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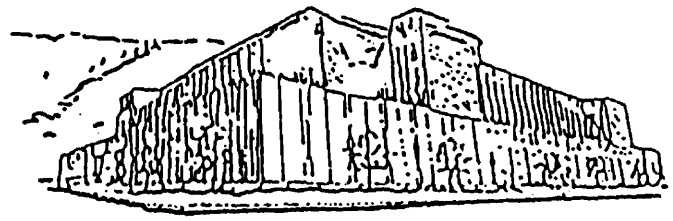

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HEALTH RISK BEHAVIOR AMONG THE GREEK POPULATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

By
Dean Patrick McGovern
B.S., Colorado State University, 1990

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the degree of
Master of Science

Department of Health and Human Performance
in the School of Education
Graduate School,
The University of Montana
Missoula, Montana
May 15, 1997

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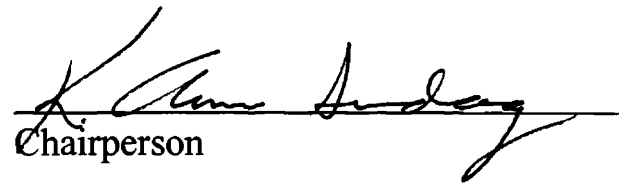

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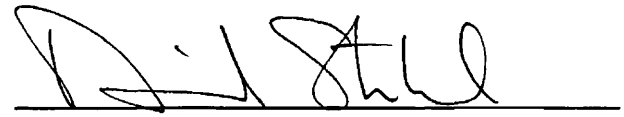

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THESIS ABSTRACT

McGovern, Dean Patrick, M.S., May 1997 Health & Human Performance

Health Risk Behavior among the Greek Population at The University of Montana (pp. 116)

Major Professor: K. Ann Sondag, Ph.D.

The purpose of this study was twofold. First was to gain an understanding of the experiences of students within the Greek system at The University of Montana. Second was to explore what these fraternity and sorority members perceive to be the major health risk behaviors among their population. Data were collected through the use of focus group interviews and personal one-on-one interviews. These interviews yielded participants' descriptions of their experiences, relationships, and day to day situations. They spoke about their perceptions and attitudes regarding Greek life at The University of Montana. The participants for this study were forty students who were members of a recognized fraternity or sorority. Thirty-six students participated in one of four focus group interviews and four students participated in personal interviews.

There were two distinct analyses of the data collected to account for the dual purpose of the study. First, transcripts were coded from descriptions of Greek life. Common themes emerged from this analysis of the data regarding the experience of being a Greek student. These themes included: a) Social stigma-- It's hard to be Greek, b) Pressures within the Greek system, c) Being there for each other-- The support network, d) Greek identity. The second data analysis resulted in defining several perceived health risk behaviors among the Greek population. These behaviors included: a) alcohol use; b) unsafe sexual activity; c) disordered eating; d) tobacco use; and e) other substance use, such as marijuana. Communal living, peer pressure, and the social environment were major influences on these health behaviors.

Acknowledgments

Of things themselves some are predicable of
a subject, and are never present in a subject.
Thus people are predictable of the individual
person, and are never present in a subject.

Aristotle

If I learned anything from this project it was that this kind of undertaking is collaborative whether the author is willing to admit it or not. Therefore, it is with gratitude and deep appreciation that I wish to thank some folks without whom I could not have completed my task.

I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to Dr. Annie Sondag, my committee chair, for providing guidance and direction from the project's inception. Her support of my chosen research method was invaluable and will stimulate future projects. I also thank the members of my committee, Dr. Lew Curry and Dr. Don Robson, for their time and effort on this project.

I am grateful to Linda Green for her leadership, friendship and assistance throughout the development and research stages of this thesis. To Michael Miura for his help with the focus group data collection. Sincere appreciation to the fraternity and sorority members at The University of Montana, whose time and energy made this project possible.

A special thank you is extended to Missoula City/County Health Department, specifically Greg Oliver for providing funding for this project.

Thanks to all of my friends for their patience, support and harassment, especially Phil and Dan for the long hours of swimming, biking and running that kept my body sore enough to stay inside and write; and Jenae for her computer and making me keep everything in perspective.

My love and gratitude to my family Debbie, Jan, Sophie, Pop and especially my mother, Elaine, who has always supported me, trusted me and loved me through thick and thick. She has, by example, taught me the value of education and hard work.

Finally, for my dear partner Kathy, I save my highest appreciation and indebtedness. You have been a scholar, exemplar and mentor. You have true mastery of the kick in the ass and the use of kid gloves, most importantly you know when to use one over the other. Thank you for the push when I needed it, the support when I needed it, the critique when I needed it and the encouragement when I needed it. Your love and companionship have been my inspiration.

DPM
May 1997

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CHAPTER I

Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Men and women of traditional college age engage in many high risk health-related behaviors (Wechsler, Davenport, Dowdall, Moeykens, & Castillo, 1994; Jones, Harel, & Levinson, 1992; Grodner, 1991; Goodwin, 1989). Researchers in this area have proposed several reasons why college students put their health at risk. They suggest that freedom from parental supervision, stress of academic work, ignorance of the risks, peer pressure and new demands of college life may all serve as motivators of risky health behaviors (O'Neil & Mingie, 1988).

Associated with increased health risk behavior is where and with whom students live, perhaps due to the increased presence of one or more hypothesized health risk motivators. For example, Jones, Harel, and Levinson (1992) showed that communal living (e.g. dormitories, cooperatives and Greek houses) during college was associated with more alcohol consumption.

Since communal living situations have been associated with sub-optimal health behaviors (Jones et al., 1992), perhaps The University of Montana Greek members are at higher than average risk for poor health; yet they consume preventive health services at a lower rate than other undergraduates at The University of Montana (Fitch, personal communication, 1996). Greek life, with its peer orientation and communal living in large off-campus houses, is a concern for local health professionals and university student affairs administrators who suspect they are not reaching a needy population (Hollmann,

Fitch, Green, Oliver, personal communications, 1996; Goodwin, 1989). Health education has been shown to reduce college students' health risk behavior (Welch-Cline & Engel, 1991). Therefore, The University of Montana Greek students may be a population for which a health promotion program can be successfully developed, if the experiences of these students were better understood and if the barriers to participation to such a program were addressed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was twofold: 1) to gain an understanding of the experiences of students within the Greek system at The University of Montana; and 2) to explore what fraternity and sorority members perceive to be the major health risk behaviors among their population.

Study Questions and Sub-questions

1) What are the perceptions of fraternity and sorority members regarding their experiences within the Greek system?

2) What do fraternity and sorority members perceive to be the major health risk behaviors among their population?

a) What do fraternity and sorority members perceive to be the influences on these health risk behaviors?

b) What do fraternity and sorority members believe should be done to reduce or eliminate these health risk behaviors?

Need for the Study

Before health education programs can be planned and implemented for a certain group, it is important to assess the needs of that group. To date, there have been no assessments of the health education needs of the Greek system, distinct from other university students, at The University of Montana. Too often interventions are implemented prematurely without development of an understanding of the target population and their experiences. Knowing these experiences well requires that an investigator take into account relevant context in its natural state. It is important to understand the reality of the population, from the perspective of the participants, before a health program can be planned or implemented to modify their behaviors (Emery, Ritter-Randolph, Strozier, & McDermott, 1993).

Significance of the Study

Information from this study will provide The University of Montana Student Health Services, the Dean of Students and the Missoula City/County Public Health Department with essential understanding of the health-related lives of members of the Greek system. This information may be used to design health education programs, which are relevant to the health education needs of the fraternity and sorority members at The University of Montana.

Assumptions

Several assumptions were made while collecting data for this investigation. Following is a list of these assumptions:

1) Focus group interview and personal interview participants fully understood my questions before they responded.

2) Focus group interview and personal interview participants answered honestly and reported accurately from past experiences.

Limitations

It is reasonable to acknowledge that limits exist within any study. Following are limitations within this study:

1) During the focus groups, participants were limited by their memory of previous experiences or what they are willing and able to share.

2) The study is limited to data that were gathered during focus group interviews and/or personal interviews.

3) Analysis and interpretation of the data is value-laden and therefore may have been influenced by my personal attitudes, biases and perceptions.

Delimitations

The following are delimitations or boundaries that were considered for this investigation:

1) The participants were delimited to students currently enrolled at The University of Montana who are members of a fraternity or sorority and live at their chapter's house.

2) The participants were delimited to Greek students that were willing and able to participate in the focus group discussions or a personal interview.

3) Data were collected using only focus group interviews and personal interviews.

4) The primary investigator was responsible for all data collection and analysis.

5) Data were collected only from the participants who attended a given interview session.

Glossary

There are several terms used throughout this project that require definition or explanation. Following is a discussion of those terms:

AIDS — Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome. A lethal infectious disease caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) (Purtilo and Purtilo, 1989).

Anorexia nervosa — Refusal to maintain a normal body weight for age and height. Intense fear of gaining weight or becoming fat even though the individual is

underweight (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1994).

Binge drinking — Consumption of five or more consecutive drinks in one episode for males and four or more consecutive drinks in one episode for females. Drinks are beer, wine or liquor (Wechlser, Davenport, Dowdall, Moeykens, and Castillo, 1994)

Brother — A male Greek student. Fraternity men refer to other men in their chapter as "brothers."

Bulimia nervosa — A disorder behaviorally described as periodic binge eating, self-induced purging, restrictive dieting, misuse of laxatives or excessive exercising to prevent weight gain (APA, 1994).

Chapter — The name applied to the local groups of a national fraternity or sorority. The University of Montana had nine fraternity chapters and four sorority chapters in Spring 1996 (ASUM, 1996).

Focus group A group of people assembled to discuss a defined topic under the direction of a moderator who promotes interaction and assures that the discussion remains on the topic of interest (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

Fraternity Formally the name applied to all male and female Greek-letter organizations. Informally used to describe a group of college men who live and socialize together (ASUM, 1996). The University of Montana had nine different fraternity chapters in Spring 1996.

GDI "God Damn Independent." Slang term used for a student who is not a member of either a fraternity or a sorority.

Greek system A community of college students (typically undergraduate) who belong to fraternity and sorority chapters. The system emphasizes academic, social and campus/community service Alumni also play an important role in the system (ASUM, 1996).

Health risk behavior Any personal activity that places an individual at risk for poor health and contributes to a higher probability of morbidity and mortality (Centers for Disease Control, 1995).

HIV Human immunodeficiency virus. The virus attributed to causing acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) (Purtilo & Purtilo, 1989).

IFC Interfraternity council. The governing body that represents each fraternity acting as a guiding, supporting, and communicating body between all fraternities. (ASUM, 1996).

Kaimin The student newspaper at The University of Montana in Spring 1996.

Legacy A Greek member whose relative (e.g. mother, father, grandparent) was a member of his or her Greek chapter (ASUM, 1996).

PHC Panhellenic council. The governing body that represents each sorority acting as a guiding, supporting, and

communicating body between all sororities. (ASUM, 1996).

Qualitative method Research techniques employed to capture an understanding of a culture using the participants experiences and point of view. Techniques may include focus group interviewing and personal interviewing (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Random Slang term used for a student who is not a member of either a fraternity or a sorority.

Sister A female Greek student. Sorority women refer to other women in their chapter as "sisters."

Sorority A formal group of college women who live and socialize together (ASUM, 1996). The University of Montana had four different sorority chapters in Spring 1996.

STDs Sexually transmitted diseases. Common STDs include chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, herpes simplex virus infection, HIV infection, genital warts, and chancroid (Morris, Warren, & Aral, 1993).

Theoretical saturation	Repetition in the information obtained and confirmation of previously collected data (Morse, 1994, Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this study was twofold: 1) gain an understanding of the experiences of students within the Greek system at The University of Montana; and 2) explore what fraternity and sorority members perceive to be the major health risk behaviors among their population. This chapter will review and discuss current literature pertinent to the study purpose.

The review of literature is divided into three sections. The first section addresses Greek life with specific information pertaining to The University of Montana Greek system. The second section addresses five specific health risks pertinent to college students: Alcohol use, unsafe sexual activity, eating behaviors, tobacco use, and other drug use. Health risk behaviors that have been identified as salient by The Centers for Disease Control (CDC, 1995). These five behaviors were also recognized as problematic in preliminary research with The University of Montana collegiate fraternity and sorority members as well as alumni.[1] Further, the five health risk behaviors were identified by concerned Missoula health professionals and campus administrators, the Dean of Students, the Director of the Student Health Services, the Director of Health Education

[1] This preliminary research included an informal group interview with The University of Montana Greek Alumni. The interview was conducted at a meeting attended by alumni from several different graduating classes and several different Greek chapters, the current Dean of Students, and several collegiate members of fraternities and sororities.

l the Director of Health Promotion for Missoula City/County Public Health
partment (Personal communications, 1996).

The third and final section addresses the use of qualitative research methods
luding focus group interviews and personal interviews.

Greek Life

> "All Greek facilities must comply with local, state, and federal codes and/or guidelines. The University of Montana can assist in these areas through consultation and advisement; however, local house corporations are responsible for providing safe and healthful living facilities and the appropriate inspections and written reports.
> Alcohol risk management strategies established by each chapter's national office and by The University of Montana should be followed to reduce the risk of an alcohol-related injury or death" (Greek Risk Reduction Statement, reprinted from The University of Montana Fraternity Relationship Statement, 1994)

The Greek system of fraternities and sororities on American college campuses is
old as the nation itself. Greek life began on American college campuses in 1776, when
i Beta Kappa was established at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg,
rginia. Now primarily an academic honors fraternity, Phi Beta Kappa was originally
ınded as a social organization and served as a model for other social fraternities.
apters of social fraternities emerged as the American university system grew.
rrently there are fifty-six nationally recognized chapters on college campuses all over
country.

Fraternities emphasize scholarship, leadership, teamwork and social activities.
bsequent chapters have also adopted other characteristics: a degree of secrecy, an

initiation ceremony, and a strong bond of friendship (Delta Gamma Executive Offices [DGEO], 1994).

When more and more women began attending college many decided to form their own "secret societies" (DGEO, 1994). The first sorority was founded in 1867 at Monmouth College in Monmouth, Illinois. Sororities began as supportive groups for women to get assistance and fellowship in the male-dominated educational system. In the period between 1870 and 1873 over ten new sorority chapters were formed at eastern universities (DGEO, 1994).

In the spring semester of 1996 The University of Montana had nine fraternity chapters and four sorority chapters. The Greek system accounted for approximately 8% of The University of Montana student body (ASUM, 1994).

Health Risks on the College Campus

Alcohol Use

> "Lowering alcohol consumption on the college campus is not an easy task because drinking is deeply imbedded in the college culture" (Goodwin, 1989, p.457).

The lore of drinking, frequenting bars and large alcohol parties is well known in American college life. Published research studies as well as news stories in the popular press have linked alcohol with the college experience. According to the Carnegie Foundation and the American Council on Education (1987), many college administrators believe alcohol abuse is one of the top health concerns on their campuses. In fact, when polled, university presidents overwhelmingly placed alcohol abuse as the number one

problem on college campuses (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990).

The consumption of alcohol on college campuses has been shown to lead to several problems for the students who drink irresponsibly and the people around them. Grades in academic classes tend to suffer when students drink and abuse alcohol (Saltz & Elandt, 1986). Frequent drinkers are more likely to damage property, miss classes, get injured, get into trouble with the police, engage in unplanned sexual activity and not use protection when having sex (Wechsler et al., 1994).

College students drink alcohol for several reasons. Saltz and Elandt (1986) reported that drinking was used to increase an individual's self-perceived sociability and decrease stress. In their focus groups with college men and women, Emery's (1993) participants cited three salient reasons for drinking alcohol: 1) to improve or decrease the fears of inadequacy in social situations, 2) to reduce anxiety or stress, 3) to satisfy the intense need to conform, primarily to peers but also to the larger society (a reason specifically emphasized by men).

The living arrangement of college students often plays a significant role in their drinking behavior. Those who live in residence halls or live independently drink more than those who live at home with their parents (Jones et al., 1992). Alcohol consumption is greater in off-campus living situations and when students live with their peers. These influences may be responsible for the more excessive drinking found in fraternity houses than in other living situations (Saltz & Elandt, 1986).

An extensive study conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health (Wechsler et al., 1994) confirmed preliminary studies regarding college students' alcohol

consumption. It was titled The College Alcohol Study and in it Wechsler et al. gathered data from 140 American colleges and universities. Researchers investigated binge drinking among 17,592 college students through surveys that were distributed through the mail. Binge drinking was defined as consuming five or more consecutive drinks in one episode for men and consuming four or more consecutive drinks in one episode for women. The research showed that members of fraternities or sororities were four times more likely to binge drink, compared to other college students (Wechsler et al., 1994).

