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Barbara J. Risman

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Gender socialization in urban societies is acknowledged to occur primarily in preadolescence. Risman's analysis of one college sorority displays additional ways in which women adopt role-specific behaviors that are formally encouraged by both official regulations and informally shaped by cultural norms. Her data suggest that the socialization processes and the consequent roles may in fact be inappropriate for facilitating women's adaptation to a changing social environment.

COLLEGE WOMEN AND SORORITIES

The Social Construction and Reaffirmation of Gender Roles

BARBARA J. RISMAN

A self, then, virtually awaits the individual entering a position; he need only conform to the pressures on him and he will find a "me" ready-made for him . . . doing is being.

—Goffman (1961: 87-88)

I am learning to be a woman.

—Sorority member, 1979

A basic assumption in social psychology has always been that individuals learn who they are and how they ought to behave in interaction with those around them. As Shibutani (1955) suggests, it matters little if the influential group is labeled a "reference group" or is discussed in the context of the "generalized other." The salient issue is that each of us approaches the world and orders our perceptions from the standpoint of our group's culture. Through direct or vicarious group participation, we internalize the group's perspective, as well as external phenomena, to define ourselves.

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Sororities provide an interesting setting to observe the relationship between institutionalized social norms and individual members' self-development. This study will analyze the day-to-day operation of the sorority system as it affects each member's ideas about herself and her perspective on the world around her. Female college students are in the process of learning what it means to be women. It is my hypothesis that the Greek system functions effectively as a mechanism for traditional gender role socialization. Whether or not these sorority members are being prepared for roles that actually exist within contemporary society is not clear. In a society where women marry into their standard of living (e.g., Bernard, 1972) traditional gender role socialization may be effective training for adolescent females. In a world where women spend much of their lives in the paid labor force, such training may be anachronistic.

There has been little past research on sororities from this perspective. Waller (1937) discussed the "rating and dating" system on campus, but did not address the relationship between courtship patterns and gender roles. Scott (1965) and Reiss (1965) both focus on the "Greek" system of fraternities and sororities as mechanisms through which economically elite ascriptive groups maintain control over courtship. Control over courtship, however, includes a dimension not discussed by past researchers; control over courtship has traditionally extended not merely to the regulation of partners, but to behavioral patterns as well. Institutionally regulated courtship patterns are central to the study of gender role behavior. Traditionally, courtship has been an asymmetrical process; what is appropriate behavior for men is inappropriate for women and vice versa. When such interaction patterns are organizationally regulated—as in the Greek system—individuals can be observed as they participate in group culture, and through such behavior learn what is proper for themselves and for others.

Many theorists (e.g., Gerth and Mills, 1953; Turner, 1978; Hewitt, 1979) have suggested that institutional opportunity

and reward structures function to limit the possible identities people can assume. Identities are only in part a matter of choice in that ascribed characteristics, such as sex, clearly influence how others react to an individual. This is particularly relevant for a study of sororities and gender role; in the Greek system formal regulations are different for males and females. Institutional patterns can also limit the identities people may assume by restricting the significant others by whose standards the self shall be appraised. Peasants cannot learn to think themselves elegant from the society of kings; girls in low-status sororities do not mix with high-status fraternity boys. These institutional limitations, ascribed characteristics, and social distance between groups will be analyzed to help understand how the Greek world influences sorority members' self-concepts.

This study will concentrate on values underlying both official regulations and informal cultural norms currently in vogue in the college Greek world. Just as academic institutions involve anticipatory socialization for adult work roles, so too, voluntary organizations—the Greek system—function as anticipatory socialization for adult social roles. The process by which rituals, courtesies, and priorities are learned, expressed, and accepted by female students as they become sorority girls¹ is the focus of this research.

