sax, 1997).

Beyond the first year of college, other factors contribute to poor mental health. Alcohol and drug abuse leads students to counseling (Cooper, 2000). Also, negative social interactions can affect mental health and stress levels (Edwards, Hershberger, Russell, & Markert, 2001). It
has become more culturally acceptable to seek help for mental and emotional issues, such as depression and anxiety (Archer & Cooper, 1998).

Women in particular tend to be more depressed and have more mental health issues than men. Women entering college, in particular, report greater levels of depression than men. (Sax, Bryant, & Gilmartin, 2002). However, women may be more candid in reporting their levels of depression than men, which may mean that there is little or no difference.

Self-esteem is an integral part of overall mental health and addressing self-esteem issues is a way to ensure mental wellness in students (Kittleson, 1989). Those in counseling tend to have lower self-esteem (Bednar, Wells, & Peterson, 1989). Conversely, elements that affect mental health can also affect self-esteem (Harter, 1993). Further, low self-esteem is specifically related to higher rates of attrition (Pritchard & Wilson, 2003) and higher rates of binge drinking (Fortney, Geller, & Glindeymann, 1999).

College students have many experiences that may affect their self-esteem. Those who have greater body satisfaction are more likely to have high self-esteem (Frost & McKelvie, 2004). African American students who attend historically Black institutions have higher self-esteem than African American students at predominantly White schools (Oates, 2004). Students who participate in religious activities also tend to have higher self-esteem (Knox et al, 1998). Negative life events and stressful situations are associated with lower self-esteem among college students (Hudd et al., 2000; Pettit & Joiner, 2001).

College-age women, in particular, can have experiences that can affect self-esteem. Women who participate in gender-related activities, such as women’s studies courses, report higher levels of self-esteem than females who do not participate in such activities (Macalister, 1999).
Self-esteem can be a dynamic construct that changes depending on certain life events and situations. These changes in self-esteem are most likely to occur during the adolescent years (Baldwin & Hoffman, 2002).

As a dynamic construct, self-esteem “does not develop in a vacuum, but is created out of… the social milieu” (Steffenhagen & Burns, 1987, p. 23). As students mature from childhood through adolescence, the influence of peers on self-esteem becomes more important (Caunt, 2003). This social influence on self-esteem can be manifested in several ways.

Perceptions of approval from others have an impact on self-esteem, especially in the adolescent years (Harter, 1993). Bednar, Wells, and Peterson (1989) agree, arguing that self-esteem is responsive to feedback from the social environment.

These socially-based changes in self-esteem can be affected by social rejection (Eisenberger & Lieberman, 2004). In such instances, self-esteem may be diminished because the student does not feel accepted by a group of peers. Ostracism from a specific group or organization, due to physical, social, or behavioral differences, can also lead to decreased levels of self-esteem (Caunt, 2003).

Rejection may also affect self-esteem indirectly. Rejection may cause psychological processes that negatively influence self-esteem (Bednar, Wells, & Peterson, 1989). Steffenhagen and Burns (1987) concur and state that status, an important component of self-esteem, is established through competition to belong in a social group, such as a fraternity or sorority.

Greek recruitment is an experience that may affect self-esteem. Greek recruitment is the process by which fraternities and sororities select new members. According to the National Panhellenic Council, there are three different types of sorority recruitment: continuous, structured, and partially-structured (National Panhellenic Conference, n.d.).
Continuous recruitment is a type of recruitment that has no formal time frame or process, and sororities may select new members at any time of the year. Continuous recruitment can take place in addition to the two other types of recruitment (National Panhellenic Conference, n.d.).

Sororities often participate in structured recruitment, which is a formal process involving a series of events held during several days. Structured recruitment takes place once a year, usually at the beginning of the fall or spring semester. In this type of recruitment, events are meticulously scheduled and timed. Potential members and chapters are required to comply with an assortment of regulations. Usually, potential members are required to visit as many chapters as possible, and may not skip chapters. Chapters must obey strict regulations about the number of members allowed at events, length of events, and permissible activities during events. At the end of each day, chapters are allowed to invite a certain number of women to the next day’s function, which means that some potential members will not be invited back. Chapters that traditionally perform weakly during the recruitment process are allowed to invite more women to the events. Potential members also decide which chapters interest them most (National Panhellenic Conference, n.d.).

Partially-structured recruitment is a combination of continuous and structured recruitment. Typically, common events are scheduled similarly to structured recruitment, but regulations affecting chapters and potential members are limited. Partially-structured recruitment creates a relaxed environment for recruitment (National Panhellenic Conference, n.d.).

All types of recruitment are known as mutual selection processes. This means that both chapters and potential members have a say in the recruitment selection process. Chapters will not invite back some potential members, meaning that those potential members will not receive a bid to join the organization. Potential members may choose to attend events only at chapters in
which they have an interest, and may choose not to accept a bid from a chapter (National Panhellenic Conference, n.d.).

All three types of sorority recruitment involve rejection of some potential members. As a result, the rejected women may feel as though they are not accepted by a peer group. As Eisenberger & Lieberman (2004) note, failure to be accepted by a peer group can lead to diminished self-esteem. Also, structured sorority recruitment is characterized by long days and stressful situations. For the potential members involved in recruitment, these feelings of stress and of not being accepted could have negative impacts on self-esteem.

In summary, mental health affects the quality of students’ educational experience (Arthur, 1998; Edwards, Hershberger, Russell, & Markert, 2001; Sax, 1997; Sax, Bryant, & Gilmartin, 2002). Mental health is related to issues involving retention, graduation, and academic achievement (Kitzrow, 2003).

High self-esteem is a component of good mental health (Bednar, Wells, & Peterson, 1989; Harter, 1993) and thus also relates to issues involving retention, graduation, and academic achievement (Kittleson, 1989). Self-esteem can be a dynamic construct, especially during the adolescent years (Baldwin & Hoffman, 2002). Also, self-esteem can be affected by social experiences, particularly those that make students feel rejected by peer groups (Eisenberg & Lieberman, 2004; Bednar, Wells, & Peterson, 1989; Steffenhagen & Burns, 1987; Caunt, 2003). Accordingly, sorority recruitment is an experience that may affect the self-esteem of participants.

Because sorority recruitment involves rejection, participation may make potential members feel unaccepted by the peer group of one or more sororities. This feeling of lack of acceptance may lead to decreased self-esteem. Research is needed to determine if the rejection involved with sorority recruitment is, in fact, related to decreased self-esteem. This study
attempted to address this issue by measuring the self-esteem of potential members before and after recruitment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between recruitment and the self-esteem of participants in two ways. First, this study sought to determine if self-esteem changes during recruitment for two groups of Potential Members (PMs): those who complete recruitment (persistent PMs) and those who withdraw from the recruitment process (withdrawn PMs). Second, this study investigated how self-esteem differed at the start and the end of recruitment between these two groups of PMs.

The target sample included approximately 600 potential sorority members at a large, land-grant institution in a mid-Atlantic state. PMs were women who participated in formal sorority recruitment at that institution during a two-week period of time in January 2007.