The Harvard College Alcohol Study included several anonymous verbatim quotations from respondents. Consider the following responses from the Harvard study:

> "My roommate and I went to a party, and she got drunk. She hooked up with this guy from the fraternity and had sex with him that night. I couldn't have stopped her because she would have gotten mad. The next day we found out that the guy is seeing someone else and is known all around campus for taking advantage of girls when they're drunk." (Wechsler et al., p. 2)

> "Several people were drunk at this fraternity party. Some of the guys were kicked out because they were so drunk they were urinating on the walls. The entire place reeked of beer, and people were covered in it." (Wechsler et al., p. 3)

> "I was having a great night. I drank at least 15 beers, and then I completely blacked out. This is not uncommon for me." (Wechsler et al., p. 4)

> "One weekend my roommate went out to a fraternity party after having several beers. While she was there one of the brothers gave her a cup of beer to finish. It turns out the drink was laced with LSD. She had never done drugs before and reacted violently. I got a call at 3:30 a.m. to go to the emergency room to be with her." (Wechsler et al., p. 5)

This study found that very few students, no matter what their level of alcohol consumption, reported that they currently had a problem with alcohol (Wechsler et al., 1994).

The link between college students' alcohol consumption and their sexual behavior is well documented. Crowe & George (1989) found that alcohol was associated with increases in sexual arousal and expectancies in college men. That is, after a bout of drinking these men would be more likely to assume that they would engage in sexual activity. When women were surveyed by Radius et al. (1991), several reported that they "usually" had sex after drinking.

Alcohol use has been associated with unsafe sexual practices such as failing to regularly use condoms (Meilman, 1993, Hingson, Strunin, Berlin and Heeren, 1990, Robertson and Plant, 1988). The alcohol-induced habit of engaging in unprotected sexual activity significantly increases the risk of sexually transmitted infection, including the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) (Robertson, 1988).

Unsafe Sexual Activity

The Centers for Disease Control has determined that it is unsafe sexual practices that lead to unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). Carroll (1991) found that three quarters of the American college student population is sexually active, that sexually active students average more than two partners per year, and that up to one half of students will have six or more partners before they are married. Results of a national survey of college students found that almost fifty percent of all heterosexual respondents reported multiple sexual partners and sixty percent used condoms less than half the time they engaged in sexual intercourse (DiCliemente et al., 1990).

As was discussed earlier, alcohol can play a key role in college students' sexual behavior (Wechsler et al., 1994). At the College of William and Mary in 1993, Meilman found that one-third of students he surveyed had engaged in alcohol induced sexual behaviors and most had not used safer sex techniques (e.g. condom or latex barrier use) while under the influence of alcohol. In addition to alcohol, several other factors have been associated with unsafe sexual activity. Failure to use a condom, for example, has several antecedents. Embarrassment about condom purchases, difficulty discussing condom use with a partner, use of oral contraceptive, insufficient knowledge about STD/ HIV, and the belief that condoms interfere with sexual pleasure were all reasons cited for not using a condom (MacDonald et al., 1990). Interestingly, even with the increased availability of condoms on university campuses and knowledge of the risks, students still do not use them (Bankhead, 1989). In a study conducted by Reinisch et al. in 1990 several students surveyed indicated that they did not use condoms the last time they had intercourse. This was despite their increased knowledge about HIV and AIDS. Apparently, knowledge about the risks of frequent and unprotected sex does not cause students to choose abstinence or to regularly use condoms (Baldwin & Baldwin, 1988).

While college students are failing to consider risk for STD/ HIV infection, many do consider and use some form of birth control. However, methods such as the birth control pill offer no protection from STD/ HIV infection. Most college men reported their primary reason for using condoms was pregnancy prevention (Baffi et al., 1989).

HIV infection affects two in every one thousand college students (Jaccard, Levinson, Beamer, 1995, Painter, 1989). STD infection including chlamydia, genital

warts, genital herpes, and gonorrhea also affects a significant number of college students every school year (Estrin, 1988).

Disordered Eating Behavior

Five of the ten leading causes of death in America are directly associated with eating patterns (NRC, 1989). It has been shown that dietary behaviors can markedly influence one's health status and contribute to obesity, unsafe weight loss practices and eating disorders (Public Health Service, 1988). National dietary intake surveys suggest that the average American consumes more fat, saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium and less fiber than is recommended (USDHHS, 1991). Along with the rest of the population, college students are not consuming an adequate diet. Studies have shown that the dietary intakes of college-aged students do not meet recommended levels (Glore, Walker and Chandler, 1993).

The prevalence of weight-related concern and eating disorders on campuses is a serious concern of college administrators and health professionals. In their study in 1990, Beerman, Jennings and Crawford found that the dietary practices of female college students are motivated by weight loss. In addition, they found that female students consistently perceived themselves as "too heavy," "too tall," or "too short." Among their results, Beerman, et al. (1990) discovered that Greek students tended to diet more frequently, exercise more, and were more dissatisfied with their weight then non-Greek students.

Eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and compulsive overeating are also diet-related health risks to the college student. Mintz and Betz (1988)

found that disordered eating is common among undergraduate females in the United States. According to Kashubeck, Walsh and Crowl (1994), competitiveness, pressure to succeed academically and the college environment itself can contribute to disordered eating behaviors among students. Brouwers (1988) hypothesized that college life may indirectly contribute to the development and maintenance of eating disorders by emphasizing perfection, competition, motivation and attractiveness.

In their study of Greek students, Meilman, von Hippel and Gaylor (1991) found a strong correlation between self-induced vomiting after eating and being a member of a sorority house. Specifically, 72% of sorority women, in this study, had frequently self-induced vomiting. This number is even more significant given that 55% of the women on the campus studied were Greek.

Tobacco Use

The most important preventable cause of death in our society is tobacco use (Marcus, Giovino, Pierce, & Harel, 1993). Using tobacco, either cigarettes, cigars, pipes or smokeless, is linked to several forms of cancer as well as heart and lung disease (USDHHS, 1991). Nicotine, the addictive drug contained in tobacco, makes smoking cessation very difficult (Public Health Service, 1990). The use of tobacco among adolescents and young adults is increasing (Charney, 1993). Smoking tobacco is a frequent and "normal" occurrence on college campuses (Jensen, Peterson, Murphy, and Emmerling, 1992).

Tobacco smokers are more likely to use illicit drugs, including marijuana, than non-smokers (Gray, 1993). Gray's study, also found that users of smokeless tobacco

were far more likely to drink alcohol and use marijuana on a regular basis than non-tobacco users. Several studies indicate the negative implications of tobacco use, especially among youth. The long-term health prospects are bleak as well; Glover, Laflin, Flannery, & Albritton, (1989) found that two-thirds of the college tobacco users said they plan to continue to use it.

Other Drug Use

Besides alcohol, the use of other drugs can have a large impact on the health of college students (Blanken, 1993). Drug use among college age students may include cocaine, crack cocaine, marijuana, stimulants, caffeine pills, LSD, PCP, Heroin, tranquilizers, barbiturates, and ecstasy (Prendergast, 1994). People who abuse these drugs are more likely to use a larger share of health services, risk family and social problems, and often burden the justice system with drug-related crimes (Public Health Service, 1991). Injection drug use puts college students at a higher risk for contracting HIV and other viruses. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control (1992) report that injected drug use is the second most common means of HIV transmission in the United States.

In her study of college students, Gray (1993) found that five percent of respondents said they used illegal substances on an occasional or regular basis. Also, only thirty-three percent of respondents said that they had never smoked marijuana.

Qualitative Study Techniques

Focus Group Interviews

Historically, quantitative research methods have predominated within the field of health education (Green & Lewis, 1986). Recently, however, the use of qualitative methods has gained increasing acceptance (Steckler, 1989).

Focus group interviews can be used as an effective method for identifying attitudes and behaviors of a population with regard to specific health topics (Keller et al., 1987). The focus group is a qualitative research technique originally developed for business marketing to gather information quickly about the attitudes, beliefs, preferences and other characteristics that influence purchasing decisions. Focus groups are now widely used to gather information for social marketing campaigns as well as for other research purposes (Krueger, 1994).

A focus group consists of a number of participants and a moderator (Krueger, 1994). The moderator leads the group through a series of questions that have been previously developed, tested, and framed in an interview guide. These questions are directed to gather opinions or perceptions on the selected topic.

Focus groups provide an attractive alternative to other research techniques, such as surveys or personal interviews, because focus groups can be completed quickly and inexpensively with the comfort of participating with others (Keller et al., 1987). Because participants react to what others in the group say, the focus group method also allows the researcher to observe interesting interactions that may not occur in a structured one-on-

one approach. A focus group format allows the researcher to reach several participants at one time, thereby saving valuable research time (Krueger, 1994).

A disadvantage to using focus groups is that the participants may be peculiar in some way, that is not highly representative of the larger group under study, so the information gathered from them may mislead the researchers. Also, the groups are not usually randomly selected and are too small to allow investigators to make broad inferences from their findings to the population (Keller et al., 1987). This weakness is overcome by conducting several focus groups and comparing the results; if findings vary dramatically in one of the groups, the information gathered from that group can either be dropped from consideration, or additional research can be done to substantiate the information (Emery et al., 1993).

Personal Interviews

The personal interview is a basic, yet valuable tool in qualitative research (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Scholars and researchers use the personal interview to comprehend more deeply the meaning that a participant attaches to his/ her life regarding the topic being studied (Mast, 1994). In an interview, a person describes how he/ she understands or perceives the world in which he/ she lives. This information is helpful to a researcher who wants to explore a problem from the perspective of the participants of a certain culture (Moffatt, 1989).

Rubin and Rubin (1995, pp. 5-7) describe two conceptual approaches to qualitative interviewing, unstructured and semi-structured. The former approach, unstructured interviewing, is a more casual or conversational format. With this approach,

the researcher directs the conversation by suggesting the topic but has very few specific questions in mind. For example, the interviewer might say, "Let's talk about what it's like to be a Greek student" and then let the interviewee answer any way he or she pleases (Douglas, 1985).

The second approach used by qualitative interviewers is called semi-structured interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). While unstructured interviewing can provide rich detailed information, semi-structured interviews are used when researchers require more information or the answers to more specific questions (Merton, Fiske & Kendall, 1990). The semi-structured interview begins with the interviewer introducing the topic and then asking specific, predetermined questions to actively guide the interview. For instance, "What do you eat at your fraternity house?"

When using the focus group or personal one-on-one interview as a qualitative research instrument, the validity and reliability of the data should be subject to scrutiny. If the data are valid, they closely reflect the world being described. If the data are reliable, two researchers studying the same arena will have similar interview results (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Most indicators for validity and reliability do not fit within the qualitative paradigm. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue for a new vocabulary and desire a search for substitute terms for "validity and reliability." Ferrarotti (1981) is critical of the objectivity that underlies these two terms. He believes the most profound knowledge can be gained only by the deepest subjectivity between researchers and that which they are studying.

CHAPTER III

History of the Study Procedures

Introduction

The purpose of this study was twofold: 1) to gain an understanding of the experiences of students within the Greek system at The University of Montana; and 2) to explore what fraternity and sorority members perceive to be the major health risk behaviors among their population. Students within the Greek system at The University of Montana were studied using focus group interviews and personal interviews. These two techniques allowed the subjects to share personal knowledge, their perceptions, and their experiences with me. This chapter includes a description of the methods and procedures that I used in the investigation.

Study Design

In an attempt to gain insight into the Greek students' experiences and perceptions, this investigation utilized qualitative methodology. Through focus group interviews and personal interviews quotations were collected and became the data for this study. The quotations are presented to support my analysis of the experiences and perceptions that the Greek students described. I was the interviewer for this study carried out on The University of Montana campus.

The University of Montana Institutional Review Board reviewed the proposal for this study. The board determined that this investigation did not constitute an unreasonable risk to human subjects and therefore granted permission for the study.

Data Collection

I used two methods of collecting data for this study, focus group interviews and personal interviews. Both of these methods helped to identify relevant themes and to answer the study questions. Direct communication with the participants allowed me to access their experiences, attitudes and perceptions of being Greek students.

To facilitate dialogue, I developed an interview guide (Appendix A) through a review of literature and from a preliminary interview with Greek alumni and collegiate Greek members. For the interviews, the participants were placed into one of four initial focus groups: One was all-female; one was all-male; and two consisted of both female and male participants. In the focus group interviews and the personal interviews I used the interview guide which outlined the questions I wanted to ask and served as a helpful tool to cover all the relevant study topics. During the interviews, however, I did not read each question verbatim in the same order in which it appeared on the interview guide. Rather, I used the guide as an outline for the semi-structured interviews. If a topic came up naturally in the discussion I would note the comments and also that the topic had been covered. A detailed account of the data collection follows the description of the participants below.

Greek students who participated in the focus group interviews became key contacts and identified other Greek students whom they thought would be willing to participate in personal interviews. Additionally, several of my personal acquaintances on campus helped me secure four Greek students who agreed to participate in personal interviews. These four students did not participate in one of the four focus group interviews.

Participants in the personal interview segment of this study were students of The University of Montana who were members of either a fraternity or sorority in the Spring semester of 1996. Each interview participant lived in her/his chapter's house. Each was enrolled as an undergraduate at The University of Montana. Two females and two males were interviewed.

Focus Group Interviews

For the focus group interviews, I recruited students from the various Greek houses at The University of Montana. I secured a meeting room on campus for the focus group interviews and made arrangements for food, beverages and door prizes. The invitations were distributed to the fraternity and sorority members by key Greek contacts. These contacts were fraternity and sorority members who were told about the study and were willing to help recruit members. Distribution of the invitations took place approximately two weeks prior to the first focus group session. More invitations were distributed than participants were needed in an effort to over-recruit to account for absent participants. Participants were given a general idea of the focus group procedure, topics, and agenda through the invitation.

I facilitated each focus group interview using the interview guide. My assistant, Mike, helped take notes during each focus group interview. He also helped me set up the interview room and participated in post-discussion processing which included reviewing notes, discussing observations and commenting on the overall success of the interview.

At the beginning of each focus group I welcomed the participants and a pizza dinner was served. We engaged in informal discussion covering several topics including current events.[2] Following dinner, I facilitated brief introductions and participants were informed of the significance of the study as well as the procedure that would be used throughout the evening. The anonymity of the participants' responses was emphasized to facilitate honesty and openness during the subsequent discussion. Then I read the informed consent form (Appendix C) to the participants, answered questions and asked each participant to give their consent by signing the form. Every participant in every focus group was of legal age to sign the consent form and all agreed to sign the form without exception.

All of the focus group sessions were audio-tape recorded so that notes could be checked for accuracy and exact quotations could be verified. As I had explained to the participants, after the tapes were transcribed they were erased.

I used the interview guide as a checklist throughout each focus group interview. The guide was designed to elicit the information that is most central to the purpose of this investigation. It contains several questions, each of which could be followed by a series of additional questions aimed at getting richer, more detailed information on the health

[2] Some of these discussions involved current campus events or current news items, but often the topic was the upcoming spring break.

risk behaviors of the Greek students. The discussions began with less sensitive questions to help build trust and rapport among the group, then led into more personal information.

Each focus group interview lasted approximately one and one half-hours. After the interview, the participants were thanked and free to leave. Mike and I immediately recorded our thoughts and observations either on audio-tape or in written format. I began informal data analysis after each session in the form of summary, discussion, and interpretation of the interviews. This informal analysis consisted of a brief audio-taped discussion between Mike and I. We discussed the interview and reviewed our notes after each of the interviews had ended. Tentative hypotheses were formed and matched to initial assumptions regarding the study. After all four of the initial groups met, inter-group data were analyzed and reoccurring themes were identified.

When I had collected and analyzed all the data from the initial four groups, I made an assessment regarding theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation is defined as repetition in the information obtained and confirmation of previously collected data (Morse, 1994). I determined that follow-up groups were unnecessary. I determined that although some common themes were repeated, very few new themes emerged from the third and fourth groups and, so theoretical saturation had occurred (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). When theoretical saturation was reached no further groups were formed and the focus group data collection was finished.

Personal Interviews

In addition to the focus group interviews a qualitative technique known as personal interviewing was used to collect data. This technique, like focus group

Data Analysis

As is the accepted procedure in most qualitative, interview-based studies, data collection and data analysis were concomitant in this study. By continuously analyzing data between interviews I was able subsequently to ask interview questions to fill in the gaps of information from earlier interviews, to recognize theoretical saturation thereby end data collection and to minimize the overwhelming amount of work when I was finished collecting data.

The analysis strategy that I adopted for this study is called *tape-based analysis*, described by Krueger (1994, p.143). The focus group and personal interview audio-tapes were completely transcribed. The transcripts contained participant comments and my oral summary at the conclusion of each focus group and personal interview. I reviewed the transcribed responses and analyzed the emerging themes, patterns and general categories to answer the first study question: What are the experiences of Greek students?

In order to answer the more specific second study question, categories were created to include health risk behaviors that were frequently mentioned by the focus group and personal interview participants. The data include reports from the participants on what they believe influences these behaviors and what might be done to prevent or reduce the frequency of the behaviors. A comprehensive report of all the focus group and personal interview responses was compiled. This report describes the themes and categories using specific verbatim quotations from the interview transcripts.

I coded the interview transcriptions using Microsoft WORD word-processing software. With the cut and paste functions, I placed text units of information that were

common to all of the interviews into separate documents on the word-processor. Every pertinent quotation in each interview was coded and placed into a document. Each separate document then contained all the text units or quotations that constituted a theme.

