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Anna Davlin
DePauw University

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An Arduous Path: Positive and Negative Consequences of Groups from Psychological,
Philosophical, and Economic Perspectives

Anna Davlin

DePauw University Honor Scholar Program

Class of 2019

Sponsor: Professor Ted Bitner

Committee: Professor Erik Wielenberg, Professor Allison Roehling, Professor Jarrod Hunt

Preface

A special thank you to Jeff Kenney, my first-year seminar professor, who encouraged me to stick with the Honor Scholar program. Many thanks to my advisor Ted Bitner, and the rest of my committee: Erik Wielenberg, Allison Roehling, and Jarrod Hunt. Much of this work was made possible by Kevin Moore, Amy Welch, and Tonya Welker as well. Thank you all for your contributions, understanding, flexibility, and dedication.

How to read this document

This thesis is unique in that it combines research as well as my own experiences. It is in narrative format, and the names of individuals and organizations have been changed. The introductions to each chapter are my personal experiences, which are followed by analysis if relevant. Some chapters just contain personal stories sans research and are included for the sake of cohesion and understanding since they are a part of the larger narrative. The stories are told in chronological order with few exceptions. I thought it best to organize this document based on the sequence of my personal experiences. There will be dates and times to prevent confusion.

**Trigger warning:* This document contains/alludes to information related to sexual harassment, rape, mental health, trauma, and Greek life. If any of these topics are triggering for you, I suggest not reading this document.

Introduction

In this thesis, I discuss the positive and negative consequences of social groups. I will explain how groups impact an individual member using psychology, philosophy, economics, as well as other relevant social sciences. The scope of this project extends to only small and medium groups: think of your handful of close friends, or an organization you are a part of. That's how big the groups get. This thesis does not cover anything beyond that, such as large organizations like corporations, political groups, or nation states (all of which are also classified as groups). Of particular importance are the ideas of exclusion, inclusion, conflict, and leadership. I have a few hopes for this thesis; that it sheds light on group dynamics and how groups can be harmful and helpful to an individual, that writing it will be cathartic for me, and that while reading it you will somehow relate to the content.

1. Erin and Gwen

September 2016

I quickly became close with one of the girls who lived in the room next to me, Erin. We were on the formal recruitment team together and spent many nights discussing how we didn't really feel like we had a place within our pledge class. We also shared a sleep room at Gamma, which is an intimate sleeping space comprised of two sets of bunk beds for four girls. A bond was forged between us. Or at least I thought so.

One day that fall, at a group meeting for my managerial accounting class, a boy named Rex made a comment directed towards me that I deemed as sexual harassment. If it wasn't sexual harassment, it was certainly sexually malicious. Another classmate of ours emailed me his assignment, and Rex proclaimed to the whole group that the only reason this boy had shared his answers with me is because he wanted to 'screw' me. This struck a chord based on my past experiences with an abusive boyfriend, and I left the meeting in tears.

I told Erin about the situation, and she seemed to sympathize. She left me chocolates and a sweet note the next day. A few weeks later, Erin brought Rex into our sleep room. They were hooking up at the time. I was shocked and appalled. I left the sleep room screaming and crying. It felt like a betrayal.

Gwen, one of my few friends from freshman year, also pledged Gamma. I was excited to live with her and deepen our friendship. She also shared the same sleep room with Erin and me. Unfortunately for us, her boyfriend stayed over every single night for about half of the semester. At first, I treated it as a joke. We called Dave our fifth sleep roommate, or something like that.

After a while, it got old. I started to wish that he didn't stay over so much. The worst part was that Gwen never asked any of us if it was okay if he spent the night... ever.

I was subjected to their couple's noises at night. This was not only generally uncomfortable, but reminded me of the times that my former boyfriend would put me in similar situations... He made me vulnerable to people walking in on us at parties doing whatever (probably something I didn't want to do) too many times. I walked in on them naked one time and left the sleep room in tears. I began to get angry. I didn't understand how she could abuse our sleep room so selfishly. One night I came home, and someone in the sleep room was snoring. I assumed it was Gwen's boyfriend, so I began to say something about the noise. Gwen got angry with me and repeatedly said it wasn't her boyfriend and that I needed to relax.

After these incidents, I came home to my room one night and overheard Erin and Gwen discussing how they hoped I didn't come home and saying other mean things about me. I sat in my day room with my roommate Cece and her boyfriend. I shrunk into the futon. I cried as we all listened to Erin and Gwen bully me next door.

In the situation with Erin and Rex, I was seeking out Erin for support. I thought she was a relatively empathetic individual and could possibly understand the way that Rex made me feel. Empathy is defined as "the ability to be affected by the state of another individual or creature" (de Waal 184). After all, she was concerned about me. I distinctly remember her leaving a bag of chocolates and a sweet note on my desk after I explained my situation to her. Again, de Waal's book *Our Inner Ape* is relevant here, as he states, "we have been programmed to thoroughly dislike seeing and hearing the pain of others" (de Waal 187). This, however, stood in such stark

contrast to her actions later on that month. If she understood how I felt, and was able to empathize or at least sympathize, why would she bring Rex into our sleep room? My educated guess is that Erin was able to empathize, but her self-awareness was lacking.