Data were collected by administering the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES) (Rosenberg, 1979) twice in that two-week period: once before recruitment began, and again when the PM either withdrew from recruitment or completed the recruitment process. PMs were separated into two groups, those who completed the recruitment process (persistent PMs), and those who withdrew and decided not to join a sorority at that time (withdrawn PMs).

Research Questions

Specifically, the study was designed to address the following research questions:

1. Does self-esteem change among persistent PMs between the start and the end of recruitment?
2. Does self-esteem change among withdrawn PMs between the start and the end of recruitment?
3. Does self-esteem differ between persistent and withdrawn PMs at the start of recruitment?

4. Does self-esteem differ between persistent and withdrawn PMs at the end of recruitment?

Significance of the Study

This study was significant for many constituencies on college campuses. One group that could benefit is the counseling center staff. The results of this study provided data about self-esteem related issues. Counselors might use the results to examine the type of services they provide during recruitment time periods, or to develop mental health programs around a sorority recruitment theme.

Another constituency that may benefit from this study is residence life staff. The results of this study provided data for resident advisors and directors about the well-being of their residents who might participate in sorority recruitment. Residence life staff might use the results to anticipate potential conversations with residents surrounding sorority recruitment and self-esteem issues.

The final group that might benefit from this research is Greek life administrators. The results provided data for administrators who coordinate the training and selection of student recruitment counselors. Those administrators and staff members might use the results to train recruitment counselors to recognize and talk about self-esteem related issues with PMs.

This study also had significance for future research. For example, this study examined the self-esteem of only women during the recruitment process. Future studies could investigate self-esteem among men during similar recruitment activities. Such a study would expand the information available about self-esteem in relation to Greek recruitment in general.
Future research might also expand upon self-esteem issues in sorority-related activities. This study explored only self-esteem during the recruitment process. Future studies could investigate self-esteem among sorority members instead of PMs. Such research would expand the available information about self-esteem and the total sorority experience.

Finally, future scholars might want to explore the long-term effects of sorority recruitment. The current study investigated only the short-term effects of sorority recruitment on self-esteem. A future study could examine the long-term effects of recruitment on PMs’ self-esteem. A study such as this would add to the information available about the effects of Greek life on self-esteem.

Finally, this study was significant for future policy. The results provided Greek life administrators with information about the self-esteem levels of PMs. These administrators might use this information when considering policies regarding the presence of counselors or other support staff during recruitment activities.

Greek life administrators might also use this information to develop policies about recruitment guides. The results about self-esteem levels of PMs might influence the policies in place about the training of the recruitment guides.

The results of the study were useful to Greek life administrators in another way. The findings might influence policy about mandatory recruitment events, specifically requiring PMs to attend sessions related to self-esteem and the philosophy behind the “mutual selection” recruitment process.

Delimitations

As with all research, the present study had some initial delimitations. The first delimitation related to the instrument used to collect data. The SES is a short, 10-item
instrument, and may not fully measure self-esteem. If so, this might have influenced the results in some unforeseen manner. However, the SES is “perhaps the most widely used self-esteem measure in social science research,” and thought to be effective (The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, n.d.).

A final delimitation is related to the method of study. It is possible that participants were not candid in their SES responses, and that self-reported self-esteem may not be fully accurate. The participants completed the SES after the day’s recruitment activities, and may have been eager to simply complete their obligation. Thus, the participants may have completed the SES without fully deliberating their responses. This might have influenced the findings.

Despite these delimitations, this was an important study. It provided initial insights into the self-esteem levels of women participating in sorority recruitment. Also, the study provided insights into how recruitment may affect PMs’ self-esteem on a short-term basis.

Organization of the Study

The present study is organized in five chapters. Chapter One introduced the topic of the study, the research questions, and the significance of the study. The second chapter reviews the literature relevant to the study. Chapter Three describes the methodology of the study, including the sampling techniques and the procedures surrounding the use of the SES. The fourth chapter describes the results of the study, and the final chapter discusses those results and their implications for future practice, research, and policy.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

To study the effects of sorority recruitment on self-esteem, I examined the literature on self-esteem among college students. Within that body of work, three major themes emerged: the consequences of low and high self-esteem, factors contributing to low and high self-esteem, and the self-esteem of certain college-age populations.

Next, it was necessary to examine the studies involving the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES). Among this literature are studies using samples of children, adults, and adolescents.

It was also necessary to review research on Greek students. This revealed trends in the following areas: outcomes of Greek involvement and issues related to Greek recruitment.

Research on Self-Esteem

Literature on self-esteem issues among students in higher education reflects three main trends. First, self-esteem levels of college students can predict certain academic and lifestyle consequences (Bettencourt, Charlton, Eubanks, Kernahan, & Fuller, 1999; Glindemann, Geller, & Fortney, 2004; Heinonen, Raikkonen, & Keltikangas-Jarvinian, 2005; Johnson & Cohen, 2004; Korn & Maggs, 2004; Lowery, Blanks, Kurpius, Sollenberger, Nicpon, Befort, & Huser, 2005; Luhtanen & Crocker, 2005; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003; Shaw-Zirt, Popali-Lehane, Chaplin, & Bergman, 2005; Smith, Gerrard, & Gibbons, 1997; Wilburn & Smith, 2005). Also, a great deal of literature explores predictors of low and high levels of self-esteem (Frost & McKelvie, 2004; Goodman & Pickens, 2001; Hudd, Dumlao, Erdmann-Sager, Murray, Phan, Soukas, Yokuzuka, 2000; Knox, Langehough, Walters, & Rowlet, 1998; Macalister, 1999; Oates, 2004; Pettit & Joiner, 2001). Finally, much of the literature ascertains the levels of self-esteem for students in
different demographic groups (Alessandria & Nelson, 2005; Blake & Rust, 2000; Cosden & McNamara, 1997; Niemz, Griffiths, & Banyrad, 2005; van Laar, 2000).

Consequences of High or Low Self-esteem

To grasp the importance of studying self-esteem in college students, it helps to understand how self-esteem issues can affect those students. Issues with low self-esteem can produce negative outcomes during the college years and in young adulthood.

Low or high levels of self-esteem among students can predict certain elements of physical and mental health. Having low self-esteem in this time period can lead to increased risk of suicide and pessimism (Heinonen, Raikkonen, & Keltikangas-Jarvinan, 2005; Wilburn & Smith, 2005). For women, low self-esteem can also predict low levels of body satisfaction. Conversely, students with high self-esteem are more likely to engage in physical fitness activities (Lowery et al., 2005).

Female students’ health practices and perceptions are significantly shaped by self-esteem. Women with low self-esteem feel more vulnerable to health problems, such as unplanned pregnancies. Women with high self-esteem are more likely to engage in self-serving health practices, such as contraceptive behavior, but are less likely to acknowledge health risks realistically. This means that although they practice healthy habits, they underestimate even the small risks associated with practices such as sexual activity (Smith, Gerrard, & Gibbons, 1997).