The interaction within a sorority is highly effective in shaping a girl's self-image. Although there are certainly no physical barriers to what the girls themselves call the "outside," sorority members report that nearly all their time is spent with other Greeks. The girls in this study sleep, eat, play, and work within the same closed group of significant others. The Greek system provides them with one audience for every aspect of daily life. Greeks do, of course, mix with non-Greek students, instructors, and parents, but most daily interaction is confined to one highly organized, rational, and normatively conservative audience. If one's self-concept is developed through interaction with others, and all significant others belong to one cohesive social group, that group's

norms and values become singularly influential for the individuals involved.

METHODOLOGY

The data were collected between 1976 and 1979 at a large state university on the West coast using both participant observation and in-depth interview techniques. The focus of observations changed over the three years. The first year was devoted almost exclusively to access attempts by approaching organizations that differed according to prestige ranking within the Greek system.² Over half the sororities on campus were contacted. Although the girls themselves were usually willing, and occasionally eager, to participate in this study, in all but one organization the alumni refused to allow them to do so. For example, alumni serve gatekeeping functions by discouraging interaction with outsiders.

The research design was modified to focus on individuals within the Greek system in order to avoid the problems inherent in the more formal organizational study first envisioned. As individuals, girls in every sorority were free to discuss their experiences. Far too many girls volunteered, from sororities at every level within the Greek hierarchy. Twenty-two girls were chosen at random from those willing to be interviewed. An interview schedule was followed that covered all facets of each girl's life: family background, reasons for "going Greek," female friendships, social life, and future plans. These interviews provided initial access and prompted invitations to Greek functions, introduction to other sorority members, and relationships that ensured recurring contact throughout the next two years. Observations included attendance at sorority dinners, preparation for "rush," fraternity parties, "Greek week" for high school recruitment, and a fashion show advising potential members how to dress for "rush." Other observations were more informal: conversations with sorority members over coffee, drinks after work, and discussions in class. In addition,

approximately 25 undergraduate papers that discussed sorority life were analyzed.

The respondents in this study represent a significant portion of contemporary college students. On this campus approximately 10% of the undergraduates belong to fraternities and sororities (there are over 4000 Greeks on campus). Nor are the respondents in this study atypical among those in the Greek system. The validity of these findings is supported by the remarkable consistency between data collected using different measurement strategies. The in-depth interviews corroborated the participant observation, and both these strategies were corroborated by the student papers analyzed. In addition, the results have since been discussed with other sorority girls who recognize the world described, although many claim that the picture painted fits everyone except their specific organization.

CRITERIA FOR MEMBERSHIP: PRIORITIES AND GROUP EVALUATIONS

Most everyone reports "going Greek" to ensure a good social life, usually phrased as wanting to "meet people." Girls join sororities to belong to a close-knit community in an otherwise overwhelming and alienating university. Girls going through the membership selection process often mentioned the desire to have a "home away from home." Joining a sorority assures the first-year undergraduate of instant friends of both sexes. Spared, somewhat, the loneliness that accompanies the initial search for acceptance in a new environment, she foregoes the search for a pool of acquaintances from whom she will later choose her friends. Nearly every respondent indicated that most of her friends were in sororities. That large circle of friends, and the ease of their acquisition, is an oft-cited benefit of Greek life.

The process by which girls choose, and are chosen, to join specific sororities is called "rush." No one in the sorority system likes rush, but most agree it is a necessary evil. A

common complaint is that girls are forced to choose new members with very little information. This perception is quite accurate; data upon which to choose sisters is indeed scarce. Discussion during the rush parties (approximately four hours in total) were by regulation confined to small talk; discussing politics, morality, religion, or sexuality was usually forbidden.

When asked why certain girls were chosen, the most common answer was that they "fit in." When pressed for a definition of the term, the bottom line was primarily physical attractiveness integrated with social skills and, secondarily, family status. One girl stated succinctly what others implied:

Most important, you'd be looking for pretty girls, that is what is going to attract the frats.

Judging each other in terms of male approval is a theme that recurs in discussions with sorority girls.