This dichotomy is interesting because self-awareness directly influences one's ability to empathize. In *Our Inner Ape*, de Waal states that "self-awareness affects how we deal with others" (de Waal 194). Naturally, dealing with others involves a certain degree of empathy, sympathy, and compassion; it would seem that these skills follow from a keen sense of self-awareness. Interestingly enough, the way in which Erin treated me challenges this notion. Erin was able to at least sympathize but was not fully self-aware. De Waal hits the nail on the head when he states, "both sympathy and cruelty rely on the ability to imagine how one's own behavior affects others" (de Waal 4). My theory is that Erin was unable to imagine how her behavior affected me, which led to her cruel treatment of me. Even after I left the room crying, Erin's reaction was less than sympathetic. She asked me if I was okay, which I obviously was not, and after I mumbled something inaudible, she returned to Rex in the sleep room. This is so contrary to what de Waal describes as emotional contagion:

"Emotions tend to arouse matching emotions, from laughing and joy to the well-known phenomenon of a room full of crying toddlers. We know now that emotional contagion resides in parts of the brain so ancient that we share them with animals as diverse as rats, dogs, elephants, and monkeys" (de Waal 187).

Clearly, my emotions did not arouse similar emotions in Erin. She did not cry as I was crying, she was not upset as I was upset, and she went about her life as usual in spite of me and in my feelings. She didn't even think twice about possibly removing Rex from the space. After all, this was my room as much as it was hers, and definitely wasn't Rex's. If she was affected by emotional contagion, she would have considered removing him from our room. I continue to this

day to wonder why she thought bringing Rex home that night was okay. Maybe she had thought enough time had passed since the incident, or maybe she was just flat out insensitive. I like to hope for the former rather than the latter.

An economic perspective is useful when analyzing the way in which Gwen abused our sleep room. The situation with Gwen, her boyfriend Dave, and our sleep room motivates an examination of rivalry versus excludability. In economics, rivalry describes “how much one person’s use of the good prevents someone else from using it” (Cronk and Leech p. 53). Relatedly, excludability describes “the difficulty of preventing people from consuming the good if they did not help pay for it” (Cronk and Leech p. 53). Economists classify goods into four categories, based on how rivalrous or excludable they are.

Figure 1: Classification of Goods (Choe and Yun 2017)

	Excludable	Non-Excludable
Rival	Private Goods	Common-Pool Resources
Non-Rival	Club Goods	Public Goods

In this case, the sleep room can be interpreted as a common-pool resource. Gwen’s use of the sleep room as a lover’s cabana for her and her boyfriend made the space rival because it very much prevented me from using the space comfortably. Huang and Smith describe this type of situation succinctly, as “the actions of one agent affect the stock of the resource, which in turn affects the well-being of another agent through decreased resource availability or increased costs” (Huang and Smith p. 4072). The sleep room was also non-excludable because I could not prevent Gwen (nor Erin) from sharing it with other non-members, especially men.

Non-excludable goods are especially prone to the free-rider problem, which describes when individuals who do not pay for or contribute to the upkeep of a good or resource take advantage of it anyway. In a sense, Gwen's boyfriend was a free rider. He did not pay sorority dues nor room and board for Gamma, but yet was eating our food and sleeping in our space. This type of behavior is detrimental to group dynamics. It weakens group cohesion, leads members to question why they would continue to contribute to membership costs if non-members are allowed the same access to the resource, and prevents cooperation amongst group members. As Cronk and Leech describe, "the first step toward successful cooperation is to avoid non-cooperators and free riders" (Cronk and Leech 74). Clearly, Dave's free riding of the sleep room caused palpable tension between myself and Gwen, prevented successful cooperation between the two of us, and also created and imposed a negative externality upon me.

Negative externalities and inefficiencies are common consequences of non-excludable resources. Researchers have found that "open access to resources, or at least minimal levels of excludability, can generate multiple inefficiencies" (Huang and Smith p. 4071). For common-pool resources, inefficiencies take the form of externalities. Negative externalities are generated when the marginal cost of using the resource for the individual in question is less than the marginal cost to another individual or society at large, and his or her behavior or choices negatively affect another individual. In case with Gwen, Dave, and the sleep room, a negative externality was generated by Gwen's use of the sleep room because the marginal cost of her actions were less than the marginal cost I incurred as a result of her actions.

The externality imposed on me by Gwen is very similar to other typical externalities that arise as a consequence of the nature of common-pool resources. Ostrom and her colleagues coin

the term appropriation externality, which “reflects the production relationship by which one user’s increased appropriation reduces the yield obtained by other users for any given level of appropriation activity” (Ostrom et al p. 10). An example quite frequently used to demonstrate the generation of an appropriation externality is that of a fishery with homogenous fishers.

Rationally, fishers will fish to the point where his or her marginal cost of fishing equals the average return of fishing. If all fishermen pursue this strategy, “the yield other fishers receive from their fishing activities is reduced” (Ostrom et al p. 10). This type of outcome is suboptimal and produces an externality imposed on other users of the fishery. When one fisher maximizes his or her fishing activities “... that user reduces the average return to all appropriators, thereby creating an externality” (Ostrom et al p. 11).

There are a few potential policies offered by economists and other researchers to ameliorate the creation of externalities in relation to common-pool resources. A typical approach would be to either privatize the common-pool resource or allow for government intervention in the allocation of the resource. These strategies, however, cannot necessarily be directly applied to the situation with Gwen, her boyfriend Dave, myself, and common-pool resource of the sleep room. One way in which the common-pool resource could be managed by an outside source similar to the government, however, would be to involve the house corporation board in situations regarding the use of the chapter facility by non-members. The house corporation board is a group of Gamma alums that are in charge of the upkeep of the physical chapter facility, manage the finances of the chapter, and oversee other important matters such as investment and scholarship funding. Had they initially been aware of the situation with Gwen, her boyfriend Dave, myself, and the sleep room, I am sure they would have intervened on my behalf and

created rules about the use of space in Gamma by guests, especially male guests. Intervention by outside authority figures, however, is not always effective because of their lack of proximity to the issue. The house corporation board could easily set rules but enforcing them would be difficult since they are rarely present at the house and only meet once every quarter. The probability of members of Gamma following the rules set by the house corporation board would be very slim because of the lack of agency the house corporation board has amongst members. Most women in Gamma do not know who is on the house corporation board or that it exists, which gives me little faith that an intervention staged by them would be impactful at all.