CHAPTER IV

Results

Introduction

In July 1995 the Missoula City/County Health Department received funding for HIV prevention activities. Some of these funds were targeted at The University of Montana Greek community. The funds were used to develop this study, "Health Risk Behavior among the Greek Population at The University of Montana." The purpose of this study was twofold: 1) gain an understanding of the experiences of students within the Greek system at The University of Montana; and 2) explore what fraternity and sorority members perceive to be the major health risk behaviors among their population. Four focus group interviews and four personal one-on-one interviews were employed to collect the data.

In this chapter I give a description of each of the focus group interviews and each of the personal interviews. Because of the dual purpose of this study, the results are divided into two sections. Section one describes the themes, which emerged from the data regarding Greek experiences. Each theme has a title and will be described. Verbatim quotations from participants follow the description of the theme, which illustrate and support it.

In the second section of this chapter, I present the results of specific study questions that the Greek students were asked in the interviews. This section lists the study question followed by the categories that emerged from the interviews and then several supporting verbatim responses from interview participants.

Description of Focus Group Interviews

Following is a description of each focus group interview. The focus group participants were thirty-six Greek students from The University of Montana. Each of these students participated in 1 of 4 focus group interviews. The focus groups were conducted between April 2 and April 24, 1996 on The University of Montana campus. Each group was audio-tape recorded and each interview was carefully transcribed.

Focus group one: sorority women

Interview conducted April 2, 1996 McGill Hall room 217.

Five sorority women representing all four of the sorority houses on campus attended the first focus group interview. The pizza arrived at 7 p.m. As each woman came in I introduced my assistant, Mike, and myself and offered her food and something to drink. We engaged in small talk and got to know each other while we waited for others to arrive. The informal discussion focused on spring break, which was to begin the following week.

When everyone arrived I thanked them all for coming and briefly described the study. I told them my role was to moderate and to keep the discussion on track. I also explained that Mike was there to take notes and run the tape recorder. Then I read them the informed consent form, and when there were no questions, all the women signed it.

As the discussion began, I noticed that four out of the five women were wearing their Greek letters on their shirts, sweatshirts or hats. This was significant because the

importance Greek identity came up several times in the interview and again in later interviews.

I began by asking the group to describe what it was like to be a Greek student at The University of Montana. The women seemed a little nervous at first and possibly suspicious of my motives. After this initial request, there was a hesitation that seemed to last for minute. Finally, someone spoke up and got the group started. My inquiry was so general that I think it took them a moment to figure out how to answer the question. When one woman spoke up and responded in a more specific way (i.e. benefits of being Greek) then the others seemed to jump on that topic and add in. It is also possible that no one wanted to be the first to speak.

As the evening progressed, all the participants seemed to loosen up and relax. At first, the tape recorder was obvious and awkward and then it became a natural part of the environment and received much less attention. The women laughed and several times tried to "one-up" each other with stories of sorority life. They visually became more comfortable and at one point a woman laid down on the couch she was sitting on and put her feet up. More than once I had the feeling I was involved in a sorority house chat session. As the session progressed they began to talk to one another, instead of talking to me, and gave me a sense of eavesdropping on a conversation at one of the houses.

One of the five women was not as talkative as the others. She was more quiet and listened intently to the others speak. She never interrupted anyone. Sometimes the participants would want to talk over one another but this woman always waited for a clear gap in the conversation before offering her input. She spoke softly and was possibly younger than the rest of the group. This woman was the only one there representing her

sorority house and she didn't seem to know the other women as well as they all seemed to know each other. Quite often she gave another opinion when the group seemed to have reached consensus and there was a lot of agreeing and affirming. Without saying very much she really added to the discussion by including a new dimension to what seemed to be a universally agreed upon thought.

When the discussion ended I thanked them for participating and held a drawing for the gift certificate to the mall. The winner was pleased and everyone said good night. When all the participants had left, Mike and I restarted the tape recorder and engaged in our own discussion about the interview. We clarified inconsistencies in our notes and discussed our thoughts about the interview in general. We derived several suggestions to help make subsequent interviews run smoother. One observation we had was that I, as the moderator, spoke a little too much. Over all, however, we were both pleased with the first interview and the amount of information we received.

Focus group two: fraternity men and sorority women

Interview conducted April 16, 1996 McGill Hall room 217.

Ten Greek students attended the second focus group interview. Five men represented the four different fraternities and five women represented all four of the sorority houses at The University of Montana. The pizza arrived at 7 p.m. and as each student arrived, I introduced Mike and myself. We ate and engaged in small talk and got to know each other while we waited for everyone to arrive. Several people seemed to know each other and talked about school, upcoming exams and where each had gone for spring break. I was quite happy with the mix of men and women. It was a different

dynamic than the all women group. Several participants qualified their statements with, "Speaking for men..." or "Speaking for women..." All of the participants seemed comfortable with the make-up of the group, as well.

When everyone arrived I thanked them all for coming and briefly described the study. I told them my role was to moderate and to keep the discussion on track. I also explained that Mike was there to take notes and run the tape recorder. Then I read them the informed consent form and when there were no questions everyone signed it.

This group was lively. Immediately they began to say that as Greek students they get no respect. They had example after example of how other students, faculty, administration and even the community was against their existence. Ironically, the tone in the room was lighthearted. This group told stories and laughed at how much prejudice they felt. They appeared to be entertained by the absurdity of the discrimination they were enduring. Although it was clear to me that they struggled with certain aspects of life as Greek students, they did seem to feel secure in the company of their fellow Greeks. The group spoke at length about Greek stereotypes. They were having fun comparing stories. I asked another question, however, and the topic did change slightly. Happily, the stories and the liveliness continued throughout the interview.

One man in particular really enthralled the group. He told some amazing stories of nights out with his "brothers" and road trips to out-of-state fraternity functions. We all sat back and listened intently when he spoke. Even the two or three people, who appeared skeptical of my motives and were cautious with their comments, especially when the comments had to do with parties and socializing, enjoyed this man's anecdotes

and indelicate remarks. Rarely did anyone confirm his comments as "normal Greek behavior."

I was concerned before the group began that some participants might be timid due to the mixed gender group. I thought that maybe women would have difficulty sharing experiences with the group consisting of men, and vice versa. This didn't appear to occur. In fact, some women in this group really asserted themselves and added critical comments to the discussion. I was also concerned that the participants would use more benign vocabulary in the presence of the opposite gender but this too was not the case.

Everyone was thanked again for his or her participation and a gift certificate was given out. A woman told me afterward (off the tape) that she hadn't expected to have as much fun as she had and that she thought I was going to ask extremely personal questions and use the information against the Greek community. She told me that she thought the questions were fair and that she would help me recruit her "sisters" for subsequent interviews. I found her comments very helpful insofar as I wanted to make future participants feel more comfortable before coming to the interview.

Focus group three: fraternity men

Interview conducted April 23, 1996 McGill Hall room 217.

Nine men participated in the third focus group interview. Seven of nine fraternity chapters were represented. Food and drinks were served followed by introductions and the informed consent. We got the interview started at 7:30 p.m.

This group was visibly more anxious than either of the previous groups. As the interview began I noticed that the men seemed older and more serious than previous

participants. They all sat upright in their chairs or on the couch. They were more neatly dressed; these men had combed hair and shaven faces and neat button-down shirts. This was in sharp contrast to the baseball-capped, scruffiness of the men in group two and the sweat-shirted, baseball-capped women of both groups one and two. The previous groups' participants were more relaxed in their body language and in their speech. While the other groups gradually digressed in formality finally reaching a feeling of sitting around with old friends, this current group never left the formality and awkwardness of the opening moments. Throughout the night they sat upright and remained polite and stiff.

One notable difference in their speech became obvious when they were asked to explain the life of a Greek student on The University of Montana campus. While the previous groups chose immediately to talk about what makes a Greek student different than a non-Greek student, this group of men shared examples of how they are similar to other groups and non-Greek students on campus. The man who spoke first seemed to anticipate my first question and had quite a monologue to offer our discussion regarding the sameness of the Greeks. He also talked about the negative publicity that the Greek system receives in the media. If there were differences between Greek and non-Greek students to be mentioned during this interview, these men pointed them out including leadership opportunities and the great support the Greek system offers an individual student. The "general public", they added, often overlooks these benefits of Greek life.

Throughout the evening it became apparent that I was interviewing several men from the Greek system who had taken advantage of the leadership opportunities that had been offered to them. They were currently officers of some degree in their houses, which made their comments seem very cautious and almost rehearsed. Story after story had a

qualifier. By that I mean they might tell of drinking in the fraternity houses but qualified their statement by saying that drinking is much worse in the dorms. Several stories were of Greek discrimination, stereotypes and labels. One guy compared the Greek students to Asians, African Americans and priests when he talked about the oppression that these groups faced.

I had an overwhelming feeling during the interview that I was hearing the "party line." It seemed like everyone at this interview was being very careful about what they said. Toward the end of the discussion my suspicions were confirmed when two men told me that they had been sent by their fraternities because "the house was afraid that some of the younger guys would only talk about the partying, and perpetuate the already negative image of the Greek system." I reacted by thanking them for their candor and participation. I thought it was a very successful interview. I learned a lot about these men, including how important fraternity life was to them and how much they wanted it preserved. There were several comments from this group and from the previous groups that these students felt that that Greek life was in jeopardy of falling victim to bad publicity. They were concerned about diminishing enrollment and a bad reputation in the community and on campus specifically their reputation with the Dean of Students.

Focus group four: sorority women and fraternity men

Interview conducted April 24, 1996 McGill Hall room 217.

Six Greek students; three fraternity men and three sorority women attended the final focus group interview. This group included members from houses that had not been previously represented. The group also included members from the only African

American chapter on campus. It was apparent by their punctuality and the short conversation that everyone was eager to begin and so we ate as we talked.

The discussion was quite lively. They had plenty to say and a lot of it I had heard before. The first question, regarding Greek experiences, was immediately addressed by a woman who talked about the "negative feelings" other students and faculty have toward the Greek students. These thoughts were echoed again and again by others in this focus group. One man spoke of the divisiveness on the ASUM Senate between Greeks and non-Greeks. He said that on several votes the Greek Senators would vote one way and the non-Greeks voted another. We talked about the possibility of the UM Greek system going "dry" or alcohol-free houses.

One guy, in particular, really dominated the discussion. He spoke at length about the pressures of Greek life as well as the pressures of being an athlete and the pressures of being African American in Missoula, Montana. I struggled several times to pull him back to the topic at hand. Although I wanted to allow him to talk about whatever he had on his mind, I found it challenging to make sure others had time to speak. But just like the guy in the second group, he entertained everyone with his stories and made the discussion fun.

Most of the themes that had emerged from the first three groups were supported in the final group. Very few new topics were discussed. At the end of the focus group interview, the prize was awarded and the participants were thanked for their time and input.

Description of Personal Interviews

The other method I used to collect data was personal one-on-one interviews with four different Greek students. Two woman and two men were interviewed individually. All of the interviews were conducted in the Student Wellness Office on campus. None of the focus group interview participants were personally interviewed.

All of the interviews were audio-tape recorded and hand-written notes were taken after the interview had finished. By their own affirmation, all of the participants were comfortable with the interview process with the exception of one woman who said she felt a little self-conscious about the tape recorder. Following is a general profile of each of the interview participants. To protect their identities, pseudonyms are used in place of the actual names of the personal interview participants.

Amy:

Junior

Education major

Amy was a bubbly, high-spirited woman. She was very verbal and told me that she was someone who got involved in many activities outside of school. She spoke very positively about the Greek system and all of the opportunities it offered a college student. She explained to me that she was a legacy. This meant that she had pledged the same sorority house as her mother did when she was in college. Much of our conversation focused on the leadership and social opportunities of the house. She enjoyed being Greek very much and expressed that those not involved in the system really didn't understand much about it.

Barbara:

Senior

Business major

Initially, Barbara was a little uncomfortable with the interview. Specifically, she told me she felt self-conscious about the tape recorder. Once she was speaking, however, she relaxed and spoke comfortably. Periodically during the interview, she would say something about the tape recorder. I tried to put her at ease by ignoring the recorder myself and we eventually finished the interview without much difficulty.

Barbara spoke at length about her experience in the Greek system. She was a very accomplished senior who had been involved in her sorority throughout her college career. She also spoke very objectively. I say *objectively* in contrast to the several other interviews in which I felt as if I was getting the Greek party line. She spoke openly of both the advantages and disadvantages of being a Greek student at The University of Montana.

Christopher:

Sophomore

History major

Christopher was a sporty, rugged kind of guy. He told stories of his friends and seemed to really enjoy living in the fraternity house. He spoke in simple words and used a lot of slang. "Dude" or "Man" began almost all of his sentences. This was a fun interview because he really was a likable guy. Christopher wasn't shy at all but had an

attractive modesty about him. Mostly, he had positive things to say about his experience in the Greek system and was genuinely frustrated by, what he called the negative stereotypes of the Greeks from the rest of campus.

David:

Junior

Biology major

David was a very clean-cut guy. He dressed in neat clothes and was very polite. He wanted to know why I was so interested in Greek students and although he seemed a bit skeptical, he was eager to talk to me. David was completely confident with the benefits of Greek life. He told me that the leadership opportunities, the campus activities, and community involvement were invaluable to his college experience. He discussed the differences between the freshman pledges and the older brothers. Specifically, he spoke of how the younger guys were more into the parties and social life but inevitably "settle down" after their first year.

Section One

Following is an analysis of data related to the first study question—What are the perceptions of fraternity and sorority members regarding their experiences within the Greek system? In this section the themes, which emerged from the data, are described and interpreted.

Themes

From each focus group interview and personal interview, stories and experiences of Greek life were revealed. Although the specific experiences often varied among participants, common themes emerged from analysis of the interviews that were consistent. That is, the themes that underlie the different experiences were common.

Analysis is organized by theme. My interpretation of the theme precedes a section of verbatim quotations providing support for the theme. The quotations are referenced according to the participant and interview. All references for focus group interview or personal interview are pseudonyms. For example, a quotation may have "(woman, fg2)" after it which means that it was a response by a woman from focus group number two. Similarly, the designation "(Amy)" refers to the changed name of the personal interviewee. Further, within the quotations references to a Greek house or another individual have been kept anonymous and the name of either the house or the individual has been changed. For example, a sorority house may be referred to as "Beta Beta." This is a pseudonym; currently, there is not a Greek organization at The University of Montana with this name.

Following is a list of the themes, which emerged from analysis of the interview data.

Theme 1) Social stigma: It's hard to be Greek

Theme 2) Pressures within the Greek system

Theme 3) The support network: Being there for each other

Theme 4) Greek identity

Theme #1: social stigma; it's hard to be Greek.

Easily, the most recurring theme of the study interviews was the prejudice Greek students felt from other non-Greek students, the general public or community, area homeowners, faculty and administration. There was a pervasive feeling that the Greek system has been and continues to be stereotyped. The Greek students are in a constant battle for positive publicity. A common perception is that media attention is abundant when something "bad" occurs but media coverage is not present during their numerous philanthropic events. Part of this focus on the negative aspects of Greek life stems from the images in movies, books and campus lore. People can be persuaded by the universal stereotypes of Greek life. Regardless of the origin, the fraternity and sorority members in these interviews were working toward a better, more positive image.

The following quotations are divided among four origins of the social stigma including non-Greek students, local community, homeowners, and faculty/ administration.