It is certainly not the case that all sororities pledge only attractive girls. Each house "knew against whom they competed," and concentrated their efforts to rush only those girls who might possibly join. Each sorority did select as attractive pledges as possible. The "top" house pledged only very attractive and, often, wealthy girls. As one member in a "status" house explained:

To put it bluntly, we've got the best girls! You know, the smartest, the best looking, the most popular, stuff like that. I know it sounds conceited, but that is, you know, the way it is. . . . I was really honored to be invited into this house. And I enjoy all the prestige the name gives me, you know.

A pledge from another "status" house, as tall and blonde as most of her sisters, explained what made her house different from others:

Money, for one thing. In my house everyone is from middle, upper-middle class backgrounds.

She explained that they could control class background through their strong system of alumni recommendations. Alumni contacted acquaintances in potential member's communities and prepared a folder on each girl, including information on father's occupation, religious affiliation, and high school activities. Such alumni involvement varied widely, and was directly related to the sororities' national status. In "top" houses recommendations were essential. "Midrange" houses still required "recs" but were more willing to find an alumna to meet with unknown, but desired, potential members. The lowest status houses did not require alumni recommendations at all.

A member of a less prestigious, but middle-range sorority assessed her situation:

If a girl is looking for a glamour house, she isn't going to be happy here. . . . We don't have any raving beauties in this house, but we don't have any really homely girls either.

One officer in a relatively low-status house distinguished her sorority from one at the "bottom of the barrel."

"AAA" has really big girls (she made a gesture indicating robust hips). They get the "rejects." Isn't that a terrible word, but that is what they're called.

What each sorority girl learns through this rush process is that the important ingredients for a woman's success, *for her own success*, are physical attractiveness, social skills, and social class.

GOING GREEK: IMPLICATIONS FOR SELF-IDENTITY

The sorority pledged during rush determines the group of girls and boys with which each individual will spend the next four years of her life. "Status" fraternities intermingle with

“status” sororities, and rarely with middle-range sororities. The status differences between sororities are obvious, known to potential members, and nationally consistent. A “top” sorority is one with national recognition, and not coincidentally, the members are either pretty or wealthy, and preferably both. Sororities maintain their status by expending considerable time, effort, and money to stage a “successful” rush. For a “successful” rush a sorority must attract the “best” (e.g., most attractive) pledges available to them. Each house must present an image attractive to the members they desire.

Thus, image projection is the essence of rush. And the image that sells sororities to potential members is sexual attractiveness to men. The skits sororities perform during rush parties are often overtly sexual, scantily dressed girls sing “let us entertain you” with pelvic thrusting in cadence to music. The projection of sexuality is consciously designed, but so is the limit to such an image. During a rehearsal for rush, a sorority president and impromptu choreographer remarked about a skit:

It comes across as too much sex, especially after the last act . . . sexy is okay, it’s good, but we are not running a whorehouse.

There is a conscious desire to portray coy sexuality— attractiveness—without suggesting “cheapness.” Sexy mannerisms are used as bait, assuring the green first-year student that she, too, will become cool, hip, and sexually attractive to men if she pledges their sorority.

The sorority a girl joins has serious consequences for her self-image. One pledge described how rush had affected many of her friends and, implicitly, herself.

If they don’t make it into a top house they are devastated. Away from home for the first time, and being alone. To have someone or some group you respect tell you you’re not good enough for them can be devastating if you don’t have any well formed self-identity . . . you kind of look at a skit and say, “Am I like that?”

One pledge graphically described this scene, reported by nearly every respondent:

There was a lot of pain involved. . . . Girls that didn't get asked back to a house they wanted would go around crying and screaming.

Neither of these girls had been invited to join the sorority of her choice. Rush can be painful, especially for girls not invited to join the sorority they desire.