Self-esteem levels can also predict student attrition rates and adjustment to college. Low self-esteem is related to student attrition (Pritchard & Wilson, 2003). Students with high levels of collective (social) self-esteem are more likely to adjust to college life, both socially and academically (Bettencourt et al., 1999). Among students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, those with higher levels of self-esteem adjust to college better than others (Shaw-Zirt
et al., 2005). Students with low self-esteem also are more likely to be socially isolated (Johnson & Cohen, 2004).

Consequences of low self-esteem have mixed results in relationship to alcohol. Low levels of self-esteem cannot predict alcohol use (Luhtanen & Crocker, 2005). However, low levels of self-esteem can predict certain behaviors and attitudes among students who do drink. Students with low self-esteem believe that alcohol use has a positive social effect, meaning they believe those students who drink alcohol have more friends, are more popular, and have better social lives (Korn & Maggs, 2004). Also, among students who drink, those with low self-esteem become more intoxicated than their high self-esteem counterparts (Glindemann, Geller, & Fortney, 1999). In addition to the effects of self-esteem, researchers have explored how certain life events or attitudes can predict self-esteem among college students.

Predictors of Self-esteem

Select activities, attitudes, and life events can predict self-esteem levels of college students. Certain issues, in particular, are predictors of high levels of self-esteem. Body image issues can affect the self-esteem of college students. Students with greater body satisfaction are more likely to have high self-esteem (Frost & McKelvie, 2004).

Participation in gender-related activities can affect students’ self-esteem. After taking a women’s studies class, female students increase their reported levels of overall self-esteem, and all students report an increase in academic performance self-esteem (Macalister, 1999).

Also, African American students experience higher levels of self-esteem when they attend school with other Black students. African American students who attend historically Black colleges experience an increase in self-esteem not found in their counterparts at predominantly White institutions (Oates, 2004).
Finally, religious activities are also a predictor of higher levels of self-esteem. Students with greater participation in religious activities have higher self-esteem (Knox et al., 1998).

Negative life events, in general, produce lower levels of self-esteem in college students (Pettit & Joiner, 2001). Students under stress exhibit low self-esteem (Hudd et al., 2000). College students from divorced families report low retrospective self-esteem during their childhood and adolescent years, but experience a sharper increase in self-esteem during the college years than students from non-divorced families (Goodman & Pickens, 2001).

In addition to the predictors and consequences of self-esteem, the literature has explored the differences in levels of self-esteem among certain populations. The following is a description of certain student populations and their respective self-esteem issues.

*Self-esteem among Students in Different Demographic Groups*

When self-esteem levels cannot be attributed to certain factors, or predict behaviors, it is nonetheless important to examine the self-esteem levels of some college populations. Demographics that pertain to race, generational status, or ability are especially of interest.

Students with differing types of learning disabilities and psychological disorders have self-esteem similar to other students. Cosden and McNamara (1997) found that students with all kinds of learning disabilities had similar levels of self-esteem as other students, with the exceptions of higher social self-esteem and lower academic self-esteem.

College students with physical disabilities have lower levels of self-esteem than able students. However, physically disabled students have self-esteem levels that correlate with their levels of self-efficacy, and can have self-esteem similar to students without a physical disability if they feel that their disability does not interfere with their daily lives (Blake & Rust, 2000).
Students who spend more time online also report differences in self-esteem. Pathological Internet users have low self-esteem compared to students who are not online as often (Niemz, Griffiths, & Banyard, 2005). Pathological Internet use is defined as having four or more characteristics of Internet use that interfere with daily life. For example, those students classified as pathological users indicate that their use has affected their schoolwork, sleep, or the amount of free time they have to spend in other activities.

Generational status also influences self-esteem. First-generation American students report higher self-esteem than students who are not first-generation (Alessandria & Nelson, 2005). In this case, first-generation status applies to students whose parents were not born in the United States. The authors hypothesized that the parents of first-generation college students have high self-esteem, and parent their children to have high self-esteem as well.

Finally, self-esteem can differ among students based on race. At least one study suggests that African American students have equal or higher self-esteem compared to White students (van Laar, 2000). According to this study, African American college students tend to have lower expectancies for their college experience, and as a result tend to meet or surpass those expectations, which positively affects their self-esteem levels.

In addition to the topic of self-esteem, I also need to summarize the use of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Specifically, a description of samples used with the SES is a necessary addition.

Research Using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

To better understand previous use of the Rosenberg SES, I examined the samples who have completed the instrument over time. Different samples used in SES studies include children, adults, and adolescents.
Research that employs the SES often includes samples of children. Studies using these samples fall into a variety of topics, typically involving family issues. These include parental relationships, parenting styles, and family relationships, all in regards to self-esteem (Axinn, Barber, & Thornton, 1999; Felson & Zielinski, 1989). For example, researchers have found that parental and family integration positively affect self-esteem in early adulthood (Yabiku, Axinn, & Thornton, 1999), and supportive parenting styles affect the self-esteem of children (Felson & Zielinski, 1989).

Other studies that employ the SES include samples of adults. Research involving adults and the SES are more varied than those that study children. For instance, one broad topic that uses the SES with adult samples is work-related issues and self-esteem, such as social class, unemployment, and the receipt of federal aid (Elliot, 1996; Gecas & Seff, 1989; Shamir, 1986; Thomas & Perry-Jenkins, 1994). Other studies explore relationships between family issues and self-esteem, such as domestic violence and parental roles (Goldstein & Rosenbaum, 1985; Reitzes & Mutran, 1994). Further traits like immigrant status, sex, and ethnic identity can affect self-esteem among adults (Hoelter, 1983; Schnittker, 2002).

Finally, studies have been conducted that administer the SES to include samples of adolescents and college-aged students. Some of these studies explore topics dealing with certain behaviors and their relationships to self-esteem, such as spiritual activity, Internet use, and drinking (Knox et al., 1998; Luhtanen & Crocker, 2005; Niemz, Griffiths, & Banyard, 2005). Other studies explore relationships between self-esteem and other characteristics, like learning disabilities, attrition, stress, and body image (Lowery et al., 2005; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003; Shaw-Zirt, et al., 2005; Wilburn & Smith, 2005).
While the topic of this study was self-esteem, the sample used included women participating in sorority recruitment. Thus, it was important to examine the literature on Greek students and the recruitment process.

Research on Greek Membership and Recruitment

Researchers have explored several topics on students in fraternities and sororities. The research in this review can be divided into two sections: the outcomes of Greek membership and issues surrounding Greek recruitment.

Outcomes of Greek Membership

Greek membership can have academic and social consequences for college students. Specifically, Greek membership can affect academic outcomes, drinking behavior, interpersonal relationships, and racial segregation (Alva, 1998; Bartlett, 2001; Danielson, Taylor, & Hartford, 2001; Durkin et al., 1996; Gellin, 2003; Hayek, Carini, O’Day, & Kuh, 2002; Pace & McGrath, 2002; Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Pike, 2000; Pike, 2003; Reisburg, 2000; Sidanius, Van Laar, & Levin, 2004; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001).