Non-Greek Students

> "There are always things going on within the house, whether it's Monday night meetings or Sunday night meetings or fraternity competitions all week. If you're in the Greek system, you understand that. And students outside of it...they're like, 'What? You're full of it!' They don't understand. At the same time sometimes you are proud. It's awful hard to be a Greek at The U of M." (woman, fg1)

> "It's the unawareness [about the Greek system], not unawareness but....ignorance." (woman, fg1)

> "Randoms are the people that get us in trouble, not Greeks. We can get our own selves in trouble. They're the ones that publicize it. We can get in trouble in the house and it's not going to be publicized as much. We've got 30 people to cover

for us. You know, to say, 'Oh well, if something bad did happen it wasn't really that bad,' and if a GDI is there they're going to go out and say, 'Yeah, we just crashed the Sigma Sigma party and....'" (woman, fg1)

"Someone who's not Greek is going to say, 'You should have seen the way those Greeks were acting. They're stuck up and they were doing this and they were doing this and oh my god this is just out of control.' And then it gets back around to somebody that comes and crashes down on our heads and are like, 'O.K. what are you guys doing? You're out of control.'" (woman, fg1)

"It seems like a lot of people look down on the Greek system, who aren't involved in it. I guess it's kind of the understanding I've gotten. Like a lot of people don't know what it's about and aren't....,well those who don't have any friends in the Greek system really look down on you." (man, fg2)

"I know with myself, um, I just joined last spring and I do play on the university basketball team and when I joined the house, I was totally looked upon differently. I mean, from my friends, my own teammates, you know, throwing their little wisecracks every now and then about how, I'm the sorority girl. You know the little, 'Oh, what are you doing tonight? Going out with your little sorority sisters?' and, 'Oh, how are your sisters doing?' You know, or, I'll do something and they say, 'Oh is that something you picked up from your sisters?', you know, and that's like their big thing, the sister thing. They don't get the concept of what it means to us, because they haven't experienced it." (woman, fg2)

"Even our student paper, nothing against them, but there's rarely anything positive said about the Greeks in the Kaimin. Which is kind of depressing because I think we should have a place in there but we don't." (man, fg2)

"I get a lot of slack from the basketball team. But, that's when I wear the letters the most, because I'm like, 'Eh-eh, check it out.' You know, but [the other girls] are always looking down on it. They say, 'What does that mean?'" (woman, fg2)

"I think that people that aren't Greek, especially those that aren't Greek are against it, the only thing they know about the Greek system is the parties and the typical stereotype...Animal House type." (man, fg3)

"I know that if someone is rejected. It's a lot easier to find faults with them. You know, no matter how many good things you hear about them. It doesn't matter. I know that last year when one of the alleged rapes occurred, there was one Kaimin reporter who was female that was very brutal and vicious in her writings about the Greeks. I found out later that she went through sorority rush and she wasn't accepted. I think, by nature there's that view that we are elitist. Um...you know,

it isn't totally unfounded but, at the same time it has some.....it can lead to some pretty vicious repercussions." (man, fg3)

"There are a lot of negative feelings toward the Greeks. For a while a lot of my friends, that are not within the Greek system, made comments like, 'Oh, you buy your friends.' That kind of stuff." (Barbara)

"Once you're involved on campus, my letters make me a target. But different things on campus like, being accused of being an alcoholic or rapist or racist or the latest thing is, I'm on the Senate and I'm being accused of being 'Matt Lee's Little puppet'. Like, all the Greeks on the senate." (man, fg4)

Local Community

"If anything negative happens, it's exploited. It's almost like a politician, he's going to get nailed whereas, like, Joe Blow is not going to get nailed. Whereas in the Greek system, all eyes are on us. We do something and people are watching, they're waiting for us to mess up." (woman, fg1)

"I think the media has a lot to do with it too though. I mean, if you watch all these TV shows where fraternities are being hazed, walking around campus in their underwear for, you know, four weeks straight or something like that, I mean, people look at that too." (woman, fg1)

"People get their ideas from the media. There was something on Dateline last semester where a fraternity down in Texas, or something like that, was caught hazing, and it was big news, I mean it was. You know, it was on all the little promos-- 'This week on Dateline....' They were showing these promos for this fraternity that got busted for hazing and they were going to have their charter closed and you know whatever. And then my Grandma was on the phone within a half hour, 'Is this happening with you?'" (woman, fg1)

"Right now the sororities are going to Paxson [elementary] School and we help little kids cross the street at eight in the morning. It's just something that we do. They can blame the fraternities. 'Oh, you guys are doing this and you know that's not called for!' But, you should have seen the amount of toys that came in this week, incredible! Between all four sororities we had toys everywhere, toys and clothes.... We give them to Family Services and the YMCA or the YWCA. We raised so much for charity, it's incredible! And, you know there's not going to be anything in the paper about that. All everybody's going to hear is 'Oh yeah, guess what this sorority did so they can win the [charity] competition. And guess what these guys did to do this and oh the fraternity guys are getting this,' it's ridiculous." (woman, fg1)

"We had a function last year first semester between two houses. It was a dance and I mean it has not happened since because it was set up to be a big, out of control [party]. It was a big mess. We're pretty much excluded from every place in Missoula anymore to have a function. We had it a hotel and the owner or whoever said, 'I'm sorry, you will **not** get dessert, you can get your pictures on the way out but you must leave right now!' It was a sorority function and we brought dates. It was a very formal function. Very dressed up but, very out of control." (woman, fg1)

"It seems like people have blinders on. You know, it seems like they think we're such....the typical beer drinking slobs, you know, guys falling down the stairs and puking out of a second story window. They don't see, like the time me and my brothers were on the North side painting a bridge, they don't see the good side." (man, fg2)

"I think being Greek does separate us [from non-Greeks] in the sense that we're all bound by certain principles and ethics that we try to follow. You know, and the majority of us follow them as best as possible. But um,...unfortunately that isn't perceived by the general public. um...because I mean, as a whole I think we work very hard and....every now and then.... we play hard, you know, partying or whatever. Unfortunately, we get typecast very negatively and I think that's very unfair in some instances. But, other times it is kind of correct. I can't honestly say that some people, you know, when they read about a fraternity in the police blotter on the back page of the Kaimin, you know, they get a negative picture of us. I mean, which might be appropriate, it might not be. So, I really don't think, being a Greek separates us all that much from other students." (man, fg3)

"Well, I think most of the stereotypes against Greeks have to do with the social aspects. Most people that don't understand the Greek system, don't know about the other things. They just know about the social things that are advertised and put out there for them to realize. And, I think any individual faced against a united group is going to fight back. It's like survival of the fittest. If it was everybody against me, I would be like, 'Well, I'm right', you know.' (Amy)

"The negative publicity is the only aspect the community might have experienced. You know, we sit down and say, 'O.K., well, we're going to do a blood drive,' or like Greek week –we're doing a blood drawing, we're collecting canned food, we're going to the daycare and we're going to build their fence for them. We're doing these things and we might do one or two days a week toward community service. And, it's small things, and they add up to us. People don't immediately see them. But, the negative! You have a party and something happens, suddenly everyone knows about it, if they were not at the party or if they were. You know, and stories change around. It's just like high school. You know, such and such a person did this and it gets around, back to the person, and it's something totally different." (man, fg3)

"It's like, what's interesting? You're not going to spread a rumor that we gave this guy over here a 100 cans of canned food. I mean, what's interesting about that? Another rumor, some mishap that happened somewhere is going to spread a lot faster than donating food or time. It happens with people that are in the Greek system that do community service. They're not in the paper. Articles are in the paper only every once in a while. You'll have a spotlight in the paper that someone's donated their entire life to doing this to help and better people. And most of the time it's after they've died or they're like 85 years old. You know, it's a tribute to them, but we do a lot of it and we do it **all** the time." (man, fg3)

"I think a lot of it has to do with preconceived perceptions of Greeks too. It's like any other stereotype when you're not going to look for the good. Like blacks, say a black guy robs the store, you're like, 'It figures-- he's black.' You know, I think a lot of people are satisfying their own beliefs by publishing stories like that." (man, fg3)

"I know that fraternities have been involved at the university for over 90 years. And, you know, ever since their inception we have always been very active in the community and on campus. You know, like I said, our fraternity requires us to be. But, somewhere along the line it just got taken for granted. Just because we do all these things and we don't really toot our own horn. So, if something bad would happen that would get publicized. But, we did so many good things that it wasn't news because it was so commonplace. And, somewhere along the way all the bad things would just totally drown out the good things and we just totally forgot to toot our own horn and talk about ourselves. And, as far as the real turning of public opinion on fraternities, I mean, it really happened in the 60's, I mean, the Vietnam War, and all the students, especially at this campus, which is a very liberal campus, were anti-establishment. And, fraternities are an establishment, you know, and that's something that we're still trying to recover from." (man, fg3)

"A prime example is the rape last year. The guy did it...or he was alleged to have done it. I don't know what happened, you know, you get all the speculations. Like, the editorial in the paper saying things like. 'the ritual of the fraternity teaches guys how to get chicks drunk and take advantage of them.' You know, that plays a lot into the public [stereotype]." (man, fg3)

"In the community, you're targeted as a person that is supposed to be a role model, and you know, they're waiting for you to mess up." (David)

Homeowners

"To me, it seems like not only on the campus but locally there's a lot of bias towards us. I mean, [we] don't have a house and we've been struggling with that and with the school, with the community, and the University Home Owners Association hates us. They don't want to have anything to do with us. I don't know if I should swear but this is a direct quote, we went to one of their meetings and they said, 'Why don't you move your fucking university?' It seems like we're fighting, it's an uphill battle and we're new and we just got our charter almost three years ago and....it's kind of depressing at times. And, why fight anymore? We could just give up and roll over but,.....it's frustrating." (man, fg2)

"There's such a negative stereotype in our neighborhood." (woman, fg2)

"The stereotype carries over to the behaviors expected of the members. At our house, we're on a direct route from the bars to the dorms and so we always get calls from neighbors. And we pick up slack from people walking and screaming on the way from the bars that are neighbors will suppose that it's us. When it's really them that are screaming and yelling." (man, fg2)

"It's all our neighbors see on TV. That's what they see. So, that's the only thing they really talk to us about." (Christopher)

"Not only that, I think even going back to *Animal House*[3], things like that, where a while ago, maybe the Greek system wasn't uh....as toned down as it is now. There used to be...maybe a lot of neighborhood vandalism. And also...different houses are different. Some are labeled different. Uh...you know, I'm not going to say names, but some may do different things. Some may haze and some may not. Like, our house is founded against hazing. You know, we don't go out and vandalize. Maybe some houses do but, I think as a whole, the houses that do or even if they don't anymore, we get labeled no matter what. It's the whole Greek system, it's not just one house. It's the whole system." (man, fg3)

Faculty/ Administration

"The type of [faculty] that we have on this campus look down upon being a Greek, so it's kind of like, sometimes I feel like if I'm wearing my letters people are like, 'Oh no, she's a Greek, or she's a this,' or whatever. And 'cuz we're so small we kind of are little different where as if we were on a big campus, where half or more of the campus is a Greek majority, it just.... There's a lot of things people don't know about it and they see it for what it is and that's how they're

[3] *Animal House* is a 1970's film about a rowdy house of fraternity men.

going to judge it. They don't know what really happens and what goes on." (woman, fg2)

"I don't think there's a lot of university support. I think it's better than it used to be but, like I just watched the new video that was sent out to new students for next year. There isn't one Greek thing in there and there's tons of football, you know...and all kinds of stuff like that, it's just little things like that where it's like we're not part of the university system even though we are." (woman, fg2)

"Like with me and my coach... I just had a big, long talk to her about it. She said, 'I see you're having a lot of fun socially.' She doesn't know what I do outside of basketball, you know, except that I am in a [sorority] house and [what she said] was just a total slam on me being in the house, just thinking that since I am in a sorority that I party all the time is basically what she thought. She has no idea." (woman, fg2)

"I think that a lot of the problem is with the university too. They stereotype and talk about what it's like being a Greek. Because automatically they see if you have letters on they think this or that of you." (man, fg2)

"Yeah, the partying and the....you know...[the administrators] think we do nothing but go to parties. Whereas, the facts are we make a lot of money. We make more money with philanthropy projects-- at least more than any other group on campus. I mean, that's a fact. The amount of money is huge. And not only that, there are Greek people at the top of every group on this campus. And, they don't see that side, it's just automatically the 'You're a sorority girl.' So you know, which I don't think is.... I'm not a stupid sorority girl, but that's what [they] see when [they] see the letters at first." (woman, fg2)

"I don't know if this has happened to anyone else, but I've noticed it-- I'm a business major, and a lot of times the teachers, the professors that I have... I do not wear my letters to class. I **will not** wear my letters. Because they're like, 'I know she has a test file, I know that she has my previous tests.' That's just something that you just do not do. You **do not** wear your letters to a lot of classes. I don't hardly see any Greeks with their letters. Unless they're just T-shirts or something which aren't... the letters are not that visible." (woman, fg2)

"That is something most people in the Greek system experience, that leadership opportunity. And, you know, unfortunately some people [in the Greek system] don't take advantage of it. They don't recognize it. Instead, they go around and they...they're negative...they're disruptive. And, you know, what's really unfortunate is that **those** are, it seems like, the only people you hear about when the Dean speaks." (man, fg3)

"You know, just little things are blown out of proportion at this university. Just take any organization, for example, um...there's going be things that go wrong, no matter who it is. Priests – they'll do something wrong and it's blown out of proportion. Well, it's the same thing with the Greeks. One little thing goes wrong and everybody's labeled. It's inevitable, something is going to go wrong. But, we end up getting stereotyped and labeled. Real easily." (man, fg3)

"When they attacked us that time, that last year. They started highlighting in the Kaimin, every single day, you know, 'There's been so many rapes in the Greek system, so many sexual assaults,' you know. But the administration didn't bother to research on the campus that there had been 4 or 5 times the amount of rapes on campus as there had been in the Greek system. They didn't bother to print that. No,....it's the Greek system that's doing all the wrong." (man, fg3)

"We're under persecution with the Dean if something goes wrong. Whereas, if 25 students from the dorms go to a friend's house up in the Rattlesnake or somewhere, what's the Dean going do then? Nothing!" (Christopher)

"There are a lot of negative feelings toward the Greeks. For a while a lot of my friends, that are not within the Greek system, made comments like, 'Oh, you buy your friends.' That kind of stuff. You get it from a lot of faculty members too. I think they look negatively on it the Greek system." (Barbara)

"We got targeted a little bit as far as, you know, our practices. So, we kind of had a lot of ears peeping in. Official people trying to figure out what the heck we were doing to see if we were breaking any regulations or what not." (man, fg4)

"It's the faculty looking into the Greek system like it has potential problems. Then they think of future events within the Greek system on a worse case scenario. And, they end up putting pressure through the administration and on to the house leaders to put these restrictions on the houses. And all of a sudden we've got this SEMCO[4] thing. Where we have to restrict our parties. We're supposed to follow this code that **they** made up because they're worried we're going to give a bad name to our Greek system and the University system as a whole." (man, fg4)

"The administration, I think that's where the pressure comes from." (David)

"A lot of the administration and alums [*sic*] from different fraternities want all [of our] parties to be dry. And, in order to prevent that from happening we tried to develop this SEMCO to monitor drinking, and underage drinking, to try to keep it

[4] SEMCO: Student Events Monitoring Committee. Put in place by fraternity and sorority members to self-regulate parties and other social functions in which alcohol is present. SEMCO was replaced in the fall semester of 1996 by a new Greek alcohol policy.

safe ourselves. The problem is this SEMCO is really disorganized." (woman, fg4)

"I think as far as The University of Montana goes, they should treat people who are Greek just like they treat the rest of the students. You know, because in a lot of occasions they're stiffer. They have stiffer penalties and rules and there's all kinds of situations they're putting you down. You're GPA needs to be higher, just because you're in the Greek system. They should just treat everyone the same." (man, fg4)

"There's some professors that you just don't wear your letters at all to their classes." (woman, fg4)

"I have one of those professors right now, and he's giving us all a "D" in there. That's what I was told about him before it even started." (man, fg4)

Theme #2: pressures within the Greek system.

The interview participants talked about different pressures they felt within their Greek houses. These pressures were associated quite often with smoking, alcohol use, body image, and eating behaviors. Pressures from within the house weren't always expressed as a negative part about being Greek. The participants spoke about campus leadership and academic expectations their houses placed on them which may contribute to their stress level but enhanced their college experience. In these interviews most agreed that the demands of the house were worthwhile.

The following quotations are divided into eight types of pressure within the Greek experience. They include pressure to use alcohol, pressure on dating/ sexual relationships, pressure to smoke, pressure to have an attractive body, pressure to protect the Greek/ house image, responsibilities of the chapter, pressure on one's time, pressure to keep and acquire members.