New members are correct in their assumption that the sorority they pledge will delineate their future opportunities. Placement in the Greek status hierarchy effectively defines the significant others with whom each individual will interact while in college. Just as surely as labels and self-fulfilling stereotypes are attached to deviant actors (e.g., Schur, 1971), they are attached to the "kind of girls" in different sororities. These labels are an integral part of the Greek social fabric, believed by those around each girl, and consequently, by herself. Schur discusses how a "deviator" tends to get "caught up" in his deviant role; change the pronouns and this description is equally applicable to the sorority stereotypes. Individuals begin

to find that it (i.e., the role or label) has become highly salient in his overall personal identity, that his behavior is increasingly organized "around" the role, and that cultural expectations attached to the role have come to have precedence, or increased salience relative to other expectations in the organization of his activities and general way of life [Schur, 1971: 69].

Sorority girls are treated as typifications of their organizations: "glamour girls, ice boxes, prudes, or nice but ordinary." They begin to see themselves as truly "fitting in" to their sororities. From this process of internalizing group expectations there emerges a modified self.

An illustration of organizational prestige setting parameters for personal interaction—and subsequently self-image—involves two sophomores who transferred to the university

as a couple after spending their first year at a small college nearby. The respondent and her boyfriend went through rush and she recalled their experiences.

He pledged a really top fraternity. He was really upset when he found out I'd pledged BBB. He even told me he was embarrassed to come pick me up at the house, because his brothers would see him. He didn't tell me, but I know, his brothers started asking him why he was going out with a BBB when he could get a CCC or DDD, like they all dated. With that much social pressure, he probably started wondering why he was dating a BBB. I thought we were above that kind of thing (she wiped a tear away discreetly, pretending it was dust).

This girl's worth had been reevaluated based upon her organizational affiliation. When asked how the relationship was doing, she quickly added, "We broke up." The respondent, at the time of this interview, was dating someone from a middle-range fraternity.

The consolation for girls in low-status sororities, particularly those labeled "rejects," is that their group has its own account of reality. People in status houses are considered to be "snobs" and foolishly preoccupied with fashion. Despite pejorative accounts of "status" houses, girls date up whenever possible. Individuals and sororities as collectives seek to improve their status ranking by attracting higher status boys. The example above demonstrates, however, the limitations to this strategy; low-status girls rarely date "top" boys, but they may have more success with midrange fraternity boys.

Girls are ranked initially by their sorority affiliation, which depends to a large extent on attractiveness to men. Their second opportunity to raise personal status also depends on attractiveness to boys, this time more directly. These girls are learning that their success depends not upon personal achievement in school or sports, but upon their relationship to boys.

COURTSHIP PATTERNS: ASYMMETRIC GENDER ROLES

The dating system, however, accomplished more than status ranking or mate seeking. Courtship patterns teach individuals what is appropriate during cross-sex interaction. Dating game rules are clearly different for each sex. The underlying norms and official rules for male-female interaction within the Greek social world are consistent: sororities act *in loco parentis*; fraternities do not. Different rules for boys and girls are accepted by all as both natural and inevitable. The regulations put forth by alumni, but enforced by peer pressure and monetary fines, are based on a traditional ideology of gender roles. Under the *formal* rules, it is the male's place to invite the female. He is the aggressor, she the pursued.

The girls exchange the right to be guests for the right to initiate interactions. Fraternity-sorority exchanges—organized mixers—are always held in fraternities and usually paid for by the boys. Sorority girls give many accounts for this: sorority houses are elegant and might be damaged during a rowdy party; liquor is not allowed in sorority houses and is ever-present at Greek social occasions despite most members being under age; and, couples cannot find privacy in a sorority since boys are not allowed above the first floor, while girls are always welcome in fraternity rooms.