Instead of a governmental intervention or privatization, another way that common-pool resources can be effectively managed are through rules set by group members and enforced by group members, which is referred to as “autonomous management” (Choe and Yun p. 122). This solves the problems of proximity and agency. Group members would more likely be responsive to management coming from other group members since they have proximity to the issues affecting the group. These group members also have agency because they are each other’s peers, which makes them knowledgeable and familiar with one another. Ostrom, via Choe and Yun, sets forth eight principles for successful autonomous management:

“1) define clear group boundaries, 2) match rules governing use of common goods to local needs and conditions, 3) ensure that those affected by the rules can participate in modifying the rules, 4) make sure the rule-making rights of community members are respected by outside authorities, 5) develop a system, carried out by community members, for monitoring members’ behavior, 6) use graduated sanctions for rule violators, 7) provide accessible, low-cost means for dispute resolution, and 8) build responsibility for governing the common resource in nested tiers from the lowest level up to the entire interconnected system” (Choe and Yun p. 123).

For the situation with Gwen, her boyfriend Dave, and myself we could have worked through the use of the common-pool resource of the sleep room through autonomous

management. If Gwen had come to me and other members of our sleep room asking if it was okay if Dave slept over, I believe the situation would have turned out much differently. As a group, we could have created rules to regulate our respective uses of the sleep room. A possible solution would have been to create a schedule, which would have allowed for each of us to determine at what times we would have had the common-pool resource of the sleep room to ourselves. Collectively, we could hold each other accountable for the ways in which we were using the sleep-room by having a regular meeting about each other's usage.

2. Sophie and Kelly

September 2016

At the end of September 2016, a programming chapter was held at the Gamma house. Chapter is our weekly meeting, and programming chapters happen once or twice a semester. Programming chapters are exactly what they sound like; an outside group or vendor comes in to present something to us. At this particular programming chapter, a representative from the Women's Center on campus was leading our discussion. She started off with a few icebreakers, and then we broke off into small groups. She posed a few questions for us to answer and discuss amongst ourselves; the first one she asked was "Describe a time you felt objectified".

Within my small group, I shared the time Rex directed his demeaning remark towards me, and how it made me feel as if nothing but my physical body mattered. As soon as I finished, a set of biological sisters in my group, Sophie and Kelly, began to passionately defend Rex. "He's a good guy and it's unfair of you to talk shit about him like this" and "I don't think you should be talking about this because this boy has a lot of friends in our house" were the claims they made. The group fell silent. A few girls came to my defense, validating my experience. The damage, however, was done.

Words can't describe how I felt. I pretended to go fill up my water bottle, but what I was really doing was leaving the meeting in tears. I ran up to my room and started heaving sobs. I felt so ostracized, so belittled, so unsupported. People who were my sorority sisters seemed to be picking a boy over me, as if my experience wasn't real or justified. This is not something I expected when I became a part of this group of women. No one seemed to understand why Rex's comment hurt me. It was not as if I was randomly talking about it; I brought it up in light of a

relevant topic. It felt like the right time and place to discuss something like that. This is when I learned a valuable lesson: not everyone in the sorority was my friend or understood me. Unable to bear being in the house any longer, I got in my car and started driving fast to nowhere in particular.

A poignant story from *Our Inner Ape* illustrates these type of coalition dynamics¹. The author Frans de Waal describes a time when one chimpanzee, Luit, challenged two co-ruling chimpanzees Yeroen and Nikkie. Yeroen and Nikkie were biologically related, similar to Sophie and Kelly. At one moment in time, Luit sensed an opportunity to take power of the colony, as he had the support of the majority of the other chimps. He worked behind the scenes with the downtrodden, excluded, and weaker members of the community; he earned their support by advocating for them and empathizing with them, similar to how I have earned the support of many members of Gamma over the years.

What happens next is very similar to the situation described in my anecdote. When Luit tried to take control of a situation in the community, (similar to how I tried to express myself at a programming chapter), the two chimps Yeroen and Nikkie (Sophie and Kelly) brutally beat him (ostracized me to the point where I had to leave chapter). Luit died the night of the beating. He passed in not in peace but in violence as he succumbed to his injuries; he bled out. My time at Gamma that evening was extremely emotional as I succumbed to my injuries; the love I thought I had for this group of women bled out and was replaced by pain.

¹ The full story of Luit can be found on pp. 44-47 of *Our Inner Ape* by Frans de Waal.

This experience was the final straw for me my sophomore year in terms of my negative experiences with Gamma. It marked the beginning of my cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is defined as “when an individual holds two or more elements of knowledge that are relevant to each other but inconsistent with one another” (Festinger 93). This psychological impasse often creates a state of discomfort. In my situation, it was certainly a painful and challenging dichotomy to say the least. On one hand, I held the belief that being a member of Gamma was and would continue to be a positive thing: I had relationships I cherished with a handful of sorority sisters, I thought being a part of a sorority would allow me to grow, and I thought the involvement opportunities within the house would better prepare me for leadership roles once I graduated. My attitude and behavior were positive and cheery.