Pressure to use alcohol

"When I joined the house, there were some seniors in the house who were 21 and when you're 21 you assume everyone else should be too. 'Well, I'm 21 so why don't you just come downtown and drink with me?'" (woman, fg1)

"And I know every Saturday and Sunday morning I would look forward to hearing the senior girls stories. Oh my god, 'Don't talk so loud, my head hurts.' And it would be funny. I mean, you could hear all these stories and you think, 'I'm going to be like that when I'm a senior.' When I was a freshmen, these were the influences that I had. 'Hey, anyone want to go downtown?' And you think you're so cool because these girls asked me to go downtown. And so my first influences were with these girls who were 21 who were out at least 2 times a week. That's like in high school and having a senior asking you to party with them and just you. That's like, 'Oh my god, I have to go, I don't care if I have a test tomorrow or not.'" (woman, fg1)

"Sometimes there's pressure from your sisters. Even on a Friday night, Saturday night you see a group of ten of your sisters and they're like, 'Well, we're going downtown, we're going to go to *Stocks* or wherever.' And you're like, 'O.K. well, I think I want to stay home and watch movies. Well, wait a minute I'm gonna go with you guys.' And, it's just like, you kind of want to hang out with the crowd and if that means that they're going to go out downtown. Well, O.K. I'm gonna go, that doesn't mean necessarily that you have to drink. But, you're in that atmosphere where it's going on. I think that has a lot to do with it." (woman, fg2)

"There is pressure like, 'If you don't do this, you're not going to get in the fraternity.' I mean, I can see the pressures, especially when you're a pledge; it's like, 'When are they going to leave me alone? Yeah, right!' I think a lot of it is trying to fit in. You know, I didn't start drinking alcohol until I was in college." (man, fg2)

"I think, there's definitely the mentoring thing but, it's kind of a double-edged sword. If somebody you look up to does something good, then you'll aspire to follow that. But, at the same time if you see them doing something wrong, it's very easy to fall into the trap of, 'Hey, they're popular-- he's a stud and he's drinking that, so why not?'" (man, fg3)

"I know when people change their group of friends they start doing a lot of the same behaviors as their friends and not even just smoking or drinking-- a lot of behaviors." (Barbara)

"But, it [drugs and alcohol] is more available to me here. People are doing it more, and when the people you hang out with are doing it, it's easier to say,

'Well, O.K. maybe I can.' I've never seen as many drugs around as I have since I've been here." (woman, fg4)

"There's a lot of peer pressure in a way. Like what [he] was saying about people sitting around having fun. You see your brothers doing that and there like, 'Come on have fun with us. Come drink with us.' And if I'm bored I'm going to [do it]." (man, fg4)

"I think peer pressure is a big thing in our house, to me. 'Cuz I don't think a person who goes around and gets plastered because of stress is the problem. I think the person looking at his peers, people who drink every Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, or every Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday or whatever. I think that is what is more prevalent. Just using our house as an example. We had a group for a while there when our numbers were way up. There was a group who would just drink and smoke all the time. And the other group of us who hardly drank at all, and if we did, it was a special occasion. But, on a week to week basis there was not any drinking at all. You saw where people made decisions. A new guy would come in and make the decision, 'I'm gonna hang with this group or I'm gonna hang with that group.' And, it was basically who influenced them more. And, obviously in some situations, you know, they went to the weed smoking, drinking group because it seemed like they were having more fun. They probably were having more fun than the rest of us 'cuz we weren't drinking but you know, there's nothin' to do. And, they went that other route and they looked up to those older guys that was doin' all that and had all of these women coming up to their rooms and stuff like that. So, I think peer pressure is the biggy." (man, fg4)

"I know, that at my house there's a group of girls that go out probably every single night and instead of saying, 'O.K., that's cool you're going to study or whatever,' it's more like, 'Oh, come on, come out with us.' It gets to be like that and I just sit there and go, 'What are you talking about, I'm trying to study.' And they try to drag people out with them. And, I know at parties and stuff, like, with my office in the house, I'm the health officer and I'd be a hypocrite, so I don't drink. I know that I can have fun without drinking. But, it just seems like some people are like 'Oh, I'm not going to go, I guess I'm just the bitch of the house.'" (woman, fg4)

Pressure on dating/ sexual relationships

"Some girls are like, 'Oh my god, I was so drunk!' And they don't even know whether they were raped or not. And, what girl is going to walk up and say, 'This guy from such and such a house did this to me? I think he did it, but I'm not sure.' Then his friends in that house, or two fraternity houses are not talking to you and it gets around to other sorority houses and then you've got two or three houses

that are like, 'GOOD-BYE!' Especially, if the girl is in a sorority and the guy is in a fraternity and then all of a sudden there is this big war between the houses." (woman, fg1)

"If you're seen once with a guy it's automatically thought that you're dating him. People are so nosy. People are so brutal. 'Did you kiss him? Did you mash last night?'" (woman, fg1)

"Yeah, I think a lot of girls talk in the bathroom, like in our house, it's really ridiculous but it happens. There are girls in our house that are virgins, and it's like, 'Wow! Really? You're a virgin?' It's like you're a geek or something, it's strange. Like, 'Is there something wrong with you? Are you okay? You're very pretty.' People are always talking about a lot of the girls, and talking about sex it could influence the girls. Like, they're missing out on something." (woman, fg1)

"I think among a big group of guys there's pressure to sleep with women." (man, fg2)

"I think for girls having sex is different. For the fraternity guys the reputation is to be the stud in the house or whatever, that is exactly opposite for the girls. Because there's the stereotype that if a guy sleeps around, he's really cool, but if a girl does she's trash." (Amy)

"Having such a tight knit group contains some disadvantages too. Let's say I got a [sexually transmitted] disease and say my best friend in the house started dating the girl that I just broke up with. You know, and I think that I got it from her, I don't know that I would have the guts to go up to my fraternity brother and say 'Hey, I got gonorrhea.' Because he's my best friend, why would I want to tell him something like that? I guess I would want to tell him, but I don't know if I'd have the guts to do it." (man, fg3)

"You can date one girl in a house and then have a break-up. And she might not totally understand why you're breaking-up and then she'll go and tell her house, 'Hey we broke up, and this guy's a real asshole.' Then her whole house starts thinking bad things about you and there's a house rule that they're not going to talk to you, or they're going to blow you off. Sometimes that happens when you deserve it and sometimes it happens when you don't deserve it. It's kind of an awkward thing." (man, fg3)

"When you start dating a girl, the opinion of the house can have a big influence on how fast you can move forward in the relationship or if you're going to stay dating at all. Your house can be a major wedge between you and the girl. I mean, that could be a major factor. Because, there they are-- your friends and they are your family and they're voicing their opinion and sometimes they can see something [about her] that you don't. I see it a lot with the people I date. I've

caught myself doing it sometimes to guys and to the people they're dating. Your friends can really find weaknesses in your dates." (man, fg3)

Pressure to smoke

"I'm one of those people that likes to go out on the back patio and have a cigarette. It's like, it's very, very rare that I will go out there by myself. But, if I see 5 or 6 girls out there, I'm like 'Yeah! Go hang out and have a cigarette with everybody.' And, it's hard to stop that because everyone's doing it. I mean, what are you supposed to say, 'O.K., you can't go outside in more than groups of two.' You can't do that I don't know how you would do that. It's such a hard thing to quit smoking while living in the house. You would have to get everybody to stop." (woman, fg2)

"The mentor type thing, it can kind of backfire on you eventually. I know on our front porch, there's a group of guys and they smoke and that's what they do. It's like a little sewing circle type thing." (man, fg3)

"I notice, that the sororities, especially the sororities, that they're a little cliquey. And, I see a lot of people changing groups of friends a lot and then you know, you change, and then all of a sudden you just make friends with somebody else in your house and this person smokes and then you start smoking. It's a social thing." (man, fg4)

Pressure to have an attractive body

"I think body image is important all over campus. But, especially when you live with so many girls, it's unavoidable." (woman, fg1)

"Like, a lot of girls are...I know in our house, you know.....fat." (woman, fg 1)

"Everyone in our house is always on a diet for one reason or another." (woman, fg1)

"In our house it's like, 'Oh my god am I going to be able to eat this and get back to normal?'" (woman, fg1)

"[Girls in the house] are always on a diet, like a lot of them are going to Mazatlan, so they've been dieting for five or six weeks." (woman, fg1)

"I think one thing that affects everyone is appearance and self awareness. Like, I'll see someone in my house and I'll think 'Oh gee, that really makes her look skinny,' and I'll think mmmm. Or you see how somebody else looks and you

want to look like that if you think they look nice. You want to practice the same methods. There's a lot of pressure sometimes." (Barbara)

"I think for the guys there is a little bit of pressure to have an athletic, muscular body. Um,.... I don't really fit that role." (man, fg3)

Pressure to protect the Greek/ house image

"If you see someone totally hammered, you want to know what house they're from. She could be from your house and as soon as you find out—'Oh my god, that's one of our girls! Let's get her!' You know, 'You grab her, and you drag her out the back door!' It's an embarrassment. The other side of it is-- if I was an Omega and I saw some Beta Beta hammered I'd be like, 'Oh my god did you see that Beta Beta? She is so hammered! I am so glad that I am not like that.' It's not like a gossip thing, but it's kind of funny. Sort of like a prize—'Look at your house. I'm in control; that girl has problems!' It's nice to say, 'Our house is not doing that.' 'We are doing good!'" (woman, fg1)

"So, we have to be careful to cover ourselves. If something bad does happen, it's not just the house and the people who were in that house where the party was, I mean, everybody else [in the Greek system] is involved." (woman, fg1)

"We have this girl, she's graduating out, and she's always joking like, if we throw on a hat, she's like, 'Now, if you wear your letters make sure you look really good.' And we just laugh and say, 'Oh, do I look good enough to wear my letters today?'" (woman, fg2)

Responsibilities of the chapter

"One of the big things is like we have FIPG[5], which is like an insurance policy that we cannot drink at fraternity parties. So, if you're under 21, you don't drink! And, anyone there is like, 'You're kidding, you **can't** drink?' or whatever, you know, 'We're at a fraternity party! You're in the Greek system!' No, we suffer major consequences if we drink." (woman, fg1)

"You can't drink or have alcohol on our block. If we have a beer cap found on our property and if our house burns down, we don't get money. Our house is destroyed with nothing. Our insurance is shot. We are right next to Hellgate High School. And, where my room is, we can witness their little drug transactions and everything because they come into our parking lot. We have this

[5] FIPG: Fraternal Insurance Policy Group. A national organization formed to underwrite fraternity chapter insurance policies around the U.S.

big shrub, that's probably 10 feet tall and so they come into our parking lot and do their little dealings or whatever there. And the people that live behind us have their own carriage house and so they hired a private.....well not private cop but, like a rent a cop to walk back and forth and make sure these people didn't go on their property. But, you know, I went out to clean up trash one day and there were cigarettes and other things and beer cans and everything kind of just all along right by the sidewalk, right where our yard starts. And, if somebody Nationals[6] or anybody was there and found the garbage bag full of something....you know... we could lose our charter, we could lose our house....shut down! Which means everything." (woman, fg1)

"We can't change the law just because we're Greek." (woman, fg1)

"In the last couple of weeks we've been having some bad things happen. Our president quit on us. We're put on membership probation from nationals and everybody's all stressed out saying, 'What are we gonna do?' You can just tell, it's right around midterms, and a guy from Nationals was just here. You know, we're getting inspected. There were people yelling at each other in the middle of our meeting. It's real hard." (man, fg2)

"There are so many rules and regulations [in the Greek system]. They control our parties. You have to go with their format. And, there's your bylaws and all these other things. You have a checklist. You have to provide so much. You have security. It has to be....everything has to be by the lines. And if you sway from that, you can be instantly thrown on probation. You can't have any more parties for the semester, or for a period of time. Depending on what the Dean [of Students] says." (man, fg3)

"We're under persecution with the Dean if something goes wrong. Whereas, if 25 students from the dorms go to a friends, outside, or up the Rattlesnake or somewhere, what's the Dean gonna do to them? Nothing!" (man, fg3)

"We have a heightened sense of awareness about liability also. In fact, if something happens with an individual in your house, you could lose your house, you could lose your charter, you know. We have more responsible parties. You just take more precautions." (man, fg3)

Pressure on one's time

"There's always things going on within a house, whether it's Monday night meetings or Sunday night meetings or fraternity competitions all week. If you're

[6] The term "Nationals" was used to refer to the national body that governs a specific chapter. All chapters have a national organization.

in the Greek system, you understand that your time belongs to the house." (woman, fg1)

"I'm in a house too. I gotta keep my grades up or I can't be in the sorority. I mean, and that for me is a big thing, it's been a huge part of my life for three years and I don't want to blow it, you know, not only for myself, but you got a group of women working together, you have to keep your grades up to be in the chapter." (woman, fg2)

"These are stressful times, I mean, you have your social life, your academic life, you have your house, yourself, your love life, living with so many people. It's hard." (woman, fg2)

"With being Greek there's a lot to balance. You can really tell it's hard when you get in meetings and everyone's like, 'O.K., let's get this done. Let's get this over with. Nobody else in college is sitting here talking for 2 hours worrying about Nationals and SEMCO.'" (woman, fg2)

"I know that with my house, and certainly other houses, they require a certain number of people in each house to go out and do extra-curricular things on campus. So, I've certainly been pushed to involve myself in activities, such as Senate and certain honor societies." (man, fg3)

"I know that in my sorority house I don't sleep very much because there's always opportunities to do something. It's like, 2:00 rolls around, and I have an 8 o'clock [class] so you're getting 4 or 5 hours of sleep. Some nights get so hyper at our house. Prime time is at 1 o'clock in the morning. And, it's hard to sleep. I can't go on such a little amount of sleep." (woman, fg4)

<u>Pressure to keep and acquire members</u>

"When it comes down to it, the main goal is to keep the Greek system going. It's like, 'We better get more members than anyone else!' It's like, 'Bring people into the Greek System period!' And then worry about which house." (woman, fg1)

"There are always rumors that you know, like this fraternity might shut down and everyone's like, 'No don't let that happen,' because even if one sorority shut down, we would all have to shut down. Like, if we shut down, like all the other three [sororities] would have to go down and the whole Greek system would go down with it." (woman, fg1)

"Well, you just have to have so many [houses]. We have to have four and we only have four right now, so if we lost one, we would lose them all." (woman, fg1)

"And, like right now, people at Colorado State, their whole campus went dry. Some schools in Colorado just went dry and the Greek system and everything went dry. It's a significant blow to membership drives." (woman, fg1)

"So the question comes up in the house, 'O.K., you guys have this marijuana problem. What are you going to do about it?' And, it becomes a problem [for the house] when you have limited members you know, kicking people out will seriously start depleting your numbers. You could lose your house." (man, fg4)

Theme #3: the support network: being there for each other.

Every interview participant said something in support of the Greek system. They gave several examples of the benefits of being Greek. All of these comments had a recurring pattern; the Greek system offered a support network for college students. The closeness of the house members and the "tight knit group" played a central role in the individual's experience of fraternity and sorority life.

"Well, I think it's (Greek life) got benefits. Like for now and later and lifelong friends in your house and other houses." (woman, fg1)

"Well, like, if you have a big sister or little sister in a house or something and you get really close to them and once school is over it's not like you guys are going to split. I mean, you guys are going to keep in touch and anywhere you go, I mean, even on another campus, like in Helena and everywhere else, you and the others just hang out with other chapters, you know." (woman, fg1)

"We are a tight knit group." (woman, fg1)

"I was here on campus last year and went to a couple [Greek] parties and I was like, you know, 'This is fun!' And, it was hard for me to get to know people because everybody knew each other because they were so closely knit. And once you get in, you get close to everybody and everybody is just so friendly, regardless of whether they really want to be your friend but, they will be friendly anyway just because they want to keep good relations with everybody. And, I know from being an outsider last year it's so weird but, I didn't get any harsh feelings. It's just so hard to understand. It's like being part of a team, you don't understand what being part of a team is like until you are a part of that team. And,

until you get sucked in, not sucked in.... well, I got sucked in (*laugh*). Until you get sucked into the Greek System you don't understand what it's all about." (woman, fg1)

"It's like a big network. There's a huge amount of people that you have something very in common with. And, like, it's so much easier sometimes, just because you could go double dating and everyone knows each other for functions, it's easier." (woman, fg1)

"There's a lot of trust with your sisters though. You have to trust them. A sister will walk up to you in a place and say, 'See that guy right there you're talking to? Stay away because he's bad news.' Even other brothers will tell you. Everybody looks out for each other. If there's one rotten egg, then someone's going to say something. Even if it is someone from that same house. They will say, 'Get him away from her now!'" (woman, fg1)

"I've got 40 sisters looking out for me." (woman, fg1)

"We were at a party and there's this brand new girl clamping on a guy and somebody walked up to me and said, 'Do you know her?' And I'm like, 'I don't know her.' And we walked away, even though the guy was bad news. We walked back into the party and drank some more anyway because we knew this guy was bad and she's not in the [sorority] house." (woman, fg1)

"Yeah, if you don't [know him], somebody in the house does know him. If the guy screws up, I mean, his chances of winning a date in our house again are slim. He's like black-balled for a long time." (woman, fg1)

"Like, if a random girl, like someone not in the Greek system came into the party it's not the responsibility of us sorority women to say, 'You can't do this and I wouldn't do that.' I mean they come into these parties and are so unaware. They're just here for the party." (woman, fg1)

"I saw my friend from another sorority just butt-faced on the floor, puking. She was under 21. I mean, 'What is the policy in your house? Why don't you get your act together?' We said, 'Get her out of here! She is not only giving **your** house a bad rep but everybody else's....get her out of here!'
That's also a big concern. We look out for our sisters. We get things under control. We'll say, 'Oh my god, what house is she from? Why don't we go home now? Get her out.' Someone's gonna drag her home and shove her in bed. Then you say, 'O.K., now I'm going back over to the party." (woman, fg1)

"We have girls that are like you in our house, who are just like, 'I don't feel the need to drink.' And, it's really nice to know that when you call and you're down at the Bodega and you know that you're hammered and you know that if you tried

to walk home, you wouldn't make it and if you tried to drive, you wouldn't make it out of the parking lot. It's nice to know that you have these girls that you can call who are like, 'Yes, I was sleeping and yes, I'm very mad at you but I'll come get you.'" (woman, fg1)

"Even with sexual concerns, if the girls have something happen to them... you could go to someone in your house. I think being in a house too, there's that unspoken trust, that if I tell you this, you're not going to tell everybody across the street. It's nice to know that you have that trust there unconditionally. Whether you have paper cuts or you're pregnant. It's nice to know you have that trust there. It's important.' (woman, fg1)

"And the Greek system can play a positive role in [education], because we have speakers that come into our house and I'm sure sororities do too. Most fraternities have guest speakers, as well, that educate the members and every year all new pledges have to go to a seminar on sexual issues and alcohol and drug related issues. And, through being in the Greek system, it's not perfect but there's more available, there's more resources available to counteract these negative health risks than there are available to other students who are not members of the Greek system. We have people coming in to talk about STDs and about, we have a SARS[7] representative come every year to talk about sexual assaults and that's one of the things that I think the Greek system does that's really positive as well as community service and things like that." (man, fg2)

"And as well, if you're living in a house with 15 people or 20 people or 30 people then you're going to see if somebody has a problem. If somebody's drunk 5 nights in a row, then maybe nothing will happen, but maybe somebody will say this guy needs some help. And it's visible. If somebody's drunk all the time, everybody's going to know about it because he'll be stumbling. I won't claim to say that everyone in the house is friends but there is a number of people who would want to help. It's a very caring community in that people will try to help their brothers or sisters." (man, fg2)

"At parties my sisters are always looking out for me. Whether it's liability or whatever. They're trying to protect each other." (woman, fg2)

"Sometimes it just boils down to watching your brother's back. Sometimes my brothers have backed me up in a corner. Like, I've done something stupid, you know, they grab me by the back of the collar and drag me out the door. Knock the snot out of me....(laugh).. And I could have done something, like raise some hell, but that would short not only my reputation but my fraternity's reputation. At times you get ticked off. But, it's a good thing that people watch you and you watch other people." (man, fg2)

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[7] SARS. Sexual Assault Recovery Service.