Sorority girls also relinquish control over their situation. For example, alumni control the physical setting, and thus, they “manage the props” used in everyday interpersonal interaction. One high status sorority was redecorating and the girls desired some input. A student representative was allowed to attend the decorating committee's meetings, but students and alumni agreed that since the alumni had raised the money, they would decide its use. In addition, the girls currently living in the house would be gone within four years while the house itself would remain. This particular house

was slightly more extravagant than others, although all were plush. Typically, the first floor of a sorority house is decorated elegantly with a baby grand piano in the main living room, thick, lightly colored carpets, and framed watercolors, not a good place for rowdy students. The props—furniture, color scheme, ambience—are designed for quiet, neat, polite “young ladies.” In contrast, fraternity houses have linoleum floors or wall-to-wall carpets and sturdy furniture easily removed for parties; the props here are arranged for young men who become wild, rowdy, and knock things over when drunk.

Although boys overtly control exchanges, girls are able to use the leverage available to them through their social chairman.⁴ Her most important task is to subtly suggest exchanges to appropriate boys. The social chairman of a small house consciously trying to raise its reputation by having exchanges with higher status fraternities explained her duties this way:

If I know someone in a house I particularly want to have an exchange with I nudge him . . . to have his social chairman call me.

Although this social chairman had never considered calling a fraternity herself, at least one social chairman from another sorority had made such advances. The general consensus was that only girls in very low status houses would need to “resort” to calling fraternities.

One pledge not pleased with her sororities’ social chairman had set her sights on the job. And she had strong ideas about the post.

A good social chairman will get around. She’ll go to different parties and have dates with guys from good frats, and subtly mention that they should get together sometime in an exchange. There are subtle ways, the way women always have power.

The president of this pledge’s house explained that it was only “natural” to wait for the boys to call because “the guys

pay for everything, after all." The boy's monetary expenditures give them power with its accompanying privileges. They have bought control over the very occurrence of every organized encounter.

The official rules governing male-female interaction reflect assumptions for traditional sex-specific gender roles. What is appropriate for boys, freedom to fully participate and to make their own decisions concerning alcohol consumption and sex, is totally inappropriate for girls. It is obvious that both girls and boys are involved in drinking and sex. The difference is that girls shroud such activities in "discretion" and concern for reputation. Within the Greek world view this makes sense. A woman's looks and reputation are keys to her success.

This dual system of norms for exchanges, officially endorsed by the Greek system, permeates all facets of male-female interactions, even outside the institutional setting. The sentiment was similar whether the hypothetical situation involved the social chairman initiating an exchange or an individual girl initiating a date:

The girls feel they'd rather not go out than to have to ask to be taken . . . it is really scorned.

The idea of taking someone out themselves is beyond these girls' perception of the possible; going out, but not being taken is a paradox not befitting their role as desirable sorority "coeds."

The appearance of "being taken out," even if the reality is different, often is important. One pledge recounted a conversation in the women's room of a downtown restaurant. Each of four girls had invited a date to the "pledge dance," an institutionalized girl-ask-boy evening.⁵ Before the dance, the four couples went to dinner. In true Sadie Hawkins Day fashion, the girls were responsible for the tab. The following is a conversation recounted by the one girl who felt comfortable paying for her date.

The [other] girls asked me if I gave my date money for the dinner. I said, "Of course not." It was my money, and I was

going to pay for the dinner. They said they had all given their dates the thirty dollars for dinner on the way over in the car, telling them that they weren't that liberated.

There was absolute consensus that under normal circumstances girls did not pay for dates, although couples going steady might occasionally go "dutch treat." Likewise, female-initiated dates were not considered appropriate. One girl suggested that although females sometimes initiate dates

It isn't direct. I mean you've got to be subtle or else it scares the guys. Plus it's always better when the guy makes the first move. . . . It's just more proper. I think the other girls look down on girls who, oh, let's say, ask guys out on dates. They kind of look desperate. I guess, I mean, it just doesn't look very good, not only for the girl but for the sorority too.

This concern about personal and collective reputation was a predominant theme in discussions of dating and sexuality.