On the other hand, I held the belief that being a member of Gamma was and would continue to be a negative thing: I thought many girls in Gamma were against me, I heard them talk about me behind my back, and I knew they didn’t understand me. My attitude and behavior were negative and rebellious. I constantly debated whether or not I belonged in this sorority, and whether or not I should deactivate. Deactivating from a Greek organization is the formal process of nullifying membership and affiliation with the chapter in question. Deactivating is normally looked down upon and questioned by members of the organization from which one would deactivate. In the specific case of Gamma, deactivation was considered a serious no-no. Gamma has the lowest deactivation rate of any sorority on campus I believe. This may be due to the attitudes surrounding the way deactivation is perceived. Some people are scared to deactivate because of the social stigma that would be attached to doing so. I know that’s the reason why I never did. I also didn’t want to lose the small sliver of love and acceptance that I felt from a

handful of the friends I did have in Gamma. For these reasons, I continued to be a member to this day. Every day has been a challenge for me with my opposing and inconsistent beliefs about Gamma.

3. Summer and Justine

September 2016

The night of the programming chapter, I was supposed to have a meeting with the Watchcare team. They called me as I was somewhere on US 231, and I told them I couldn't meet tonight. They demanded that I return for the meeting, intimidating me, and I was so scared to not go that I turned around and came back.

My experience with Rex emboldened me to post in our Facebook group about sexual harassment and sexual assault. Justine, the Vice President of Risk Management, described that these posts offended many people because they felt as if it wasn't my place to post about those things because 1) I had not been a victim myself, and 2) my bringing up the topic so explicitly in our social media group was hurtful to herself and other victims of sexual assault.

Clearly, my message had been lost on them. It was not something I wanted to share, but at this point I was practically forced to in order to explain myself. I had been a victim of rape in high school. My former boyfriend did things to me without my consent; I was too scared to say no. The pain of these memories was triggered by Rex's comment. That was why it was so tough for me. I didn't want anyone else in Gamma to feel the way that I did, so I posted articles and such to let them know they weren't alone.

I started sobbing over the damage and hurt I unknowingly caused. All I was trying to do was create allyship and community. Instead, I alienated myself. No one wanted to hear what I had to say because they felt as if I had no authority or cause to be talking about such things. Members of Gamma viewed me as over dramatic and annoying. I was the topic of conversation behind closed doors. I sobbed and I sobbed, apologizing over and over again. As soon as Justine

and Summer realized it was deeper than they first thought, they began to feel bad. They promised they would quash the gossip going around the house about me.

A topic that is frequently explored in management and organizational economics is group support systems within businesses and organizations. I will use this research framework and apply it to what is considered the group support system within Gamma. Our support network, which is known as Watchcare, is led by a Vice President of Risk Management and a Director of Watchcare, which were Justine and Summer respectively at the time. The responsibilities of their roles collectively were to mediate conflict between members of Gamma, provide support for members of Gamma that may be struggling emotionally, and to ensure that all chapter events are safe. The Watchcare team has a vested interest in effectively managing conflict between groups members because “interpersonal conflict, targeted at persons within the group... can be detrimental to group functioning” (Miranda and Bostrom p. 63). I believe this is one of the reasons they took such interest in my situation; my personal issues seemed to be tearing the house apart and limited Gamma’s ability to function cohesively. As demonstrated in the previous anecdote with Sophie and Kelly, house-wide chapter meetings couldn’t even go smoothly without someone getting upset about my situation. Additionally, Miranda and Bostrom state:

“If conflict is not appropriately managed, it can lead to hostility within the group and poor motivation and morale, resulting in poorer decisions. Other consequences of poorly managed conflict are stress, misallocation of resources, and diminished performance” (Miranda and Bostrom p. 63).

These types of outcomes were evident at Gamma as a consequence of the conflicts between me and other members described earlier. There was an increased feeling of discontent throughout the sorority; some members believed I was acting out unjustly and irrationally, which made them

increasingly hostile towards not only me but others. The few women who supported me were upset with how I was being treated. Their confidence and faith in Gamma were shaken, which led lowered their spirits about Gamma.

In addition to wanting to manage the conflict between myself and others, I believe Justine and Summer were also concerned about me. I was obviously very distressed, and they knew I didn't feel safe or understood at Gamma. The purpose of their meeting with me, therefore, was to try to gain a better understanding of what they could do to help. This was much appreciated, as I did not feel the same level of care and concern from other members within Gamma.

4. Pledge Class

October 2016

Pretty quickly, people in my pledge class abandoned me. The friends I had at the beginning of the semester no longer associated with me. I was the black sheep of our grade. Their gossiping had reached absurdity, to a point where Jamie and Taylor had to call a meeting. At this meeting I was expected to explain myself. I didn't think this was necessary, why should it be my job to change misconceptions? Unwillingly, I shared with my pledge class why Rex's comment hurt me so badly. I was embarrassed as I stood in front of them all, crying. After I was done sharing, people murmured "we love you Anna" and "we support you Anna". I knew this wasn't true, and my suspicions were confirmed throughout the rest of the semester with few exceptions. When it came time to determine living situations for the fall of our junior year, people's true sentiments about me were revealed.

Usually, members of Gamma live out of the sorority house and in university-owned housing their junior year. I had to choose to live in the house for the entirety of my junior year because none of the groups in my pledge class wanted to live with me due to my mental illness and the ways in which I had interacted with Erin and Gwen. I was terrified to live in the chapter house again because up until this point it had been a horrendous experience. I talked to my friend Susan about the situation, hoping to gain a better understanding of what she and her friends were doing in terms of their living situation. She told me her group of friends liked me, but they just didn't want to live with me. To me, the two were synonymous. If people liked me, wouldn't they want to live with me?