Greek membership has mixed results on academic outcomes. First, membership in Greek organizations can have a negative effect on cognitive development. This holds true especially during the first year of college, but the negative effects are weaker in the second and third years (Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2001). However, students involved in campus activities, including Greek organizations, report higher levels of critical thinking (Gellin, 2003). Also, Black students at predominantly White institutions who are involved in traditionally African American Greek organizations report a higher grade point average than those who are not members of such groups (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). Additionally, students in Greek organizations experience
equal or greater levels of faculty interaction and participation in academically challenging tasks (Hayek, Carini, O’Day, & Kuh, 2002).

Membership in a Greek organization also has certain effects on social behavior. Drinking, in particular, is a subject addressed in much of the literature about students in fraternities and sororities. Members of Greek organizations are more likely to drink alcohol, and to do so irresponsibly. Students in fraternities and sororities are more likely to binge drink than students in volunteer organizations (Pace & McGrath, 2002). Greek students are also more likely to report their drinking behavior in surveys or questionnaires, which implies that they in fact drink more than independent students (Alva, 1998). Students in fraternities and sororities also use false identification to obtain alcohol more often than their unaffiliated counterparts (Durkin et al., 1996). In the media and in reality, alcohol is a major part of fraternity and sorority culture (Reisberg, 2000).

While many studies have illustrated simple demographic trends concerning Greeks and alcohol, a literature review by Danielson, Taylor, and Hartford (2001) analyzed the literature to generate new hypotheses about the cause and effect relationship of Greek life and drinking. The authors found that Greek students are more likely to have been drinkers in high school, and that students who were non-drinkers in high school are more likely to become drinkers if they join a Greek organization. While alcohol use is intrinsically connected to Greek life, the relationship is more complicated than cause and effect. The use of alcohol in high school indicates that students who are already alcohol users join Greek organizations, and that joining a Greek organization does not necessarily create or cause drinking behavior.

However, students in fraternities and sororities can experience positive social outcomes. Membership in social organizations, including fraternities and sororities, can lead to the
development of interpersonal relationships (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Specifically, Greek students have higher levels of social involvement and engagement, especially in the last year of college (Pike, 2000; Pike, 2003).

Participating in social organizations can also lead to racial segregation and tension. White students are more likely to join Greek organizations (which are predominantly White), and minority students are more likely to join minority (non-Greek) organizations (Sidanius, Van Laar, & Levin, 2004). Several predominantly White fraternity chapters have been involved in racially charged incidents, where members have been photographed wearing blackface costumes at theme parties. Chapters and members were disciplined in the fallout of these cases (Bartlett, 2001), but incidents like these illustrate racial tensions that surround Greek organizations.

In addition to the outcomes of Greek membership, literature on Greek students also includes information about the recruitment process. Below is a description of the issues surrounding fraternity and sorority recruitment processes.

*Issues Surrounding Greek Recruitment*

Greek recruitment can also offer insight into issues surrounding involvement in fraternities and sororities. Greek recruitment can discourage Black students from joining predominantly White sororities, and vice versa (Chang & DeAngelo, 2002). Women who participate in the recruitment process and experience rejection from sororities are more likely to be depressed (Atlas & Morier, 1994). Both men and women who participate in recruitment, but do not receive a bid to join a chapter, are more likely to have negative self-images (Keller & Hart, 1982).

Recruitment in Black Greek-Letter Organizations (BGLOs) can also help to describe the climate of fraternities and sororities. In 1990, the national BGLOs voted to abolish the practice
of pledging, which often involved hazing and other activities where the potential initiates would have to prove their worth to their respective organizations. Pledging was replaced with the membership intake process, which focuses on education in place of hazing (Kimbrough, 1997). Despite this change, some BGLOs continue to perform the pledging (hence hazing) activities underground, and ridicule the groups that follow the intake process (Kimbrough, 2004).

In summary, there is extensive research on self-esteem and college students. Studies have examined the consequences of high and low self-esteem, such as physical and mental health (Heinonen, Raikkonen, & Keltikangas-Jarvinan, 2005; Lowery et al., 2005; Smith, Gerrard, & Gibbons, 1997; Wilburn & Smith, 2005), adjustment to college (Bettencourt et al., 1999; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003; Johnson & Cohen, 2004; Shaw-Zirt et al., 2005) and alcohol use and perceptions (Glindemann, Feller, & Fortney, 1999; Korn & Maggs, 2004; Luhtanen & Crocker, 2005). Literature also explores how certain characteristics correlate with levels of self-esteem, like negative life events (Goodman & Pickens, 2001; Hudd, et al., 2000; Pettit & Joiner, 2001). Studies have also explained how certain student populations have typical levels of self-esteem, like race (van Laar, 2000) and disability status (Blake & Rust, 2000; Cosden & McNamara, 1997; Shaw-Zirt, et al., 2005).

Research that employs the SES has been conducted on numerous types of groups. Studies include samples of children (Axinn, Barber, & Thornton, 1998; Felson & Zielinks, 1989; Yabiku, Axinn, & Thornton, 1999), adults (Elliot, 1996; Gecas & Seff, 1989; Goldstein & Rosenbaum, 1985; Hoelter, 1983; Reitzes & Mutran, 1994; Schnittker, 2002; Shamir, 1986; Thomas & Perry-Jenkins, 1994), and adolescents (Knox et al., 1998; Lowery et al., 2005; Luhtanen & Crocker, 2005; Niemz, Griffiths, & Banyard, 2005; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003; Shaw-Zirt et al., 2005; Wilburn & Smith, 2005).
Finally, research on fraternities and sororities has focused on the outcomes of membership and issues surrounding recruitment. Greek membership is associated with mixed academic outcomes (Gellin, 2003; Hayek, Carini, O’Day, & Kuh, 2002; Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2001; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001), complicated relationships with alcohol (Alva, 1998; Danielson, Taylor, & Hartford, 2001; Durkin et al., 1996; Pace & McGrath, 2002; Reisberg, 2000), social engagement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Pike, 2000; Pike, 2003), and racial segregation and tension (Bartlett, 2001; Sidanius, Van Laar, & Levin, 2004). Greek recruitment can lead to segregation (Chang & DeAngelo, 2002), depression (Atlas & Morier, 1994), and negative self-image of potential members (Keller & Hart, 1982). Also, changes in recruitment for Black organizations have mixed results (Kimbrough, 1997; Kimbrough, 2004).

What is missing from the literature, however, is a connection between self-esteem and Greek involvement. Self-esteem issues have not been studied in relationship to Greek recruitment. Though Keller and Hart (1982) did explore a relationship between Greek recruitment and self-image, a concept of self-esteem, their study is now more than 20 years old. Also, while studies using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale have included samples of college-age populations (Knox et al., 1998; Lowery et al., 2005; Luhtanen & Crocker, 2005; Niemz, Griffiths, & Banyard, 2005; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003; Shaw-Zirt et al., 2005; Wilburn & Smith, 2005), no study has been found that utilizes the SES with students participating in Greek recruitment. This study sought to fill those gaps in the existing bodies of literature by examining the relationship between Greek recruitment and self-esteem in the contemporary Greek recruitment climate.
Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between recruitment and the self-esteem of participants in two ways. First, this study sought to determine if self-esteem changes during recruitment for two groups of PMs: those who complete recruitment (persistent PMs) and those who withdraw from the recruitment process (withdrawn PMs). Second, this study investigated how self-esteem differed at the start and the end of recruitment for both groups of PMs.