"Well, and that's the hardest thing for people with an eating disorder. They're so used to being able to hide it, and they can't hide it [in the sorority house], they're forced to confront it and if nothing else, you know you can help them get a grasp of what they're doing to themselves. You know, maybe if they're not ready to accept treatment or whatever, but they know that they're being watched all the time." (woman, fg2)

"Like, if I see our new freshmen, like, walking away with some guy into a room. I'm like, you know, we just don't let our sisters do that. And, you're usually there with a group of people anyway. And, you kind of end up watching out for each other. It's just that way. It makes it harder, but there's always going to be a problem. But, it helps at least." (woman, fg2)

"There's a lot of fraternity guys that we're really good friends with. We can say, 'There's a freshmen over there, would you go help her out?' I mean, I know my fraternity friends and they watch out for us too." (woman, fg2)

"Oh yeah. I've been walked home by one of my friends before, fraternity friends. He's like, 'Barbara, lets go home, you need to go home and go to bed.'" (Barbara)

"You're talking about alcohol related STDs; the Greek system will do a lot to stop that. Because at parties we have free cab rides home available for girls that are drunk. And, we have sober monitors at a party. I mean, I was going around and finding girls that were drunk in a corner and potential rape victims and getting them out of there. Giving them to security guards to take home. And we had people waiting at the door to shuttle people back to the dorms." (man, fg2)

"Smoking kinda worries me, because of my grandfather and I don't want them to end up like he did. He died when he was only 46 years old. And, I never got to know him. And, it's scary because these are your brothers and your sisters." (man, fg2)

"Sometimes you just have to get away from the house. You know, the girls in our house, really know when I have to do my thing. We call it a 'Beta Sigma Overload'. It's just like, 'I'm not doing anymore, don't ask me to.'" (woman, fg2)

"We handle stress together. We have little pillow passings when things in the house are so tense that we just say, 'O.K., we need to stop and talk about this.' We have this 'Gamma Bear' and you pass it around the room; the only person that can talk is the one with the bear. So, you hold the bear and you just say, 'This is what's going on in my life. I'm pissed at you 'cuz of this, and I'm angry all the time because this is going on. And everyone in the house goes around and says

how they're feeling. It's like, huge...huge. It brings everything to the surface." (woman, fg2)

"So much happens in your house. Just having all the people living there. I can't even fathom the idea of not having a house. So much happens in our house. You know all the girls together, we just sit in the hallway and chat and talk and hang out. Those are just the greatest times ever. Just hanging out in your house with all the people. It would be so hard to not have a house to meet in." (woman, fg2)

"I think maybe an advantage we do have over [non-Greeks] is the fact that there are a lot of older people in the house that we can look up to, you know, and we can base what we want to do just on their experiences and so we kind of know what classes to take, what clubs to join and things like that." (man, fg3)

"You have more of an opportunity in the Greek system to rely on other people than you would, say, living in the dorms. If you have emotional problems or if you have school problems, if you have any problems you have people around you that become very good friends of yours and you can rely on and they'll help you out in any way. With school, when you're a freshman, Seniors will say, 'You should take that class, it's a really good class,' or 'That teacher is a better teacher than that teacher.' When you live in the dorms or you're just a bunch of people in the apartments, you're just...it's potluck. Whatever you take, 'It fits my schedule, I gotta take it,' or whatever. So, you may have certain advantages like that, and it may give you a better education and it may not give you a better education. But, it certainly gives you a lot stronger support system to grow from and with than you would otherwise. It's a very healthy environment. I think." (man, fg3)

"I think [the support] also goes well beyond academics. I know every fraternity and sorority, has a big brother/ big sister program. For example, I had a big brother when I was a pledge, you know, and I partied it up and I wasn't sure how to act. I didn't know 'cuz it was a new setting to me. And, you know, my big brother pulled me aside and he said, 'You look like a fool. What are you doing?' I mean, he's like, 'Some of the older guys don't approve of it and you're sure as hell not impressing anyone else, so just tone it down.' You know, and instances like those where you really learn what is socially acceptable." (man, fg3)

"I think when you're in the dorms, you have no sense, well, you have some sense of liability but really not too much. But once you're in your house and you're at a party, especially if it's in your house, you watch because you don't want something bad to happen to your house, your room, your friends....the consequences are more than double when you're living in the house. I mean, you have a lot more to watch out for." (man, fg3)

"In the house you're responsible for you, your brothers, your house, your chapter...and you don't want to mess that up. Nationals.... the whole fraternity

system gets blamed, not just you. It's never just one house, it's the entire system." (Christopher)

"As a female, I feel a lot safer going to a Greek party than to a house party where I've never been before and don't know anybody. At a Greek party there's security men all around. You can't go 10 steps without seeing a big bodyguard. And in most of the houses, the girls aren't allowed in the sleeping quarters now. So, you're looking for the bathroom, and you go to go upstairs, and somebody is like, 'No, you can't go on the second floor, there's a bathroom down the hall on this floor.' It's so much safer, you know, there's so many more people you recognize if you're in a bad situation. You know, your sisters look out for you. It's so much different than like a street party. There's just way better advantages." (Amy)

"I know that, in our house, when people have broken up with somebody or gotten in a fight, everybody in the house knows about it. And, with our house it's not like we're going to quit talking to you, but it's a known thing and nobody else in our house will ever date that guy. It's respect. Even if you are a match made in heaven. You will not date him." (Barbara)

"If I was dating a girl and then I [found out] I had a disease and then she started going out with someone else in the house. I know I would tell the guy. I mean, in my instance it would stop right there. So, it doesn't get a chance to spread. And, that is one of the real advantages of having a tight knit group." (man, fg3)

"Living with 45 different girls. I think there's more positives than negatives." (woman, fg4)

"The group offers a little security. You know, you get some younger guy coming in here that is like, 'What am I doing?' you know? And then they become part of the group. They look up to the older guys in the fraternity and say, 'O.K., you've been here 5 years, how did you make it?' Like [he] said, we've been here. They come into our [fraternity] and we're like, 'This is how it is and this is how it's gonna be. You can buck the system or you can lose trying.' You know, and then it's just a process that we're teaching and also learning. And then teaching our members that are coming in how to deal with the pressures and how to get along." (man, fg4)

"There's always somebody to go places with and there's always people with you and I feel safe, way more safe than when I was in the dorms. I was always scared in the dorms to go anywhere and now, 'cuz now, I think that I know everybody on a personal level, there's nobody jumping down your back." (woman, fg4)

"I just wanted to say that personally, I had very, very negative feelings about the Greek system up until this semester and I've been in it for almost two years now. Um...you can also have that safety in numbers outside with any group of friends

you have. I think you're going to have that safety but, with a fraternity or sorority you have more that links you together. But when you just have friends [outside of the Greek system], you're all going to be living different places and you can't rely on the fact that someone is always going to be home. When you live in the fraternity or sorority house, it doesn't matter what time you're there, somebody's going to be up. If you need a shoulder to cry on, they're always going to be there for you. If you want to just go have a beer downtown because you need to, then you've got 45 people living with you—so how can you not find someone to go do that with?" (woman, fg4)

"I think a lot of it is not physical safety. I think it's safety from yourself. Humans by nature are social creatures. To be alone is stressful. To be alone.... the mind is very powerful and you can think yourself into an anxiety attack. And you have no vent, no one to talk to. No one to say, 'It's gonna be all right.' Now, within an organization, especially when you're living in a house, if you've got something on your mind, it gives you someone that's there all the time. A lot of people that are not in the organization, you know, there can be 50 people around you, just like living in the dorms. You could be surrounded by a hundred people but, in your room at night, in your mind you are alone. You are by yourself. And, it's hard to go out and knock on [someone's door] and be like, 'I'm freakin' out!' But, within the Greek system, you know not everyone is your friend but there's always someone you can confide in. Somebody that you can tell, 'Hey, I'm lookin' fat.'" (man, fg4)

"In the [Greek] system, you have your friends around you constantly, because in the pledging process, the people you pledge with-- you become very close with them. And, you see unity in the Greek system, there's a lot of unity. That's where it comes from. Knowing you went through the same thing with that exact person. They know what it took to get where you're at. And, also through the pledging process, you learn to work with each other, to watch each other's backs and that's who you talk to. That's the person you had to spend your whole pledging process with. That's a long time to spend with a group of people. And, that's where your bonds are built within the Greek system. I mean, there are bonds within the Greek system. There are bonds that are between other people as friends but the bonds between the people that you pledge with is something you remember for the rest of your life. You know when you see where someone saves someone's life and those two stay friends for the rest of their lives?. That's kinda what it is with pledging. You come into this situation and you go through a lot with this person or this group of people and that becomes your support group. I think that's a really large part of it." (man, fg4)

"It's got its good family qualities and it's got it's petty, like family things that go around, but I mean that goes with everything in life." (Amy)

Theme #4: Greek identity.

Several of the interview participants talked a great deal about what it meant to be Greek. They spoke of how they identified themselves as Greek versus someone who is non-Greek. Most of the participants seemed very proud to be Greek. They talked about wearing their letters as a means of identifying one another. Even though the letters could elicit negative stereotypes or public images, they are an important part of the Greek system.

The term legacy was mentioned at one focus group. A legacy was defined as a Greek student who has a relative that pledged his/her chapter (e.g. mother, father, grandparent, etc...). The notion of legacies brought the importance of group identity beyond the peer level and into a level that stretches across generations.

The participants compared Greeks to students that live in the dorms on campus. Perhaps this comparison occurred because the Greek communal living arrangement is an important part of the Greek experience. Several terms were used to refer to students that are not in the Greek system. They include non-Greek, random, and GDI (god-damn-independent).

Consider the following quotations that relate to Greek identity.

> "You share a common interest with so many people and it's such a broad spectrum of people that you just kind of like.... Well, I know when I go home, and I'm from Ontario, I can go home and find a Greek from houses from home and say, 'Hey, you know I'm a Beta, and blah blah blah.' And then totally go hang out with these people just for a week or so. And they accept me completely because we all share a common interest and that's why we're in the house that we are in because there's something that we all have that's the same." (woman, fg1)

"Well, like, if you have a big sister or little sister in a house or something and you get really close to them and once school is over it's not like you guys are going to split. I mean, you guys are going to keep in touch and anywhere you go, I mean, even on another campus, like in Helena and everywhere else, you and the others just hang out with other chapters, you know." (woman, fg1)

"It's not even just you're own house, you can run into somebody wearing different letters and you say, 'Oh, you're a Greek,' and you have that common bond with all the Greeks." (woman, fg1)

"Randoms are the people that get us in trouble, not Greeks." (woman, fg1)

"We pretty much dominate a lot of the leadership groups on campus as far as advocates, peer advising, student government." (fg2, woman)

"[Being Greek is] a matter of pride. I'm a legacy and when my Dad came up when I got initiated and he was part of the ceremony. And the guys were like, 'That's cool,' when my dad came all the way from Oregon to come up here and see me get initiated." (man, fg2)

"It's really a special thing to share. My mom is Zeta Sigma and it's a really special thing to share with her, 'cuz she knows what [being Greek] all about. And, I think a lot of times, I know with sororities you want to try to rush those legacies of your own house pretty hard because obviously if their mother or their aunt or their sister or their grandmother if they were in that house, they're like, you know, obviously going to have a respect for this house. Someone that they're related to used to be in that house." (woman, fg2)

"Also, being a role model for the younger pledges. Like, we're not allowed to take our pledges out on weekdays. That's just a rule that we have. Pledges **do not** go out with you. On weekends, they can if they want to but, they're supposed to meet you there. It's the whole role model thing." (woman, fg2)

"You can't smoke in the front of our house. Because people see you and it's the first thing they see. And I'm not known as Amy, I'm a Beta Sigma before I'm my name. So, if you're smoking in front of the house, people are like, 'Oh, look at the Beta Sigma smoking!'" (Amy)

"You also watch your behavior more when you're wearing your letters. Because you realize you're representing your house right now. If I have my letters on, I'm careful. I'm not out smoking and I don't cuss and I try to show respect for the people. Because I want to promote a good image. I mean, that's just how it is. That's just another thing that adds to it. You can't drink and have them on. You can't wear them to the bars...ever. Never anything with your house's name on it." (woman, fg2)

"I get a lot of slack from the basketball team. But, that's when I wear my letters the most, because I'm like, 'Eh-eh, check it out.' You know, but they're always looking down on it. They say, 'What does that mean?' But, I'm very proud to wear them." (woman, fg2)

"Tonight I knew I was going to be with other Greeks so I wore my letters. I knew they had their letters in their drawers and I knew they'd probably wear them. They understand. There's safety in that." (woman, fg2)

"I like to wear my letters, because I want people to know, 'I'm an Omega and I don't care what you think.' You know, Professor X could be like, 'Oh, you're an Omega; you're an idiot.' I say, 'Hey, I pay your salary, some day you'll be working for me!' We're not supposed to wear them at the bars, but once in a while you forget. We had an incident; I don't know if you guys went to some of the football playoff games, like the Georgia Southern game and the game stopped because of a whistle blowing incident—well that was a couple of my brothers. They were yelling at the refs. And, they were wearing letters...and I was like [very embarrassed]. You know, you're in a stadium with 20,000 people and the game stops, everyone looks at you and you've got the Omega letters. So there are times when you wish people wouldn't wear them. Like, bars and stuff. But, most of the time we are very proud to wear them." (man, fg2)

"A lot of times, you try to wear [your letters]. Like, if I was with a different group somewhere on campus, I'll wear my letters to say, 'Yeah, I'm in this group **and** I'm Greek.' To show that it's not just a certain type of individuals." (woman, fg2)

"And, like you said, a lot of times you'll wear letters to a class if you're doing awesome in that class and then [professors] are like, 'You're a Greek?' So it looks good sometimes to show the positives of the system." (woman, fg2)

"I think, one of the things that separates a Greek and a non-Greek, is being in the Greek system puts you in a lot more leadership roles and you're in charge of a lot of things and people." (man, fg3)

"If I wasn't Greek, I know that I never would have had all the opportunities that I've had." (Barbara)

"If you enter the Greek system as a freshman, you're instantly thrown into a leadership position. You're instantly shown how to lead. You see people in the house that are leaders and you look up to them. You follow them, you do the things they do. And, it's an incredible learning experience. And, I think people that aren't Greek don't get that chance. I mean, if they're a real leader they'll seek

out that but, when you're a Greek it's right in front of your face. You see it all the time and you don't have to look for it at all." (man, fg3)

"Greeks by their very nature are elitists. You know, we're doing a lot. And, you know, we have ceilings on memberships. We're required to cut some people, you know. So people go through rush hoping they'll pledge a fraternity and, unfortunately we can't take all of them. You know, rejection is a terrible feeling." (man, fg3)

"In college, you know, a lot of people go downtown and a lot of people party. But, so do people in the dorms, the non-Greeks. And people in the dorms don't go to class and they're a lot closer to campus than we are. You know, compare GPA's. I'll bet we're a lot higher." (man, fg2)

"Greek houses have cooks. So you will eat a lot healthier than, say, anyone else on campus or anyone that lives off campus. Because the food is prepared for you, and you don't have to take the time to go shopping to buy the food to come back and cook the food. I think you have more time to concentrate on your studies and things like that." (man, fg3)

"I think a lot of the bad things that happen at parties are between Greeks and non-Greeks." (David)

"I think that because I'm in the house and because I know that if I were to get really drunk and do something stupid, the effects of that wouldn't only be blamed on me, but on my house. So I think that a lot of guys are worried about bringing their entire organization down with them." (man, fg3)

"If a guy really wants loving or, you know, some affection, it's not that hard to find, I mean, especially in the Greek system, where everybody knows each other. I mean, it's not hard to guess who you can hook up with. I think if you get any social organization that's this tight knit, you'll find people like that and if you really wanted to you could seek them out." (man, fg3)

"You're surrounded within the Greek system so much, that you start to know everybody. That's who you hang out with the most is fraternity and sorority people. So, that's who you know the best." (man, fg3)

"I think in a lot of ways [being Greek] is beneficial. I think you can get involved a lot easier in a lot of campus organizations. I know my sorority wants us to get involved in extra things outside the sorority just so we can promote the house." (woman, fg4)

"It's not that we're trying to be exclusive. It's just, there's a lot of things that make our group unique and we want to keep those things that make our group unique. So it's not being exclusive but, choosy." (man, fg4)

"They all stereotype us into one big group. Which I can understand, 'cuz we have all Greek letters on and we're easy to identify but at the same time I hate being told I'm like this person and this person--when I have nothing in common with any of them, except being Greek." (man, fg4)

"If you get in trouble in the Greek system, you have your name and your house, you have everything pasted up on somebody's office over here. Or it all ends up in the paper." (man, fg4)

"At our parties, there ends up being a lot of people who aren't involved in the Greek system at all. And that can be a problem." (Christopher)

"Knowing that that person is going through the same doubts, the same excitement that you went through is really what living in the house is all about. And, everybody in your house has gone through that. It's not specifically the same things but.... Sometimes people say, ' Hey, you like to exclude people.' It's not really that. It's just a bond that you share with **those** people in the Greek system. And, you can share different kinds of bonds with other people, but, it's a special thing in the sorority." (woman, fg4)

Section Two

Following is an analysis of data related to the second study question, "What do fraternity and sorority members perceive to be the major health risk behaviors among their population?" Follow-up questions to this question included: a) What do fraternity and sorority members perceive to be the influences on these health risk behaviors? b) What do fraternity and sorority members believe should be done to reduce or eliminate these health risk behaviors? In this section the categories of responses from the participants are individually listed. The responses are organized into categories that were formed as the data were analyzed.