I tried to join one of the other liveout groups with my two remaining friends Meredith and Mary. I approached the girl in charge of the situation, Bella, and she said they didn't have room for us and were wanting more of a 'chill' liveout. Based on how she reacted when I approached her, I could tell she and her friends wanted nothing to do with me. It was so hurtful to be excluded from every single friend group within my pledge class. I felt very misunderstood and unlovable.

The stressful flurry, marked by multiple rejections from various groups, of figuring out my living situation for junior year illustrates stigmatized exclusion. A few definitions might be helpful to establish what stigmatized exclusion is. According to Abrams, Hogg, and Marques, "in its most basic terms, stigma refers to a mark or sign of disgrace or discredit" (p. 64). In the minds of many women in my pledge class, I bore a sign of disfavor because of my interactions with Gwen and Erin, as well as my incident with Rex. The chatter throughout the house about my mental health popularized the view that I was a dangerous outsider, someone who should not be included, regarded, or dealt with at all costs. Unfortunately, my case is not unique. There are many situations in which people are cast aside as:

"in every society there are some categories of individuals who are systematically devalued and excluded from a broad array of social relationships and social domains. These individuals are stigmatized" (Abrams et al p. 64).

The key word in this quote is *systematically*. My exclusion in terms of my living situation for junior year was quite methodical and was felt at multiple levels; the exclusion was not from one group alone, but from multiple groups simultaneously. This leads to another important aspect of stigmatized exclusion, which is that it is consensual. Typically, there is general agreement

amongst group members that certain types of people should be excluded (Abrams et al). In my case, the women divided themselves into three groups. Within each group, there was unanimous support against including me in their respective living arrangements for the following year. Clearly, my being excluded was mutually agreed upon by the women in each group. I was deemed as being difficult to live with, and also as someone who had serious mental health problems.

Another way in which my experience of being excluded from the living arrangements of the women in my pledge class of my sorority demonstrates stigmatized exclusion is through its very nature, by the fact that they did not want to live with me. These women refused to live with me because they wanted to keep their distance from me. Abrams, Hogg, and Marques argue the following:

“Stigma is so intimately related to rejection and exclusion that prejudiced attitudes towards members of stigmatized groups frequently are measured by asking people to indicate the social distance they want to keep between themselves and members of the stigmatized group” (66).

In my case, the women in my pledge class of my sorority wanted to keep a very large social distance from me, so much so that they refused to live with me. They attempted to establish the largest social distance they could by excluding me from all of the living arrangements for our junior year. Such a large social distances indicates that the exclusion was a version of stigmatized exclusion. Such exclusion left me with no options for housing for the upcoming year. I felt scared and very alone by this prospect. Out of necessity, I was basically forced to live in the sorority chapter facility again my junior year.

5. Meredith

November 2016

During the ups and downs of my first and second semesters of sophomore year, a girl named Meredith befriended me. She was sweet, reserved, and quiet. On a warm fall day in September, after the Rex situation had occurred, we took a walk together. On our excursion I explained why the situation was so upsetting. With tears in her eyes, she commended me for being so brave and strong. Based on her reaction, I could tell she had gone through something similar. From that point on, she would check in on me. I distinctly remember her coming to my room before one of our formal dances, asking me what I was wearing and if I would do a fashion show with my dress options. I felt like someone cared about me amidst a sea of people that didn't. We bonded over the fact that we felt like we didn't belong at Gamma and lamented about how mean some of the girls were. At the end of the year, we had become so close that we decided to go to the Kentucky Derby together on a whim. It was the absolute best time. I really felt like I had found my best friend.

6. Mary

February 2017

Second semester of my sophomore year, my mania died down and was replaced by a vast and all-consuming depression. I kept thinking how nice it would be if I just didn't exist at all. Sometimes I would try to stop breathing. My roommate, Mary, did her best to keep me afloat. We became close friends by nature of proximity and shared experiences. She was also going through a down period in her life. We stayed up late watching *The Office* and spent time commiserating over silly boys that did us the utmost wrong. Her support and physical presence are what provided light in my darkest of hours. Her love and acceptance helped me realize that I didn't deserve the way the other women in our sorority had treated me. She constantly encouraged me to see the brighter side of things. Soon enough, Meredith became our unofficial third roommate. The three of us became inseparable.

7. Betty

March 2017

Another girl in my grade, Betty, stuck by my side throughout our sophomore year. We weren't necessarily in each other's immediate group of friends, but she did reach out to me throughout our sophomore year to let me know that she was there for me and recognized that I was going through a difficult time. It was very kind of her to do so, and to offer support when I needed it the most. Having someone outside of my immediate circle of Meredith and Mary demonstrate empathy and understanding was very encouraging to me. Her friendship made me feel as if I was not stigmatized by my entire pledge class of women. She gave me faith and hope that there were still meaningful reasons and potential opportunities for friendships within Gamma.

8. Sacrificing for Gamma

April 2017

I was told during recruitment that I would get to live out of the sorority house my junior year. That is one of the things that attracted me to Gamma, and in official Panhellenic language this could be seen as some sort of promissory bid or promissory expectation, and the promise was not fulfilled. That, however, isn't important. What's important is that no one in my pledge class wanted to live with me, with three exceptions.

Meredith, Mary and I as a three-some decided to live in the house together. We did this because if we hadn't, the three live-outs of the main friend groups would have been split up. The way the system works for Gamma is that we have to fill all of the spots in the house before people are allowed to live in university-owned housing. Sophomores and seniors live in the chapter facility, and then juniors with the lowest house points get pulled in. The rest of the juniors live out of the sorority house.