Specifically, I analyzed data from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES) to answer the following research questions:

1. Does self-esteem change among persistent PMs between the start and the end of recruitment?
2. Does self-esteem change among withdrawn PMs between the start and the end of recruitment?
3. Does self-esteem differ between persistent and withdrawn PMs at the start of recruitment?
4. Does self-esteem differ between persistent PMs and withdrawn PMs at the end of recruitment?

In this chapter I describe the methodology used in the study. I start by describing the recruitment process at the study institution. I also discuss sample selection, instrumentation, and the reliability and validity of that instrument. Finally, data collection and analysis are also described.
The Recruitment Process

At the institution where the study was conducted, sorority recruitment formally takes place once a year. Every January, freshmen women have the opportunity to register for and participate in recruitment. Freshmen may not participate in recruitment or join a sorority until this time.

Formal recruitment at the institution takes place over six days. On the first two days, also known as Open House, all PMs visit all 13 sorority chapters on campus. Each visit, or “party,” occurs at a specific time and has a strict time limit. PMs receive a specific schedule of which chapters they will visit during which times.

At the end of each recruitment round, chapters participate in a process called “membership selection” to determine who will be invited to the next round. At the same time, PMs prioritize the chapters they would most like to visit the next day. Once the chapters and PMs have made those decisions, a computer program uses that information to determine the PMs’ party lists for the next round.

The third day of recruitment is known as Philanthropy Day. On this day, PMs may visit up to 10 chapters and again receive a specific schedule. The parties are scheduled and timed. This day includes a presentation about the chapters’ involvement in philanthropic activities. At the end of this day, PMs again complete a preference card, indicating five number-one choices. The chapters again have the opportunity to select PMs to be invited to the next round, and schedules are generated for the following day.

The fourth day of recruitment is known as Sisterhood Night. On this day, PMs may visit up to six chapters and again they receive a specific party schedule. The parties are scheduled and timed. This day includes a presentation about the special characteristics of the chapter. At the
end of this day, PMs again complete a preference card of the chapters they would like to visit again. The chapters again decide which PMs to invite to the next round, and schedules are created for the final night of recruitment.

The last night of recruitment is Preference Night. On this night, PMs may visit up to three chapters during assigned times. The parties are scheduled and timed. This night is designed for the PMs to make a decision about which chapter they most want to join. At the end of the night, PMs complete the final preference card, indicating one first-choice chapter, one second-choice chapter, and one third-choice chapter. The chapters also create a prioritized bid list, which includes all PMs that attended preference functions at that chapter. A computer program then analyzes the preferences of the PMs and the chapters, and creates a finalized bid list. This list determines which PM receives a bid to join which sorority.

The final day in the process is known as Bid Day. On this day, PMs learn which sorority they have received a bid to join, and have the opportunity to accept or decline this bid. All PMs may receive only one bid at this time. There are a select few PMs who may be eligible to participate in continuous recruitment after Bid Day, but this study does not address participation in this post-Bid Day process.

Sample Selection

The research questions from this study required that a specific population be used: women participating in formal sorority recruitment. Because of the highly structured nature of the recruitment process, the potential sample included all women registered for recruitment in January 2007 at the institution where the study was conducted. Data were collected from all participants at two points in time (Round 1 and Round 2).
All women who wanted to participate were required to register for recruitment and to attend one of several general meetings prior to the start of recruitment activities. All of those at the meetings were asked to participate in the study. Staff members of the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life (OFSL) ensured that all those at the general meetings were indeed registered to participate in recruitment, thus meeting the criteria for the study. Round 1 of the SES was distributed at that time.

For the second round of the SES distribution, PMs were asked to complete the instrument at one of two times. A PM who withdrew from recruitment prior to the end of the six-day period was asked to complete the withdrawal paperwork, including a survey from OFSL which included the SES. PMs who completed recruitment were asked to complete a different survey from OFSL that also included the SES.

All PMs are assigned specific individual numbers for recruitment. PMs listed their assigned number on their paperwork to withdraw or on their preference card. These individual identification numbers were used to determine which PMs withdrew and which PMs completed the recruitment process.

Instrumentation

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES) was designed by sociologist Morris Rosenberg, and last revised in 1989. The SES is designed to measure self-esteem with items that ask respondents about how they feel about themselves. The instrument has one section of 10 items. Items require respondents to rate how they feel about themselves. For instance, one item asks respondents if they feel equally as worthwhile as others. Another item asks respondents if they feel worthless or useless. See Appendix A for a copy of the SES.
Respondents are asked to respond to items using a Likert-type scale where choice number 1 equals “Strongly Agree” and choice number 4 equals “Strongly Disagree.” The responses are given a value of 0, 1, 2, or 3, and are scored in one of two ways. For half the items, a response of 1 (“Strongly Agree”) is assigned a score of 3. For reverse worded items, a response of 1 (“Strongly Agree”) is assigned a score of 0. Reverse worded items are included to ensure that respondents are reading items carefully and conscientiously deliberating their responses.

Five of the 10 items are written so that a response of “Strongly Agree” indicates a high level of self-esteem. The other five items are written so that an agreement response indicates a low level of self-esteem.

Validity and Reliability

Validity of an instrument refers to the appropriateness and usefulness of specific inferences from that instrument (Creswell, 2003). Construct validity of the SES has been scored against the related concepts of depressive affect, anxiety, and peer-group reputation. Rosenberg hypothesized that respondents with low levels of self-esteem will have higher levels of depression and anxiety, and feel that they have a negative reputation in their peer group. Respondents who have low levels of self-esteem were found to mirror the above qualities (Rosenberg, 1979).

Reliability of an instrument refers to the consistency, stability, and precision of scores of time and different populations (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). The internal consistency reliability of the SES has been scored between .77 and .88, which indicates that the instrument is reliable in various contexts. Test-retest reliability correlations have ranged from .82 to .85 at 1- and 2-week intervals, respectively (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). Also, the SES has been used as a primary
Data Collection

Before collecting data for this study, I first obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at the institution where the study was conducted (See Appendix B). After obtaining permission, I contacted the staff of the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life (OFSL) at that institution to seek support in collecting data.

Once I received permission from the OFSL staff, I began to organize the SES instrument for Round 1 (pre-recruitment). I prepared survey packets for every participant that included a copy of the SES on an optical-scanning form and two copies of the informed consent letter. As PMs arrived at the general meetings that preceded recruitment, I gave each PM a packet. When given the packet, the PMs were told to wait for instructions before opening or looking at the packet.

At the appropriate time in the meeting, I instructed the PMs to open the packet. I explained what the study was about and asked them to read and sign the consent form if they were willing to participate in the study (see Appendix C). I then read instructions on how to complete the instrument. Respondents were told to report their PM number on the optical-scanning form. I also told the participants about how Round 2 of the SES would be administered. Finally, I collected all informed consent forms and Round 1 instruments from the participants.