The regulations and informal norms of the Greek system institutionalize traditional gender role values. The girls trade the luxury of being guests for the right to initiate or direct cross-sex interaction. Girls learn the more subtle "feminine" ways to exert power over their lives, and they learn these are the "proper" strategies to use. The sorority girls internalize the values explicitly endorsed in the formal rituals. They believe it "only natural" to want males to lead and to depend on boys for personal status and self-esteem.

If it is an organizational goal to train girls to be wives whose access to power is subtle and indirect, and to train boys to be heads of households, then the organizations' regulations are both relevant and effective. If the girls' collective or individual goals differ from this implicit organizational ideology, then these regulations may be dysfunctional.

INSTITUTIONALIZED FRIENDSHIP: PRIORITIES AND SISTERHOOD

Numerous sorority rituals are designed to encourage solidarity among members. Rush is used as an opportunity to

“pull the house together,” as well as to select new members. First year “pledge” classes often have a weekend retreat to get to know one another. In many sororities all the pledges live in one large room filled with bunk beds. Although this arrangement is a direct result of overcrowding, the ideological rationalization involves increasing solidarity among pledges.

The quality of friendships that develop in sororities was a source of disagreement among respondents. Some girls were quite satisfied with their female friendships; others were openly disappointed. For many girls, female friendships were not important enough to merit much discussion. Although the satisfaction levels vary tremendously, the descriptive accounts of relationships between girls were remarkably similar.

One officer, very involved with her sorority and quite satisfied with her friendships, expressed “love” for all her sisters, and explained the substance of these relationships in detail after some probing.

I mean that whenever I don't have a date with my boyfriend, or anyone else, then I am likely to ask my sisters to do something before I bother calling someone else.

Another respondent described the situation similarly, but with bitter and conscious disillusionment:

Around here no one makes plans together, of course, until the last minute if no date has turned up. You should watch the Friday night scene here between 7:00 and 9:00 o'clock. The girls left around at the end decide to do something together or stay in their rooms. Whereas I make plans to see my close friends, for most of these girls their friends are around them all the time. They walk to classes together, talk about what classes they are going to take, meet here or there to walk between classes together. They do things together in that sense all the time, but they don't make plans together.

Not surprisingly, this girl moved out of her sorority during the course of this research. She was concerned not with the actual time sorority sisters spend together, but the priority given to that time. Two other respondents, both of whom

remained active in their sororities, actually scheduled time with female friends. Both recognized that they were atypical.

There is general agreement among those satisfied and disillusioned with the situation that female friendships are less important than relationships with boys. Descriptions of girl-to-girl relationships were remarkably similar, although respondents suggest the description was true for everyone but themselves. The adjective consistently used to describe one another is "catty." The vice-president of a small house went so far as to suggest that backstabbing and cattiness were the definitive:

I am not into the sorority part of it. The finding a husband, stabbing each other in the back for boyfriends, all the cattiness.

There seemed to be widespread dissatisfaction with this facet of sorority life, but no sign of attempts to change these interaction patterns.

Despite the term sorority meaning "sisterhood," neither the phrase itself nor the concept holds much appeal for today's sorority girl. The women's movement emphasis on sisterhood and female solidarity is not central to sorority members' world view.

The low priority assigned to female friendship and the acceptance of "catty" behavior as unavoidable lends credence to Giallombardo's (1966) argument that woman-to-woman relationships are based on "calculated solidarity." In her study of female-female relationships in a federal penitentiary, Giallombardo suggests that, because a woman's future is determined by her success in the marriage market, female companions are seen primarily as rivals, even in single-sex institutions. Giallombardo (1966: 15) defined "calculated solidarity" as

a social unity based not on automatic conformity to a set of common social norms perceived to be morally binding, but rather a unity which is subject to constant reinterpretation . . . as she perceives each situation from the point of view of her own interest.

This analysis seems particularly appropriate to the Greek world, where the girls vie against each other for what they perceive as a finite set of high-status fraternity boys. The "cattiness" and "back-stabbing" described by sorority girls indicates the precariousness of female bonds within sororities. Unity is desired and expected, unless it interferes with the more salient process of dating, in which case each actor calculates her best interests.