If Meredith, Mary, and I hadn't volunteered to live in, each of the three live-outs would have lost one of their girls to low house points. Those girls would have been robbed of their opportunity to live out, and we would have to take their spots in the Gamma live-outs. We would rather be together in the house than live out separately, so we decided to bite the bullet and take one for the team. We never got a thank you from anyone, despite the fact that we enabled them to have all of the liberties, freedoms, and privacy that living out of the sorority house provides.

Our fourth roommate, Betty, got pulled in to live in the sorority house because she had the lowest house points in our pledge class. She asked Meredith, Mary, and I if we wanted to live with her in a quad. We said yes, and the Quad Squad, also known as sQUAD, came into being.

9. Agnes

October 2016 and April 2017

My struggles did not go unnoticed by our president, Agnes. At first, she was an ally, but then I quickly realized she wasn't on my side. The time came for us to pick our rooms for second semester of my sophomore year. Despite having the highest house points in my pledge class, I was 7th or 8th pick for room selection because it is in Gamma's by-laws that girls on our executive board, despite their house points, get priority over everyone else. This is true for parking spaces as well. I was extremely aggravated by the fact that no one bothered to tell me I would be 7th or 8th pick for room selection. I was yelling in Agnes's room about how upset I was and for that I am guilty. Regardless, after this incident Agnes was extremely rude to me and made it her mission to make me feel uncomfortable at the Gamma house. I would try to be nice and say hello to her and she would just straight up ignore me. She called me immature, rude, and disrespectful to my face as well as behind my back.

The troubles with Agnes continued. During second semester of my sophomore year, when Meredith, Mary, Betty and I were picking our room for junior year, Agnes tried to bully myself and my roommates into living in a quad in Gamma's chapter facility other than the one we wanted to live in. She stated that our living in the room she picked out for us would be best for the house, as upcoming seniors didn't have their living arrangements figured out and that the quad we wanted to live in should go to sophomores. We sat there in the President's closet with herself and Kit, the VP of Housing at the time. Agnes berated us about our room choice and continued to push back on our request to live there.

There truly was no issue with the room we picked out. I had higher house points than some seniors, so I earned the right to pick before them and choose whatever room my friends and I decided on and should not have been limited by the seniors' inability to make living arrangement plans. We were already doing the sorority a favor by volunteering to live in as juniors, so the idea that our room should be reserved for sophomores with lower house points than myself didn't make sense either. As soon as Agnes left the President's closet to discuss our choice with other upcoming seniors, Kit whispered to us that she was appalled by how Agnes treated us and was going to do everything she could to get us the room we wanted. Despite Agnes's blatant rudeness about the situation, failure to either recognize or acknowledge our good deed, and lack of abiding by the house point rules she so carefully followed in the past, I stood my ground. We ended up getting the room we wanted.

Prior to my first incident with Agnes, I had been ostracized and excluded by other members of our sorority. I was exhausted from being put to shame and from being virtually discarded and rejected by all of the friend groups within my pledge class. The consequences of exclusion are very clear, as "social exclusion is correlated with increased aggressive and antisocial behavior" (Abrams et al p. 29). This gives a good explanation for my reaction to when I discovered I was demoted in terms of rank for housing selection for second semester sophomore year. Normally, I wouldn't be upset about being further back on the list for picking a room.

Since my discovery of this information happened around the time all of the women in my pledge class excluded me for housing in the next academic year, I was already feeling the effects

of stigmatized exclusion. My temper became shorter, and even the smallest of inconveniences that I felt were caused by Gamma made me upset. There wasn't really a person I could pinpoint that caused the stigmatized exclusion, so when Agnes told me that I would be further down the line for room selection for second semester of my sophomore year, my pent-up feelings caused by the stigmatized exclusion found a target.

Studies find that aggression following ostracism, exclusion, or rejection... point to frustration, anger, hurt feelings, and other forms of negative affect that might lead individuals to lash out, either in retaliation, or in the form of displaced aggression toward neutral others (Abrams et al 54).

The situation with Agnes regarding the living arrangements for my second semester sophomore year was a textbook incidence of displaced aggression. Agnes had nothing to do with the women in my grade who had stigmatized and excluded me, but yet she was the recipient of my anger that was caused by them. I regret how I lashed out at her, as she certainly didn't deserve that type of treatment. It wasn't, however, as if my feelings were unjustified. It is a natural psychological reaction for someone who has been rejected and excluded to be upset. What wasn't justified, however, is that I released these feelings onto someone who was not associated with what had previously happened.

Agnes seemed to very agitated by my presence from that point onward, despite my numerous and sincere apologies. So much so, that she decided to contribute to the exclusionary practices the women in my pledge class were carrying out. Agnes refused to acknowledge my existence around the house and would talk about me behind my back. She called me immature and disrespectful to my face. I was extremely saddened and frustrated that I had somehow managed to turn one more person in the house against me.

When Agnes was confronted with dealing with me again later that semester, her true colors as a leader of Gamma really shone through. Our evolutionary nature causes us to “repay received help with help and received hurt with hurt” (de Waal 2009), which is exactly what Agnes did. She behaved in a way that was not very becoming of someone who was supposed to be leading the sorority. Due to our unfortunate interaction at the beginning of the semester, Agnes decided to try and wield her power as president against myself and my friends. The following analysis of leadership is important and relevant to this thesis because “leadership by definition is an activity involving groups, it is not a solitary activity and at its most basic leaders have to have followers” (Thomas and Rowland p. 99). Without myself, my friends, and other members, Agnes would not have any followers, and would therefore not be a leader. A discussion of the positive and negative consequences of groups necessitates an analysis of leadership within the group in question.