To administer Round 2 (post-recruitment) of the SES, I was assigned space at the central staff area used during recruitment. Next, I prepared two different types of Round 2 survey packets. One type included the “withdrawal” version of the OFSL survey, which included the SES on a labeled optical-scanning answer sheet (see Appendix D). Using labeled scan forms for
each round enabled me to distinguish responses from persistent and withdrawn PMs. When a PM decided to withdraw from recruitment, she would come by the central staff area to complete the necessary paperwork. When the PM was given the paperwork, she was instructed to complete the survey and indicate her PM number on the optical-scanning form. If a PM decided to withdraw without completing the necessary paperwork, an electronic version of the instrument was emailed to her.

Round 2 responses to the SES were also obtained from persistent PMs. The Round 2 survey packets were prepared in the same manner again, including the labeled optical-scanning answer sheet. At the conclusion of recruitment, PMs who had completed the process were also required to complete the OFSL survey (see Appendix E). Again, the SES was embedded within the survey. At the end of recruitment, all PMs were asked by Recruitment Guides to complete the survey and report their PM numbers on the optical-scanning form. The surveys were then collected.

Data Analysis

Once all of the surveys were collected from Round 1 and Round 2, the data were analyzed to address the research questions posed in the study. The first research question asked whether self-esteem changed during recruitment among persistent PMs. To address this question, the mean score on the SES was calculated for all persistent PMs from Round 1, then the mean score for all persistent PMs on Round 2 of the survey was determined. Then, a t-test was performed to see if the mean scores from the two rounds differed significantly (p<.05).

The second research question asked whether self-esteem changed during recruitment among withdrawn PMs. To address this question, the mean score on the SES was calculated for all withdrawn PMs from Round 1, then the mean score for all withdrawn PMs on Round 2 of the
The third research question examined whether or not self-esteem differed between persistent and withdrawn PMs at the beginning of recruitment. To determine this, the mean SES score for persistent PMs and the mean score for withdrawn PMs on Round 1 of the survey were calculated. Then a t-test was performed to determine if the mean scores from the two groups differed significantly (p<.05).

The fourth research question examined whether or not self-esteem differed between persistent and withdrawn PMs at the end of recruitment. To determine this, the mean SES score for persistent PMs and the mean score for withdrawn PMs on Round 2 of the survey were calculated. Then a t-test was performed to determine if the mean scores from the two groups differed significantly (p<.05).

In conclusion, this project sought to study self-esteem among women participating in sorority recruitment. The data collection and analysis procedures described in this chapter were deemed as sufficient to answer the research questions posed in the study.
Chapter Four

Results

To explore how sorority recruitment affects the self-esteem of PMs, participants completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale before and after recruitment activities. Results from the data collection are reported in this chapter. First, I describe the demographic characteristics of the sample. Second, I provide results from the data analysis which describe the change in self-esteem from the beginning to the end of recruitment among persistent PMs. Third, I explain the change in self-esteem in pre-post scores among withdrawn PMs. Fourth, I provide results that describe the difference in self-esteem levels between persistent and withdrawn PMs at the start of recruitment. Finally, I describe the difference in self-esteem levels between persistent and withdrawn PMs at the end of recruitment.

I solicited participation in the study according to the methods outlined in Chapter Three. Seven hundred thirty two (732) students registered to participate in sorority recruitment, and of those students, 607 attended the orientation session that was required for participation. Of the students at orientation, 591 students agreed to participate in the study. Of the students who agreed to participate, a total of 336 students completed every part of the study and were eligible to be included in the data analysis. These 336 respondents represent a response rate of 55.35%. In this final group of participants there were 19 withdrawn PMs and 317 persistent PMs.

Description of the Sample

As part of the recruitment registration process, the PMs agreed to supply information on their college, grade point average, and class standing. While this information is not directly related to the study, I wanted to paint a picture of the characteristics of the respondents. The GPA, class, and college information was verified by official records kept by the Office of
Fraternity and Sorority Life. Of the 19 withdrawn PMs, 11 were freshmen, 8 were sophomores, and none were juniors. No students had a GPA of below 2.00, 10 had a GPA of 2.00 to 2.49, four had a GPA of 2.50 to 2.90, three had a GPA of 3.00 to 3.49, and 2 had a GPA of 3.50 to 4.00. Statistics on the PMs’ colleges were also collected. The withdrawn PMs were enrolled in the following colleges: three in Agriculture and Life Sciences, one in Architecture and Urban Studies, five in Business, five in Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, two in science, and three in University Studies.

Among the 317 persistent PMs, 221 were freshmen, 92 were sophomores, and 4 were juniors. Three PMs had a GPA of less than 2.00, 13 fell between 2.00 and 2.49, 70 earned a GPA between 2.50 and 2.90, 129 had a GPA between 3.00 and 3.49, and 102 earned a GPA of 3.50 and above. There were 23 students enrolled in Agriculture and Life Sciences, six in Architecture and Urban Studies, 73 in Business, 9 in Engineering, 87 in Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, 2 in Natural Resources, 45 in Science, and 72 in University Studies. The characteristics of the sample are fully described in Table 1.

Results Regarding the Self-Esteem Scale

The first research question posed in the study examined whether there was a change in self-esteem between the beginning and the end of recruitment among the persistent PM group. A one-sample t-test was conducted to compare mean pre-post scores. A significant difference was revealed in the level of self-esteem in this group before and after recruitment; the persistent PMs experienced a significant increase in self-esteem, from a mean score of 24.99 to a mean score of 25.35. The results of this t-test are reported in Table 2.
Table 1

*Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N=336)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Withdrawn PMs</th>
<th>Persistent PMs</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%n</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Class Standing**

<table>
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<th>Withdrawn PMs</th>
<th>Persistent PMs</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>57.89</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42.12</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Term GPA**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Persistent PMs</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Less than 2.00</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00 – 2.49</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>52.63</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.50 – 2.90</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21.05</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00 – 3.49</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.79</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.50 – 4.00</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.52</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**College**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Withdrawn PMs</th>
<th>Persistent PMs</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture and Life Sciences</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.79</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture and Urban Studies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26.32</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts and Human Sciences</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26.32</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Resources</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.53</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Studies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.79</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*Results of T-tests on Persistent PMs’ Self-Esteem before and after Recruitment (N=317)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>sd</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Recruitment SE</td>
<td>24.99</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>85.40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Recruitment SE</td>
<td>25.35</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>85.32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

316 0.00
The second research question examined whether or not there was a change in self-esteem during the recruitment process among the withdrawn PM group. Again, a one-sample t-test was conducted to compare pre-post means, and a significant difference was revealed. The withdrawn PM group experienced a significant drop in self-esteem, from a mean score of 27.74 to a mean score of 26.32. The results of this data analysis are described in Table 3.

The third research question posed in the study examined any difference in the self-esteem levels between persistent and withdrawn PMs at the beginning of recruitment. An independent samples t-test was conducted on the mean scores of the two groups’ pre-scores, and a significant difference was found. The withdrawn PM group had significantly higher self-esteem, with a mean score of 27.77, compared to the persistent PM group’s mean score of 24.99 at the start of recruitment. The results of this analysis are further explained in Table 4.