DISCUSSION

The official regulations and unofficial norms that determine male-female interactions in the Greek system function to "create" women with traditional goals and desires. As one respondent suggested, sorority girls are in the process of learning to be women. The Greek system serves as their primary reference group for the first few years that they are free from direct parental control. The behavioral patterns encouraged in this setting function effectively as mechanisms for traditional gender role socialization. One senior described her criteria for a spouse when questioned about her *own* future plans:

Let me see, a professional college grad with a good job. You know security is important. He doesn't have to be fantastic looking, but tall, dark, and handsome wouldn't hurt . . . two cars, a boat, a lake cabin. You know, your basic upper-middle class life.

Most girls desire to have a career, before and after raising children. There was universal agreement that mothers ought to stay home with their children, that women's careers must be designed so as not to interfere with homemaking responsibilities. This girl's discussion of her own hopes represents the general consensus.

I hope I won't have to work before all my kids are in school. . . . Little kids need a mother and I'd like to center my attention on being a good mother, instead of a part-time one. I mean, if you have to work then, you know, what can you do? Nothing. But

like I said, I hope I won't have to. I'll let my husband handle the income part.

The two respondents with less traditional desires were quite discouraged about alternative possibilities. One junior, an officer in a large and prestigious sorority who had taken a women's studies course, suggested that an egalitarian, dual-career marriage was merely a utopian dream. She knew no boys who would consider sharing homemaking and child-rearing responsibilities. This dream, which she admitted was *her* dream, might be an option for her daughters or granddaughters. This girl had accepted the reality that if she wanted a family, and she did, she must become a homemaker.

It is entirely another question as to whether sororities are creating women to fill positions that actually exist in contemporary society, the upper-middle class homemaker, or whether such roles are becoming anachronistic. As Bernard (1972) has noted, women have traditionally married into a standard of living. These girls are acutely aware that marriage is a means of upward mobility, or of retaining their class status. If these girls' lives do, indeed, depend on their success in the marriage market, then calculated solidarity (disloyalty to women in rivalry for husbands) may be for them a rational strategy. It seems unlikely, however, that contemporary sorority girls emerge from college with the social or psychological skills necessary for active participation in the competitive, professional, contemporary labor force for which they are presumably being trained while at the university.

This is not to suggest that none of these young women will become surgeons, lawyers, or executives; only that the selves they have nurtured while in college will need considerable reorganization if and when they enter demanding occupational social worlds. Without longitudinal data it is impossible to determine the long-term affects of sorority life.

More than thirty years ago Mirra Komarovsky (1946) identified contradictions in female gender roles that remain descriptive of the respondents in this study. During times of

social change, cultural norms may deter individuals from courses of action that would serve their own and society's best interests. According to Komarovsky, college women in the 1940s were presented with two mutually exclusive roles: the "feminine" role and the "modern" model. This latter role was essentially the "career woman" model. Komarovsky (1946: 184) writes:

The goals set by each role are mutually exclusive and the fundamental personality traits each evokes are at points diametrically opposed, so that what were assets for one become liabilities for the other, and the full realization of one role threatens defeat in the other.

It seems that the Greek system assures that these roles remain in conflict. The Greek system functions to ensure that boys and girls leave college with different and complementary social skills, goals, and gender roles.

Not every respondent was the "prototypical" sorority girl described in this study: a few planned time with female friends, one dated a non-Greek boy, two considered lifetime careers, and one secretly lived with her boyfriend. These exceptions, however, illustrate the strength of the Greek normative system by displaying the counternormative nature of these "abnormal" behaviors. The woman living with her boyfriend, for example, once discovered, was asked to resign her office on "moral" grounds and did so, agreeing with the legitimate need for her sorority to protect its good reputation.