The recurring responses to this question were the basis for forming the categories. These categories which included alcohol use, unsafe sexual activity, disordered eating, tobacco use, and other illicit substance use such as marijuana. In this section there is a description of each category, followed by participant quotations regarding factors influencing the risky behavior. Potential means of eliminating or reducing the risk of that health category as suggested by the participants in response to a direct question, follow as a third segment for each category analyzed.

Alcohol use

The consumption of alcohol was perceived by many participants to be the major health risk in their lives. Alcohol or some alcohol-related item (e.g. "partying" or "bar-hopping") was usually the first risk mentioned in response to the second study question. Alcohol was the reason for many Greek housing rules and regulations; imposed by university officials or by the Greek students themselves. Presented below are verbatim

quotations, typical of participants' responses regarding alcohol use and influences on alcohol use, and ways they perceive to reduce or eliminate alcohol use as a health risk.

What do you perceive to be the major health risk behaviors among Greek students?

"Drinking! It's our big thing." (woman, fg1)

"It [drinking] is not just at fraternity parties, there's a major concern at like...there are girls that will go out Friday, Saturday and Sunday. It's a major concern." (Amy)

"The drinking." (Barbara)

"Well of course there's alcohol. Not so much at sororities but at fraternities." (man, fg2)

"I think with the guys, drinking is the one big one." (man, fg3)

"Substance abuse. Like tobacco and alcohol." (woman, fg1)

"Alcohol. I would say alcohol #1, drugs #2, STDs #3." (woman, fg1)

What influences alcohol use?

"I think a lot of people feel like this is their time to experience everything they never experienced before whether it would be getting drunk for the first time or... like, how many people didn't drink during high school and came here and were out Monday and Tuesday and...like, three nights a week or whatever?" (woman, fg1)

"Nationals. You have to follow what Nationals says about drinking. You could lose your house. They could pull your charter. Just like that, and you're gone." (man, fg2)

"How bad your week was. How depressed you are." (Christopher)

"I totally acknowledge that with a majority of the Greeks, that alcohol is used strictly as a social lubricant and as a means of celebrating. I mean, I acknowledge there are some people who get home and it's like, 'I sucked! I got a C on a test. My first C in five years!' That's how I was a few weeks ago in one of my classes,

so sometimes you'll have a beer after a bad day." (man, fg3)

"I think it's definitely who you hang out with. Like on weekends." (David)

"Lack of anything else to do. Boredom. Sitting around a room with a keg in the middle and listening to the radio sucks but, if there's nothing else to do....." (man, fg4)

"I think [going dry] would really hurt. When you join the Greek system it's like, a place to party for a lot of people or whatever. You know... when you're in college you're obviously going to want to drink." (woman, fg4)

What can be done to reduce or eliminate alcohol as a health risk?

"Our policy is a lot stronger now. If we go downtown, we go with somebody who's not drinking. I usually ...whoever I'm with I give my car keys away to whoever is sober. I'm always letting someone else drive. I don't care if I have to crash on the floor and they throw a blanket over me. As long as I'm safe." (man, fg2)

"That's an area we've definitely progressed in, like, when I was a freshman, people drove home drunk all the time, because it's like, 'It's 5 blocks, it's not very far, we'll just drive.' Of course now, we have like the designated driver, we have beeper babes. Now, this semester we have a beeper, you can call, that night, all night." (woman, fg2)

"I think what's really helped is the program PRO's ...Peers Reaching Out. We have a couple girls, I know a lot of other houses do too, have PRO's and that's helped a lot because they know a lot of stuff, eating disorders and alcohol abuse. And they bring it to our attention. At our meetings, they'll bring it up. Or put little flyers around the house with statistics and stuff." (woman, fg2)

"I think there's like...like dances at the Elk's club, which...they were fun last year and we didn't drink usually when we went to them. But, you need to have a place like.... a dance club. I think, like I went to Boston and everywhere you go to a bar, there are people singing, there are live bands, you don't have to sit there and drink beer to have fun. You can enjoy the entertainment." (woman, fg4)

Unsafe sexual activity

Another commonly perceived health risk among the fraternity and sorority students was unsafe sexual activity. One consequence of unsafe sexual activity, sexually transmitted diseases, were a particular concern to the interview participants. Although each was confident that his/her own sexual practices were safe, many mentioned that they knew of "others" in their houses that were not acting safely. Following are several responses regarding unsafe sexual activity, the perceived influences, and the ways the participants suggested to reduce or eliminate unsafe sex as a health risk.

What do you perceive to be the major health risk behaviors among Greek students?

> "STDs are especially [common] on this campus, there is such a high rate of STDs." (man, fg2)
>
> "I think sex, and unprotected sex...and sexual assault." (woman, fg4)
>
> "STDs are a big concern in the Greek system. If you date one person, you've pretty much dated the whole house." (woman, fg1)

What influences unsafe sexual activity?

> "Alcohol." (Amy)
>
> "When your out boozin', and you're Wow! Everyone's a hell of a lot looser when they've got alcohol in them and they can go approach that guy or that girl. They can go approach that person and start talkin' and you're not thinking about "Oh god, if I sleep with him I could get an STD." You're thinking, "Oh my god, I'm talking to him. It's finally gonna happen!" You know, bam there you go and you wake up the next morning...where am I, who is this or whatever. I think alcohol plays a major role." (woman, fg2)
>
> "I think among a group of guys there's pressure to sleep with women." (man, fg2)

"When one of us girls goes out with a guy, everyone wants to know the stories. They want the details, sometimes there is pressure to have stories to tell." (woman, fg4)

What can be done to reduce or eliminate unsafe sex as a health risk?

"We do seminars and a lot of things like that. And we do a lot of educational events and stuff like that and condoms are available." (man, fg3)

"I don't know what you think the...like, the statistics for STDs are among the Greek system, but, I mean, do you think there would be for any way for the health service to maybe like do a free testing for all the houses?" (man, fg3)

"I think it would be better [if Student Health Services could] go to the houses and set up a little booth and that way if anybody wanted to come downstairs and get tested they could." (man, fg3)

"Well, I mean, [I] figure that right now all that can be done is being done." (man, fg4)

"Everybody's being smart about sex and taking everything into consideration." (man, fg4)

Disordered eating

Several participants spoke of eating behaviors or patterns as a source of concern in their houses. Most of these comments came from women, however, a few men mentioned their concerns about eating. Some comments were made regarding the fact that students have limited time to prepare and eat good foods. Some participants suggested that many Greek students did not eat enough in an effort to maintain or achieve an attractive body. Presented below are comments from the interview participants about disordered eating as a health risk behavior, what they perceived to influence poor eating behaviors, and ways they perceived to eliminate or reduce these behaviors.

What do you perceive to be the major health risk behaviors among Greek students?

"Eating disorders." (woman, fg1)

"Like, a lot of girls are....I know in our house, you know...fat." (woman, fg1)

"Eating problems are very noticeable. Like at formal dinners, all of the girls don't have dessert, they're all going on diets." (woman, fg1)

"Everyone in our house is always on a diet for one reason or another." (woman, fg1)

"Eating disorders is another big issue. I know I certainly eat too much." (woman, fg1)

"We're always on a diet for one reason or another." (Barbara)

"Eating disorders." (woman, fg2)

"Eating, is a big one. A lot of us don't have enough time to eat right. None of us ever cook for ourselves." (David)

"In the sororities I feel there are a lot of....um,...eating disorders." (woman, fg4)

What influences unsafe eating behaviors?

"Girls are naturally gonna want to be like someone else." (woman, fg1)

"I think [body image] is important all over campus. But, especially when you live with so many girls, it's unavoidable." (woman, fg1)

"If you're going through the line at dinner it's no dressing on the salad, no chocolate, no matter how strong you are, no matter what because you would feel so guilty if you had that stuff on your plate when everyone else is eating dry salad." (woman, fg1)

"It's very noticeable, in our house none of the girls have dessert at formal dinners... they're all going on a diet for a formal or whatever." (woman, fg1)

"Competition. I think competition is a big one for a lot of woman. 'Oh, she has such a great body. I wish I was like her.' I think that affects them." (Amy)

"I think just like she said, the media. I mean, everywhere you look, thin is in. Even though we try to make it look like it's not. All the models and everything...." (woman, fg2)

"We are like, programmed to be some way. And after we're programmed like that, we'll do anything to get thin. You know, I mean, once we have it set in our minds what we have to do, we do it. It's kind of the way a lot of girls get eating disorders. It becomes psychological. And they can't escape it even if they wanted to. It's like already ingrained." (woman, fg2)

"The girls, the sisters...there's pressure in the house." (woman, fg2)

"I can't really speak for the girls, but, for the guys there is a little bit of pressure to have an athletic, muscular body." (man, fg3)

What can be done to reduce or eliminate unsafe eating behavior as a health risk?

"I think the behavior that is being helped is eating disorders. Just with the transition with our new cook. I don't know of any girls now who go into the bathroom and get rid of it. Just knowing that it's low fat, girls are more likely to eat it now. Even spaghetti and macaroni. If it's not low fat she [the chef] won't cook it." (woman, fg1)

Tobacco use

Substance abuse was commonly identified by participants as a health risk behavior in their houses. After alcohol, tobacco use was mentioned more often than any other substance. Smoking was viewed as a problem by some interview participants and seen as an important social activity by others. Almost all, even the smokers, agreed it was an unsafe and unhealthy practice. Several reasons for smoking behavior are presented here as well as suggestions by the participants to reduce or eliminate smoking among their members.

What do you perceive to be the major health risk behaviors among Greek students?

"Substance abuse. Like tobacco and alcohol." (woman, fg1)

"There's a lot of smoking in our house. A lot of cigarettes." (Amy)

"Most of the time, I see them smokin' when they're drinkin'. And, when we have our meetings-- you can't smoke in there-- so they're all spitting. It's just disgusting! I think it's becoming more and more of an issue." (man, fg2)

"Smoking. I see a lot of people smoking around the house." (man, fg4)

What influences tobacco use?

"It's so easy, smoke a few cigarettes-- have a great time." (woman, fg1)

"I'm one of the only girls in the house that don't smoke, and those that want to quit have a real hard time because everyone is always going out for a smoke break and asking, "Hey, do you want to come with us and smoke?" (woman, fg1)

"And, who wants to be around somebody who is trying to quit?" (woman, fg1)

What can be done to reduce or eliminate tobacco use as a health risk?

"Well, our house doesn't allow smoking on the property. That kind of reduces it at the house, they walk across the street now." (woman, fg1)

"They could make smoke-free parties." (David)

"We could have smoke-free wars. I don't know, like the little wars we have every week. It might help a little, I don't know. We get little awards. I get awards for studying and if I don't study, I don't get one." (woman, fg2)

"Maybe if fraternities would make their property smoke-free, I think it could cut down on, 'Hey, let's go hang out with a *Sigma Sigma* we can smoke in front of their house.'" (woman, fg1)

"I don't know if there's really anything to challenge it, if someone is going to smoke, they're going to smoke." (Amy)

"It's hard because smoking is legal. Maybe we could regulate like no smoking

parties but you can't because that would be like saying, 'No chewing gum.'" (woman, fg1)

Other illicit substance use

Illicit substance use was often mentioned during the interviews as a perceived health risk behavior in fraternity and sorority houses. In addition to tobacco, the participants broached the use of marijuana, cocaine and other illicit substances. Caffeine, although certainly not illicit, was mentioned as a commonly used substance in the Greek houses. Nonspecific responses (presented below) such as "substance abuse" might include alcohol, however, during the interviews participants usually mentioned alcohol by name, and differentiated between alcohol and substance abuse. Following are quotations from the interview participants regarding other illicit substance use, possible influences on the use in the Greek experience, and perceived ways to reduce or eliminate substance use as a health risk.

What do you perceive to be the major health risk behaviors among Greek students?

"I see a lot of substance abuse. Drugs." (Christopher)

"We don't have a problem with anybody smoking cigarettes. We have a problem with people smoking marijuana." (man, fg4)

"Cocaine and drinking are popular in one of the houses I know of." (woman, fg2)

"I think with the guys, in my house, drinking is one, smoking pot is another big one." (man, fg3)

"Vivarin, NoDoze, and tons of Mountain Dew! We have to stay awake to study sometimes." (Amy)

What influences illicit substance use?

"I've never smoked marijuana in my life, but it does look fun. It don't look like they're havin' any bad times at all. So, they giggle and everyone's laughin'. So, to somebody's that 17 or 18 years old that can be very appealing, I think." (man, fg4)

"Yeah, I just think it [marijuana] is available and looks fun." (woman, fg4)

"The girls just see it as fun. They see them, ...they start smokin' weed and the next thing they're gigglin'." (Barbara)

"To relax after a long week at school some of us smoke a little weed." (Christopher)

What can be done to reduce or eliminate illicit substance use as a health risk?

"Well we just have to come down harder on substance abuse." (woman, fg2)

"Brothers need to take each other aside and say, 'Hey man, you're screwing up.'" (Christopher)

"Of course, it would be great to get everybody to stop smoking that shit. But, they're not going to stop until they either are forced by something outside our organization or they decide to do it on their own." (man, fg4)

CHAPTER V

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of this study was twofold: 1) to gain an understanding of the experience of students within the Greek system at The University of Montana; and 2) to explore what fraternity and sorority members perceive to be the major health risk behaviors among their population. I chose to use qualitative methods, which allowed the data to come directly from the perspective of the Greek students themselves. Data were obtained through focus group interviews and personal one-on-one interviews. From these data I developed a rich understanding of The University of Montana Greek students' experiences, attitudes, and perceptions.

Forty fraternity and sorority members participated in this study. To recruit these participants, I used key contacts through the Greek Life office, the Peers Reaching Out health education group and from relationships formed during the study itself. Potential participants were contacted by telephone and written invitation for the focus group interviews and for the personal interviews. All of the students were enrolled as undergraduate students at The University of Montana and were living in their chapter's house, except in two cases where the chapter did not have a house.

The focus group interviews were carried out on The University of Montana campus in a comfortable, convenient room in an academic building. The personal interviews were conducted in the Student Wellness Office in a private and quiet place. The interviews were audio-taped and the participants were encouraged to speak openly

and freely about their experiences in the Greek system, assured of the anonymity of their responses. After each interview the tapes were transcribed and I analyzed the data.

My data analysis concentrated on the commonalties among the interviews. I focused on common themes that emerged from the data. Although I recognized that each individual interviewed, either personally or in a group, has her/his own attitudes and perceptions about the Greek system, I focused on the apparent similarities among the fraternity and sorority members.

Conclusions

I drew the following conclusions, based on the analyzed data from this study:

1) Greek students feel set apart by other students, faculty and the administration. There is a clear majority of non-Greek students on The University of Montana campus; these students comprise only about five percent of the undergraduate population. The Greek students feel the oppression that often accompanies minority status. They struggle with non-Greeks, who according to the Greeks, refuse to understand the diversity among fraternity and sorority houses. The participants feel that many non-Greeks tend to believe all Greek students are the same and therefore prejudge and stereotype the fraternity and sorority members.

Several students spoke of blatant discrimination by professors in the classroom. The interviews revealed that professors often impose higher standards such as tougher grading on the Greek students. Professors also make comments that perpetuate negative stereotypes about the Greek system. One possible reason for this faculty behavior is the "conservative establishment" nature of Greek life. Greeks tend to be more conservative

and have more of what one participant said was "an elite culture." Most of the faculty today was trained in the 1960's and 1970's, a time of anti-establishment and certainly more progressive views of what a college experience should look like. It is possible that the Greek students today represent what the faculties, or the students of yesteryear, were rebelling against.

Surprisingly, in these interviews athletic coaches were cited as negatively stereotyping Greek behavior. Traditionally, athletics is a very conservative institution. The Greek system and athletics share group-oriented values, support of the establishment and a strict work ethic. One possible reason for the behavior of the coaches is the competition for the students' time and energy. Both Greek life and the life of a student-athlete are extremely time consuming.