The final research question in this study examined the difference in the self-esteem levels of persistent and withdrawn PMs at the end of recruitment. An independent samples t-test was performed, and there was no significant difference found. The details of this data analysis can be found in Table 5. The changes in pre-post scores from both groups are also illustrated in a graph in Figure 1.

In summary, I conducted four t-tests, and three of these yielded significant differences or changes in self-esteem levels of PMs. The significance of these findings is discussed in the final chapter of this study.
Table 3

*Results of T-tests on Withdrawn PMs’ Self-Esteem before and after Recruitment (N=19)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
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<th>sd</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Recruitment SE</td>
<td>27.74</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>53.57</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Recruitment SE</td>
<td>26.32</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>23.97</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

Results of T-tests on Persistent PMs’ and Withdrawn PMs’ Self-Esteem Pre-Recruitment
(N=336)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>sd</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persistent PMs</td>
<td>24.99</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawn PMs</td>
<td>27.74</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5  316  0.02
Table 5

Results of T-tests on Persistent PMs’ and Withdrawn PMs’ Self-Esteem Post-Recruitment
(N=336)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>sd</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persistent PMs</td>
<td>25.35</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawn PMs</td>
<td>26.32</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1

Change in Self-Esteem Among Withdrawn and Persistent PMs
Chapter Five

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine how recruitment affects the self-esteem of participants in two ways. First, this study sought to determine if self-esteem changes pre/post recruitment for persistent PMs and withdrawn PMs. Second, this study investigated how self-esteem differed at the start and the end of recruitment between these two groups of PMs. Data were collected by administering the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1979) at the beginning and end of recruitment activities.

This chapter discusses the results of the study and is organized in five sections. The first section discusses the results and explains how they answer the four research questions posed in the study. The second section describes the results in relationship to findings from prior research. In the third section, implications for future practice, research, and policy are noted. Limitations of the study are described in the fourth section. Finally, the fifth section presents general conclusions about the study.

Discussion

The first research question posed in the study examined whether there was a change in self-esteem between the beginning and the end of recruitment among the persistent PM group. A significant difference was revealed in the level of self-esteem in this group before and after recruitment; the persistent PMs experienced a significant increase in self-esteem, from a mean score of 24.9874 to a mean score of 25.3470.

This finding is interesting for a few reasons. First, during a days-long process, in which sorority recruitment was most likely a main focus of the PMs’ time and energy, a change in self-esteem implies that sorority recruitment may have an effect on self-esteem. Second, this finding
may indicate that the PMs are expecting to successfully be invited into the Greek system. They completed the self-esteem instrument for the second time after preference night activities, and the majority of PMs who persisted through preference night received a bid to join a chapter. The increase in self-esteem may be due to an expectation of receiving a bid the next day. Thirdly, the persistent PMs likely recognized that some PMs did not persist through the recruitment process. The persistent PMs may have experienced an increase in self-esteem by feeling successful in comparison to those PMs who were no longer part of the recruitment process. Any of these would reasonably explain the significant increase in self-esteem between pre- and post-scores among persistent PMs.

The second research question examined whether there was a change in self-esteem during the recruitment process among the withdrawn PM group. A significant difference was revealed, and the withdrawn PM group experienced a significant drop in self-esteem, from a mean score of 27.7368 to a mean score of 26.3158. The findings of this question are also interesting for several reasons. First, during a time when sorority recruitment was a time-consuming event, a change in self-esteem may imply that recruitment has an effect on self-esteem. Also, the withdrawn PMs may have been disappointed that they were no longer going to be members of a Greek organization. This disappointment could have caused the drop in self-esteem that the withdrawn PMs experienced. Additionally, the withdrawn PMs may have been upset that their favored chapters (or any chapters at all) did not invite them back to recruitment events. This emotional toll may have influenced the drop in self-esteem that the withdrawn PMs experienced. Again, any of these explanations might explain the significant drop in self-esteem among withdrawn PMs over the course of recruitment.
The third research question examined any difference in the self-esteem levels of withdrawn PMs and persistent PMs at the beginning of recruitment. A significant difference was found between the two groups’ pre-scores: the withdrawn group had a significantly higher mean self-esteem score (27.7668) compared to the persistent group (24.9874). This finding is especially interesting because it is the most paradoxical. It appears that the withdrawn PMs may have been overly confident in their role at the start of the recruitment process, or that the persistent PMs underestimated their ability to successfully complete recruitment activities. It is also possible that withdrawing from recruitment required a high level of initial self-esteem. Because most women successfully complete the recruitment process, a high level of initial self-esteem may allow women who are dissatisfied with the experience the confidence to make a decision that is different from that of many other students.

When considered in conjunction with findings from the previous two research questions, the findings from the third research question are even more meaningful. Because the withdrawn PM group experienced a high initial level of self-esteem, coupled with a significant drop in self-esteem during the recruitment process, it suggests that this group may have been overly optimistic at the beginning of recruitment. Perhaps withdrawing from recruitment significantly deflated this overly optimistic attitude and resulted in a significant drop in self-esteem. On the reverse side, it is possible that the persistent PMs were nervous and not confident about themselves at the start of recruitment, but successfully completing recruitment activities allowed them to experience an increase in self-esteem due to their unexpected success. While more research is needed to further explore these findings, they present some interesting patterns.

The fourth and final research question examined any difference in the self-esteem levels of withdrawn and persistent PMs at the end of recruitment. There was no significant difference
found. However, the lack of a significant difference at the conclusion of recruitment, combined with the significant difference revealed in the third research question, paints an interesting picture. Although the two groups had significantly different levels of self-esteem at the beginning of recruitment, after both groups experienced a significant change in self-esteem, there was no significant difference at the end of recruitment. The persistent PMs started with a lower level of self-esteem, but their self-esteem levels rose. The withdrawn PMs started with a higher level of self-esteem, but their self-esteem ultimately declined. At the end of recruitment, the two groups of PMs finally ended up with similar levels of self-esteem. Again, since recruitment was the dominant activity in the lives of these women between the two measures of self-esteem, it is reasonable to suggest that recruitment influenced self-esteem in some manner. Exactly how and why recruitment can effect self-esteem remains to be explained, and perhaps could be addressed through qualitative inquiry.

Relationship of the Findings to Prior Research

The results of this study support previous research conducted about self-esteem and fraternity and sorority issues, and there were no prior studies that my study contradicted. Specifically, the results support two studies about self-esteem and college students, and two studies about the results of Greek recruitment.

First, my results support the findings of research by Pettit and Joiner (2001) that revealed that negative life events can lead to lower levels of self-esteem. If one infers that withdrawing from recruitment is a negative life event, then the drop in self-esteem among the withdrawn PM group supports this finding.

Second, Hudd et al. (2000) found that students under stress exhibit lower self-esteem levels that students not under stress. Again, if it is assumed that withdrawing from recruitment is
a stressful event, the lower self-esteem of the withdrawn PM group at the end of recruitment supports the Hudd et al. result.