The question of causality arises when discussing the creation of traditional gender roles. It may be that traditionally oriented girls seek sorority life because it is consistent with their normative ideologies. Although this is certainly the case for some, it is not applicable to many of the girls in this study. Most had joined sororities for a place to belong in a large and often frightening university. All sought the comfort of a *gemeinschaft* community, especially one with a guaranteed social life and approved by their parents. Even more to the point, however, is that people change as they move into

new circumstances. College students are often exposed to ideas and life-styles they would not have encountered at home. An eighteen-year-old girl is not imprinted "traditional" for life; the experiences she has and the people with whom she interacts will contribute to her continuously evolving sense of self. What happens to sorority girls, however, is that they are shielded from alternative perspectives by the comfortable, conservative Greek world. The two respondents who considered combining demanding careers with motherhood felt that their desires were "incompatible" in today's world, that world organized from within their Greek perspective.

Finally, there is an interesting issue yet to be addressed: How is it that the Greek world remains relatively insulated from the changes in women's roles that have been heralded over the last two decades? The sororities discussed in this article exist in an era in which books and movies concerning gender role changes are nationally acclaimed, and women have begun to enter professional ranks in business and academia. An explanation for this apparent continuity can perhaps be found by closely analyzing the types of interaction that dominate life in the Greek social world.

In a discussion of social change, Hewitt (1979) suggests that interaction can be described as either routine or problematic. To the extent that behavior is problematic and conduct is thus impeded, self-conscious reflectiveness arises leading to the negotiation of new behavioral patterns. To the extent, however, that behavior is institutionalized routinely, and all participants share identical perspectives and expectations, interaction flows smoothly and change is more rare.

The abundance of institutionalized routine behavior in the Greek social world may help to account for the continuance of traditional gender role patterns. The Greek system successfully retards change by routinizing and institutionalizing male-female interaction and by restricting participants to those individuals who accept Greek social norms. Those that do not, resign, thus ensuring the smoothness of expected

interaction. Although even routine interaction always includes some problematic components, the Greek social structure seems to minimize the nonroutine and thus to discourage social change.

What the future holds for these girls is not evident. Most want traditional lives, to be mothers and homemakers, to have careers when and if that is convenient. Yet, the world they must enter after graduation is changing. How many of their spouses will be able to afford, on one young professional's income, the life-style these girls expect? For many of these girls, working outside the home will be an economic necessity. Others may decide they desire to work outside their homes, once they have spent some time in them. In either case, the priorities these girls have set, and the selves they have nurtured while in the Greek system, may prove quite inappropriate in the world they must enter when they grow up.

NOTES

1. "Girl" is used advisedly. Sorority members refer to themselves as "girls, sorority girls." "Sorority women" is used to indicate alumni. College-aged sorority members perceive themselves as girls, legitimately subjected to quasi-parental supervision.

2. In order to rank each organization's institutional prestige within the Greek system, questionnaires were distributed to sociology classes. The questionnaires merely listed every sorority and students were asked to indicate the "top three and bottom three houses." The consensus was quite high at both ends of the spectrum. The prestige rankings were also consistent with alumni reports.

3. Fraternity and sorority initials are entirely fictitious. Each time a different organization is referred to in a quotation it has been named alphabetically. Hence, the first sorority is referred to as "AAA," the second as "BBB," and so on. Any resemblance between these fictitious names and real organizations is entirely accidental.

4. The word "chairman" is the term used by sorority members themselves.

5. The very existence of an institutionalized girl-ask-boy evening is strong supporting data for the hypothesis that courtship is an asymmetrical process in the Greek system. Boys asking girls for dates is so taken-for-granted that girls need a formal, organizationally approved justification for initiating dates, which under other circumstances would clearly be counternormative behavior.

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BARBARA J. RISMAN is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Washington, in Seattle. She teaches courses for both the Sociology and Women Studies' Departments. Her research interests focus on the social creation of gender and sex differences in parenting.