Research within economics and management has come to a consensus that grace and kindness have the potential to be desirable qualities in leaders of organizations. In this vein of research, grace is defined as “doing good to others and demonstrating kindness in a pragmatic environment requiring decision-making and judgement” (Thomas and Rowland p. 99). As made obvious by Agnes’ treatment of Meredith, Mary, Betty, and me, she was certainly lacking the quality of grace. She did not treat us with kindness while conducting her presidential duties, namely the room selection for our junior year. Instead, she actually went out of her way to attempt to sabotage our living arrangement. She cited bogus considerations for her reasoning, and completely discarded the rules and regulations she previously followed religiously with respect to how she treated my circumstances earlier in the year. Clearly, Agnes was not

consistent in how she interacted with different members of Gamma. She reserved preferential treatment for some individuals, but to others such as myself she was extremely hostile. The way she behaved completely depended upon how she felt about you on a personal level, which is not very professional. Personal sentiments should not influence how leaders treat their followers. Instead, they should act with arbitrary pragmatism in their judgement of situations regarding members of their organization.

10. The Medication Thief

May 2017

At the end of the year during finals time, someone went through my bag full of medication. My theory is that they were looking for Adderall. This is a “study drug” that many people take wrongfully in order to enhance their performance on exams. I’m not even prescribed this medication, but I’m not sure what else someone would be looking for in a medicine bag. Anyway, I always put my medicine bag in the same spot and have the meds in the same spot within the bag, so when it was all out of order and out of place, I knew someone had gone through it. My medications are vital to my health. If someone had taken any of my antidepressants or mood stabilizers that would have been a day I spent wallowing in my depression and oscillating between different emotions.

Economic theory can be used to describe social behavior, with some tweaking of course. People make choices in the context of constraints (time, money, health) in order to achieve their own highest levels of utility (happiness). The choices they make and activities they do determine how much utility (happiness) they achieve. Another important piece of economic theory that applies to social behavior is that people are assumed to be self-interested and rational beings. In the context of groups self-interested behavior is, as Mancur Olson puts it, quite common (Olson 126). An individual’s desire to join a group can take many forms. Where there is no economic incentive to join a group, a person’s desire for group membership is often “...motivated by a desire to win prestige, respect, friendship, and other social and psychological objectives” (Olson

60). In my experience with Gamma, I can speak personally to this. My desire to join the sorority can be described by all of the above. I think it's fair to say the promises of prestige, respect, and friendship are why a lot of women join sororities.

During recruitment, the period of time when sororities open their chapters to potential new members through a mutually selective process, sororities boast of their philanthropy, their sisterhood, their values, and the friendships formed as a result of membership in the group. Sororities play on social psychology and behavioral economics with their promises to provide an environment where prestige through house leadership positions are possible, respect for one another is commonplace, and friendship is a guaranteed outcome of group membership. Whether or not it provides these things is up to interpretation. In my situation, I would say Gamma allowed me to earn prestige through leadership positions. I wouldn't say I felt respected throughout my experiences, and friendship has been a questionable outcome of my membership in Gamma. I certainly did not expect, however, someone to insensitively rummage through my things as an outcome of group membership. I believe this to be a seminal point of the thesis thus far. A lot of the times, being a member of a group does not stack up to be what it is advertised to be. Things happen to you that you did not sign up for.

The assumption that individuals are rational and self-interested is worthy of further exploration within the context of Gamma. In the situations with other members of Gamma that have been presented thus far, this assumption is put to the test and in some circumstances disputed. Let's take the case of Agnes as an example from the previous chapter. When faced with our request to live in a specific room within the chapter facility, she behaved quite differently in comparison to when I questioned my rank for choosing a room my sophomore year. Agnes

contradicted herself through her inconsistency, sticking to the rules in one circumstance but completely disregarding them in another. This type of picking and choosing seems illogical and irrational. If someone is a stickler for the rules, one would expect he or she to abide by them at all times; this would be the rational course of action. Agnes, however, was not rational or logical when applying the rules and regulations of Gamma. Instead, she was illogical and inconsistent with the ways in which she decided to go about the house point system and the way rooms were picked by respective members.

11. The Quad Living Together

August-December 2017

In August of 2017, at the beginning of my junior year of college, Meredith, Mary, Betty and I all lived together in a four-person room in Gamma's chapter facility. Initially, I was worried Betty would feel like an outsider to the triad of Meredith, Mary, and myself. I knew what it felt like to be peripheral, or on the outskirts of a group, so I made a concerted effort to make her feel more comfortable around the three of us. After all, I was really the glue that held all of us together. Meredith and Mary weren't necessarily friends with Betty, but I was so. Naturally I tried to create cohesion amongst the four of us. Soon enough, I didn't have to try to do so anymore. Meredith and Mary seemed to be clicking with Betty independently, and I was so happy for this. By the end of September, Betty had already agreed to live with Meredith, Mary, and myself for our senior year. We had become a true group. We were not just roommates, but each other's biggest cheerleaders, advocates, and go-to girls.

For the first time in my college experience, I was truly happy. I finally achieved a deep-seated feeling of belonging. I no longer felt resentment towards Gamma, but instead gratitude. The unfortunate circumstances that led to the four of us living in the chapter facility our junior year had turned into the biggest blessing. It gave us each other. We spent countless hours on our couch and/or the floor watching *Friends*, goofing off, getting ready for social events, or procrastinating writing papers just because we wanted to be together instead. Other times we cried together about individual hardships, held in-depth discussions about our respective views on the world, and studied intensely for exams. Over the course of that semester, somewhere in

between the silliness and seriousness, a deep bond was forged. If you saw one of us, the other three were not far behind.