This study also supports previous research on the outcomes of Greek recruitment. Atlas & Morier (1994) argued that women rejected from a sorority (denied membership) display symptoms of depression. While the withdrawn PM group includes PMs who chose not to join a sorority at that time, the group also includes those PMs who were not invited to join any chapter. The drop in self-esteem among the withdrawn PM group is consistent with Atlas & Morier’s findings.

Finally, the results of this study support research conducted by Keller & Hart (1982). In this study, the authors argued that women and men who are part of the Greek recruitment process and do not receive invitations to join a chapter have a negative self-image. Self-image is a concept related to self-esteem, and the drop in self-esteem experienced by the withdrawn PM group seems consistent with Keller’s and Hart’s findings.

Implications for Future Practice, Research, and Policy

The findings in this study have implications for those who work with potential and current Greek members, as well as those who conduct research related to this student population. The present study examined the self-esteem levels of PMs during recruitment, and found that withdrawn PMs experienced a significant drop in self-esteem and persistent PMs experienced a significant rise in self-esteem over the course of recruitment. Additionally, at the beginning of recruitment, withdrawn PMs reported a significantly higher level of self-esteem than persistent PMs.

Greek life administrators could use this information to shape practices associated with sorority recruitment. Administrators may create a program as part of the orientation process that
emphasizes other elements of university life that all PMs can still be involved in after recruitment, regardless of whether they complete the recruitment process. Specifically, students could be encouraged to maintain their involvement with other campus activities and continue to maintain previous friendships. Such a program might encourage withdrawn PMs to find other opportunities for involvement and help persistent PMs to maintain a healthy balance of activities. In either case, self-esteem might be better sustained if potential members keep sorority life in perspective.

Also, administrators could encourage non-Greek students to be recruitment guides. This way, PMs who decide to withdraw have students to consult who made the same decision not to become part of a Greek organization. These non-Greek recruitment guides can also serve as positive role models of students who are involved on campus but not members of fraternities or sororities.

Because many potential Greek members are freshmen and thus live on campus, residence life staff members could use this information while conversing and interacting with residents who participate in sorority recruitment. Specifically, student Resident Assistants should know which residents are participating in recruitment, and especially which residents withdraw from the recruitment process. Because the withdrawn PM group experienced a drop in self-esteem, and lower self-esteem levels can lead to other mental health issues, Resident Assistants should check in with these students and refer them to counseling or other campus services if necessary.

Finally, because the persistent group experienced an increase in self-esteem, this group may have high expectations for sorority membership. Greek life administrators may want to continue to monitor the persistent PMs in some way to ensure that they are not disappointed with sorority membership, and that their expectations of sorority life are congruent with their
experiences. Incongruencies between expectations and realities could lead to a subsequent drop in self-esteem that could affect new recruits’ mental health.

This study also has implications for future research. The present study examined the self-esteem of two groups of PMs, measuring the change in self-esteem before and after recruitment, as well as determining a possible difference between the two groups at the beginning and end of recruitment. First, the sample size of the withdrawn PM group was only 19, so it was not possible to examine the self-esteem levels of that group based on the reason for withdrawal. PMs could indicate three reasons for withdrawal: because they were not invited back to any chapters, because they decided sorority membership is not for them, or for other reasons. It is possible that PMs who report a certain reason for withdrawal will be more likely to report a higher or lower self-esteem score. More research is needed, with a larger withdrawn PM sample, to determine if reason for withdrawal could affect the results.

Also, this study found that persistent PMs had a lower self-esteem score than withdrawn PMs at the beginning of recruitment. More research is needed to understand why this difference occurred, and to possibly make connections between self-esteem score at the beginning of recruitment and likelihood of persisting through the recruitment process.

Lastly, this study only examined women participating in recruitment activities for predominantly White sororities. More research is needed to examine fraternity recruitment and multicultural or African American intake, and how participating in those activities may or may not affect self-esteem.

The findings of this study reveal that during recruitment, persistent PMs experienced a significant increase in self-esteem and withdrawn PMs experienced a significant drop in self-esteem. Also, withdrawn PMs had a significantly higher level of self-esteem than persistent PMs
at the beginning of recruitment activities. These data have implications for future policy. For example, Greek life administrators may use this information to draft a policy which mandates all future PMs to be notified of the possible mental health risks associated with sorority recruitment, as well as the availability of counseling at on-campus facilities.

Second, the findings may persuade administrators to create a policy which mandates the availability of a counselor during recruitment activities. A counselor or other mental health professional could be “on call” during recruitment activities, and available only for that purpose, so that any PM who experiences mental health issues related to recruitment has access to immediate assistance.

Finally, the information from this study may influence policies that determine how many PMs a chapter invites to a particular round of recruitment. Policy may be written to mandate that certain chapter(s) must invite a set number of PMs to the next event, thus reducing the number of women who receive no invitations to chapters. Currently, certain chapters may be encouraged, but not required, to invite a large number of PMs to the next recruitment event.

Limitations of the Study

This study had some limitations associated with the collection and analysis of data. The first limitation was the sample size. Because many respondents neglected to fill out the instrument correctly, or to complete the second assessment, the withdrawn PM sample included only 19 participants (out of more than 100 who withdrew from recruitment). It is possible that the responses of the small sample did not accurately reflect the withdrawn PM group as a whole.

The next limitation dealt with the environment of the data collection. During the second round of data collection, the persistent PMs completed the instrument in large groups inside Greek houses, which were crowded and did not have enough furniture to seat every PM.
The PMs were in close, cramped quarters and without a good writing surface. It is possible that the PMs were distracted by their discomfort, and completed the instrument without fully considering their responses.

The final limitation addresses the amount of time that had passed when some withdrawn PMs completed the instrument. Although some withdrawn PMs completed the instrument directly after recruitment activities, other withdrawn PMs who were not at the recruitment event had a window of 24 hours to complete the instrument online. This difference in time could have impacted the PMs’ self-esteem and how they completed the instrument.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, this study departed from much of the existing research on self-esteem and college students by examining the construct of self-esteem within the context of Greek recruitment, a combination not previously examined in the literature. Among the research that describes predictors of self-esteem in college students, the focus is on “negative life events,” which can be defined in many ways and include concepts as vague as “stress” and as specific as divorced parents. I hoped to learn more about sorority recruitment as a possible negative (or positive) life event, one which could have an impact on the mental health of students who participate in it.

To summarize, I found that sorority recruitment may have an impact on the self-esteem of PMs. During the recruitment process, the withdrawn PMs experienced a significant drop in self-esteem, while the persistent PMs experienced a significant increase in self-esteem. The instrument was administered twice during an eight-day period, during which sorority recruitment was likely a main focus of activity for the participants. Recruitment may be the cause of the changes in self-esteem experienced by both PM groups.
The findings present sorority recruitment in a new light. They characterize recruitment as an event that may have significant impact on the overall mental health of women who participate in it. Because self-esteem is an important part of mental health, sorority recruitment must be understood as an important event that has the potential to positively or negatively impact the mental health of women involved. Mental health is important to the success of students in and out of the classroom, and because sorority recruitment has the potential to significantly affect mental health, participants in sorority recruitment must be effectively protected and informed about the risks and benefits associated with recruitment. Any less does a disservice both to potential members and to the sorority system as a whole.