Finally, The University of Montana administration is perceived by the Greek students of not fully understanding the plight of the Greek student. The Greeks feel the Dean of Students has stricter rules for their organization than for the general student body. They feel that the administration tends to make an example of the Greek system and that mistakes or missteps are unfairly made public.

2) Fraternity and sorority members believe Greek life has many benefits. The students perceive that non-Greek students, faculty and administration do not recognize these benefits. The benefits they mentioned include:

- The Greek system offers leadership opportunities to its members.
- The Greek system allows for a "family life" atmosphere.
- The Greek system offers its members "life-long" friends.

- The Greek system offers support to its members.

3) There are several negative stereotypes that fraternity and sorority members believe they must overcome to be an accepted and functional organization on campus. The media, including the campus newspaper, is perceived to be antagonistic to the Greek system by predominantly covering the negative aspects of Greek life and rarely covering the positive aspects. The student newspaper was described in the interviews as "Greek unfriendly." Greeks said they only receive press coverage when they are reprimanded, arrested or otherwise disciplined. The participants believed the sources of the negative stereotypes were popular media such as movies, books, newspaper stories and TV news stories that depict Greek life as party-centered, drug-infested, and full of "animal house" college students.

4) Greek students at The University of Montana identified the following health risks that pertain to them today: 1) alcohol use, 2) unsafe sex, 3) disordered eating behaviors, 4) tobacco use, and 5) other illicit substance use. For the most part these issues were expected from the review of the literature. The literature confirms in using other groups that all of these are salient issues facing college students today.

Not surprisingly given their ages, their living situation, and past studies on college students, alcohol use was perceived as a common occurrence among fraternity and sorority members. Alcohol affects many aspects of Greek life including many of their policies regarding safety and liability. Alcohol was seldom spoke of as a negative aspect of Greek life. During the interviews, drinking and "partying" were referred to as

commonplace activities. Although most admitted that drinking and sometimes underage drinking occurred in the fraternity houses (never in the sorority houses), almost all the interview participants revealed that they had wished that the stereotype of "the animal house" and "crazy frat boys" would diminish.

5) The Greek students perceived several broad and specific influences on the health risk behaviors they identified. The two broad influences emerged as affecting more than one health risk behavior. Greek students cited being away from home or parental supervision as one facet of their present lives that influences their health behavior generally. Their communal living arrangements were the other influence that broadly affected Greek students' health risk behavior. This information confirms Jones' (1992) finding that group or communal living in college is associated with health risk behaviors, specifically alcohol consumption.

The interview participants mentioned several specific influences on health risk behavior. That is, the influences are specific to one of the health risk behaviors that were identified. Below, are these specific influences on each of the five health risk behaviors the participants mentioned as most important.

Pressure from peers, a need to make friends, and boredom were cited by the interview participants as influences on alcohol use. Several Greek students, as do many college students, said they drink to fit in with their peers. Older Greek brothers and sisters that frequent bars or parties may knowingly or unknowingly set an example for younger students in the Greek houses. The older students, whether they are aware or not, are mentors for the new pledges. Boredom was mentioned as another influence on

alcohol consumption. Several Greeks said that there is a lack of college-aged entertainment on campus and in Missoula. This leads to beer keg parties and going to bars to socialize and drinking occurs consequentially.

Consuming alcohol was not only cited as a health risk behavior but, also as an influence on other health risks. For example, alcohol was mentioned as a very important influence on another health risk, unsafe sexual behavior. Woman getting drunk at fraternity parties was the most commonly mentioned problem relating to unsafe sex. The Greek students said that they often try to protect each other but often women from outside the Greek system would find themselves in compromising or dangerous situations at parties. Further, woman and men said that alcohol provides a "social lubricant" and therefore intoxication often leads to sexual activity. The literature supports this finding and also adds that sex under the influence of alcohol is often unsafe.

It is important to be popular with the opposite sex in the Greek system. This pressure influences an increase in sexual activity as well by encouraging activity that is perceived to be desired. The participants during the interviews did not broach homosexual relationships or sex. In fact, a few remarks that might be construed as homophobic revealed that homosexual orientation was not openly accepted within the Greek system. This might be a result of the ongoing heterosexism that exists in most of the United States and certainly in Western Montana.

Another influence on sexual behavior is the close knit community of The University of Montana Greek students. Many dating relationships occur between fraternity and sorority members. This resulted in many of the interview participants reporting multiple sexual partners within the Greek system during his/ her years at

college. Some students spoke of the possibility of sexually transmitted diseases being promulgated through the Greek system because of the close knit group. On the other hand, the same closeness has positive influences on their sexual related health behavior. Because of the closeness, a certain protection exists by members sharing first hand knowledge about the health conditions of potential sexual partners.

Disordered eating behaviors were mentioned as quite prevalent, especially within the sorority houses. Pressures to look good, the media and its focus on thinness, communal living, and peer pressures to eat less fat and fewer calories were all influences on eating behavior as a health risk. Many sorority women said they felt pressure to look "good," "thin," "slender," "healthy," and "beautiful." This pressure came from media such as TV, movies, and magazines that often portray a body image of women that is difficult to achieve. Further, this body image can be perceived as normal, which can cause problems as well. This pressure to fit the "normal" and desired body image may cause the women to choose a poor diet, go on fad diets, exercise excessively and also binge and purge on food.

Sorority women spoke of the difficulty of eating with so many roommates. Many said that it is a challenge to eat when they feel they are being watched all the time. Seldom do women eat dessert, put dressing on their salads, or finish their meals in the presence of the their sisters. These dietary practices might be perceived as forbidden indulgences. Dances, formal dinners and spring break trips force some sorority women to crash diet, possibly at the expense of their health.

Influences on tobacco use in fraternities and sororities included the fact that they are addictive, it is often socially desirable, and it is legal and convenient. Smoking is a

social activity in many Greek houses. Many participants said they knew people in their houses who wanted to quit smoking but felt they would be left out of conversations that occur during smoking sessions. One sorority woman talked about trips that the sorority sisters take together. Often, the women are divided into a car of smokers and a car of nonsmokers. This scenario could have social implications, that is, if one's friends are in the smoking car then she might be pressured into riding in the smoking car whether or not she smokes. This can dictate who one spends most of their time with and may influence a smoking behavior. Given these smoking groups that form, the peer pressure to keep smoking is great. A few participants said that although they might like to quit smoking, they find it very difficult to quit while living in their fraternity or sorority house.

Marijuana was another illicit substance mentioned as a health risk within the Greek system. Smoking marijuana is fun, available and another way to fight the boredom that some Greek students feel is ubiquitous in Missoula. For the most part the participants said they would like to free their houses of the marijuana use but said that it was ultimately up to the brothers and sisters that were using it.

Table 1 summarizes the above mentioned influences on health risk behaviors which the study participants found important. Listed are the individual health risk behaviors and their corresponding influences

Behaviors	**Influences**
Alcohol use	Peer pressure to drink Making friends Boredom
Unsafe sex	Alcohol Peer pressure to have sex Tight knit group

Disordered eating	Pressure from peers to look good Media Having many house-mates Peer pressure to eat less Pressure to eat "low fat" and "low calorie"
Use of other illicit substances	
Tobacco use	Legality Peer pressure to smoke Social Addiction Convenience of purchasing tobacco
Marijuana use	Availability Fun Boredom

6) Greek students were asked to discuss strategies that could be employed to reduce or eliminate their health risk behaviors in the Greek system. These specific actions are listed below with their corresponding health risk behavior.

Specific behaviors	**Strategy**
Alcohol use	Self governance and regulation Go "dry" Contests/ "Wars" Create more fun things to do Dance clubs Alcohol-free parties
Unsafe sex	More presentations from Student Health Services
Disordered eating	Better cooking staff in houses
Use of other illicit substances	
Tobacco use	Smoke-free houses Smoking cessation classes
Marijuana use	Substance-free houses

Self-help information

7) The Greek students said that contests or "wars" among their houses or between two or more houses might be employed to motivate members to reduce risks. This method was a common theme and a possible motivator to reduce health risk behavior. It seemed, from the interviews, that there is a high level of competition between the fraternity houses and between the sorority houses. Knowing this could be useful in health education efforts for the Greek students.

8) Several students agreed that cooks or chefs who used healthier cooking techniques and recipes would help with diet and disordered eating within the houses.

Recommendations

After several interviews and many hours listening to the experiences of Greek students at The University of Montana, their concerns and attitudes regarding their health risk behaviors led to the following recommendations.

1) To reduce stress and discomfort among the Greek students, an effort should be made by faculty, administration and other students to make these students feel more comfortable expressing their Greek identity.

2) The Greek students seem to respond very well to live-in peer health educators who are also Greek. Several students said that having a peer educator that understands

what it is like to be Greek would be an asset. The Student Wellness Office and The Health and Human Performance Department should make an effort to increase the enrollment of Greek students in the Introduction to Peer Health Education class (HHP 395). If more Greek students became peer health educators the Greek students would have their own trained, in-house, health educators.

3) When discussing ways to reduce or eliminate health risks in their houses, many Greek students feel the Student Health Service should reach out more to their population by bringing health services periodically on-site to the Greek houses, such as HIV/ STD counseling and testing.

4) Alcohol and drugs are used often because of boredom. The University of Montana and the community of Missoula need to provide interesting, exciting, substance-free activities for the college students who live here. For example, substance-free dances and concerts on a regular basis would help to provide alternatives to bars and alcohol parties.

5) Greek houses should make a good effort to hire chefs who will prepare and serve healthy meals that attend to the tastes and diets of the residents. For students who are concerned about their diets, weights and appearances, healthful choices on the menu are imperative. A database and screening process for chefs could be put together by a student services office or by the Greek houses themselves. In addition, a nutritionist should be brought into the sorority houses to talk about diets and eating habits.

6) Since fraternity and sorority members appear to respond well to competition, Greek houses might consider having health behavior modification contests to decrease the amount of smoking and alcohol consumption. Decreasing the incidence of these behaviors is a priority for fraternity and sorority members and contests may provide the necessary incentive.

7) Drinking seems to be regulated at parties only very loosely. Stricter enforcement of the rules that are in place regarding alcohol consumption at parties, such as age limits and Greek affiliation requirements may reduce the negative effects of alcohol including unsafe sexual activity and the huge negative image problem the Greeks perceive.

8) There is a perception that non-Greek students perpetuate the negative stereotypes regarding Greek parties. The perception is that non-Greek students enter Greek parties and either cause problems such a fights or have a negative experience and start unpleasant rumors about the Greek system. A possible solution would be to strictly enforce who gets into the party. Currently a rule exists that prohibits non-Greeks from entering Greek parties without a special invitation but this rule is only sometimes enforced.

9) Dialogue should be initiated between the Student Health Services, the Greek Advisor and the Interfraternity Council about Greek health issues. Workable solutions

can be developed to problems or obstacles if dialog is open and friendly. Given the history of negative public images, special consideration should be made not to put Greek students on the defensive during these meetings but, to accept and include their input.

10) During the interviews, Greek students repeatedly explained to me that their parties were "safer" than other, non-Greek college parties. I felt that the constant qualification of Greek parties sounded rather defensive. I assume they were made because for one reason or another I, as moderator, was perceived as some kind of authority figure and several students perceived the need to justify their parties and compare the safety of Greek v. non-Greek parties.

The fraternity and sorority houses must be willing to critically evaluate their own system or they risk continued negative stereotypes. When Greek students can feel comfortable critically evaluating their own system, good work can be done to reduce health risk behaviors that exist in their houses. This should be an objective evaluation of the parties and functions not a comparative evaluation that only results in comments like, "Our parties are safer than theirs."

11) The Greek system should be recognized for their current efforts to reduce health risk behaviors rather than criticized by other students, administrators, faculty, health professionals, or the community for what they have not yet accomplished.

12) The Student Health Services and the Missoula City/County Public Health Department should freely share information obtained in this study with the Greek

chapters at The University of Montana and any other interested universities. This will help raise awareness and may launch improved preventive efforts to address health risk behavior among the Greek population.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Tell me about being a Greek at The University of Montana.

What are some of the health concerns specifically facing Greek college students?

*What do you perceive to be the major health risk behaviors in your house?

*What or who influences these health risk behaviors?

*What can be done to reduce or eliminate these health risk behaviors?

To whom do you turn when you need help or advice concerning health issues?

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP INVITATION

Dear _____,

I Really Need Your Help!

I'm very interested in **your** life as a **fraternity** member. You have vital information that can improve the quality of the Greek experience at The University of Montana and possibly across the country!

I'm a graduate student in Health and Human Performance and as part of my graduate work, I am gathering information on the opinions, attitudes and experiences of Greek students at UM. Here's the deal, I want to know what health issues affect the Greek students here. Instead of asking you to fill out a boring survey, I'd like you to **tell** me what you think. That's why I'm inviting you to participate with other members of your fraternity/sorority system, in a discussion on the current health concerns of your Greek community.

I know your time is valuable, that's why I'm throwing in **dinner** and a chance to win a fabulous, **extremely valuable prize** (a gift certificate to Southgate Mall!!!). This meeting will be held on Tuesday evening, April 3, 1996, in the McGill Room in McGill Hall. Again, I would like you to be my guest for dinner, which will begin at **7:00pm**. Please dress as you wish. Our discussion will be over by 9:00pm.

It won't be the same without you, so I really hope you can make it. Please call me at 243-2809 to confirm your attendance.

Thank you for your kind consideration. I'm looking forward to meeting with you on **April 2nd**.

Sincerely,

Dean McGovern,
Graduate Student
Student Wellness Department

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent Form

The purpose of this focus group is to gain an understanding of the uniqueness of the Greek system and to explore what you, as a fraternity or sorority member, perceive to be the major health risk behaviors among the Greek population. Our discussion will address anything you or other group participants bring up concerning health issues. An interview guide will be used by the moderator to keep the group on task and ask general questions, such as "What do feel are the current health concerns of the Greek students?". The focus group discussion will be audio-taped and should last no longer than one and a half hours.

The statements you and the others make will be kept completely confidential. I will be the only one with access to the tapes. After our conversation and after the tapes are transcribed, it will be impossible to identify the source of any statements. When the study is completed the audio-tapes will be erased. No fraternity, sorority or individual will be identified by name in this study.

Information gathered from this study will be made available to the University of Montana Student Health Services and the Missoula City/ County Public Health Department so that they may better serve the community and the University of Montana fraternities and sororities. The information you and your group provide will set The University of Montana Greek system apart from other national chapters. By taking a proactive role in helping to provide health education to your members, you will be setting a standard for others to follow.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and refusal to participate will involve no penalty. Also, at any time during the discussion please feel free to discontinue your participation for any reason. I am only seeking opinions and experiences that you feel comfortable talking about. Of course, when you do have something to say, honesty and accuracy are extremely important.

Risks of this investigation may include: emotional distress or other psychological injury. Efforts will be made to make participants feel comfortable and no one will be forced to say or do anything against his or her will. Although the risks to the participants of this study are minimal, a list of on and off-campus health services has been provided

for your convenience. In the event you are injured as a result of this research you should individually seek appropriate medical treatment. If the injury is caused by the negligence of the University or any of its employees, you may be entitled to reimbursement or compensation pursuant to the Comprehensive State Insurance Plan established by the Department of Administration under the authority of M.C.A., Title 2, Chapter 9. In the event of a claim for such injury, further information may be obtained from the University's Claims Representative or University Legal Counsel.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Montana Institutional Review Board in compliance with the guidelines and procedures prepared by The University of Montana Ad Hoc Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me at anytime. I can be reached at: Dean McGovern (406) 243-2809.

I have read the above material and any questions I have had were answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years old and I agree to participate in this study, understanding that I may discontinue or withdraw at any time, for any reason.

_____ _____

Signature Date

Health Services

On Campus Medical services (No charge for students)

Student Health Services
634 Eddy Avenue
University of Montana
243-2122

On Campus Counseling Services (No charge for students)

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
Student Health Services
634 Eddy Avenue
University of Montana
243-4711

Sexual Assault Recovery Service (SARS)
Student Health Services
634 Eddy Avenue
University of Montana
243-6559

Clinical Psychology Center (Sliding scale fee)
1444 Mansfield Avenue
University of Montana
243-4523

Community Medical Services (Fee for service)

Western Montana Clinic
515 West Front Street
Missoula, Montana 59802
721-5600

Blue Mountain Clinic
610 North California
Missoula, Montana 59801

721-1646

Community Counseling Services (Fee for service)

Western Montana Clinic
515 West Front Street
Missoula, Montana 59802
721-5600 ext. 7243

Rocky Mountain Psychological and Addiction Services
210 North Higgins
Suite 202
Missoula, Montana 59802
721-0909

Health Services

On Campus Medical services (No charge for students)

Student Health Services
634 Eddy Avenue
University of Montana
243-2122

On Campus Counseling Services (No charge for students)

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
Student Health Services
634 Eddy Avenue
University of Montana
243-4711

Sexual Assault Recovery Service (SARS)
Student Health Services
634 Eddy Avenue
University of Montana
243-6559

Clinical Psychology Center (Sliding scale fee)
1444 Mansfield Avenue
University of Montana
243-4523

Community Medical Services (Fee for service)

Western Montana Clinic
515 West Front Street
Missoula, Montana 59802
721-5600

Blue Mountain Clinic
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721-1646

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