There are obvious reasons as to why this semester in particular was the happiest one throughout my college career. My need for community and to belong to something greater than myself had both been satisfied. According to Abrams, Hogg, and Marques, this need to belong is at the top of the list of human objectives:

“After primary needs such as food and shelter are satisfied, the need to belong is among the strongest of human motivations. People go to extraordinary lengths to affiliate with others, be liked by others, and belong to groups” (Abrams et al 28).

Since we lived and worked in egalitarian communities, our desire to belong is not only something we want but is something we need as human beings. It is evolutionarily ingrained in our psyche to want and to need to belong to a group. When this need is met through inclusion in a pre-existing group or the creation of a new group, individuals feel valued and cared for.

Philosophically speaking, belonging to a group impacts an individual’s moral views as “our moral tendencies evolved in direct interaction with others whom we could hear, see, touch, and smell, and whose situation we understood by taking part in it” (de Waal 198). Being a part of a group, therefore, does not only allow individuals to feel valued and cared for, but it plays a part in the formation of their morals as well. In my case, being a part of a social group with Meredith, Mary, and Betty made me feel valued and cared for, but also aided in further developing my moral outlook. Our conversations opened my eyes to different perspectives on a variety of issues. Being around them all of the time also caused me to take part in their hardships, which allowed me to learn a lot about what I valued as good and bad and how I viewed the world. I am sure

they would say the same about me, and their times spent having conversations with me and being around me.

12. Gwen, Agnes, and Kit

September 2017

At an exec meeting before chapter, the VP of Programming and Education, Gwen (the same Gwen I had trouble with my sophomore year) called me a psycho. President Agnes chimed in laughing and asked what I did this time. The VP of Housing, Kit, laughed and said something derogatory about me. I know all of this because Betty, as well as others, were also at the meeting. People normalize the word ‘psycho’ within my sorority (especially within my pledge class/grade), using it to refer to someone who is doing some crazy partying or something generally goofy and absurd when they’re drunk. When Gwen used the word, however, she meant it in a different way. She was making fun of me for my obvious mental health struggles. Others affirming her and her comment were doing the same thing. I find both uses of this word unacceptable, offensive, and personally hurtful. It’s not okay to poke fun at people who suffer. It’s not okay to take a word that describes someone who is afflicted by mental health problems and turn it into a fun party phrase to toss around casually.

Interestingly enough, gossip was the way in which the world languages we now know evolved. The earliest human beings, *Homo sapiens*, developed languages in order to communicate with each other about various things. The most important contributor to the development of languages within tribes, however, was discussion of other group members. Yuval Noah Harari describes this theory in *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. Why were

the earliest humans gossiping about each other? The answer is to foster social cooperation and group formation. Harari states, “Reliable information about who could be trusted meant that small bands could expand into larger bands, and Sapiens could develop tighter and more sophisticated types of cooperation” (Harari 24). Larger groups were necessary for the survival of *Homo sapiens*; it enabled smaller tribes to band together in order to hunt large herds of bison and lions. The logic that follows is that this type of hunting granted our ancestors access to large quantities of protein. Cooking these spoils over fire, or preserving them for the winter, gradually allowed our brains to enlarge and our intestines to shrink. Larger brain = smarter *Homo sapien*. Smaller intestines = less energy devoted to digesting food = more energy devoted to the functions and processes of a larger brain.

You may ask, how does this apply to Gwen, Agnes, and Kit teaming up and saying mean things about me? In my answer, I propose my own theory so bear with me. Other than these three women being just mean-spirited and trying to pick on someone, I think their gossiping must be an evolutionarily programmed trait. If gossip was the genesis of language, how could people in turn resist gossiping when speaking?

I would also like to propose that I am not unique, and that I am also guilty. That aside, I will admit to gossiping about others over the course of my time in high school and college. For obvious reasons, I am not the biggest fan of Gwen, Agnes, nor Kit and certainly said colorfully unflattering things about them to other members of Gamma. I am also positive that I was not the only one discussed during their Executive Board meetings. Gwen, Agnes, and Kit surely participated in gossiping about me and others outside of their meetings with different groups of individuals as well.

13. Agnes, again

November 2017

In the fall semester of 2017, President Agnes told my roommate Betty and I that we were responsible for finding our own roommates for spring semester of 2018 when Meredith and Mary would be abroad. She politely threatened us with the idea that if we didn't find roommates on our own, we would be moved from our current room to a smaller, double occupancy room... despite that we were upperclassmen living in. Again, none of this made sense within the frameworks of the house points system or Gamma's traditions. No one with more house points than myself was trying to live in our room, which would be the only scenario in which it would be fair and understandable for us to move rooms. I personally asked other girls if they would live with Betty and me in the spring semester, and all of them were unsure of their plans. I relayed this information to the person in charge of housing, Kit, who had also promised and confirmed with Betty and I that we would under no circumstances be moved to a double.

I found Agnes's treatment of Betty and I unacceptable because asking or forcing other people to live in the house was not our responsibility; this job was for the President and the VP of Housing. I felt burdened and threatened by this demand. Her passive aggressive threat also didn't make sense in the context of tradition; upperclassmen never move rooms when living in the chapter facility. A meeting was called with our chapter advisor, Agnes, Kit, myself, and Betty. The meeting went fine, as it revealed that there was a breakdown in communication between Agnes and Kit. Despite this, it does not change the fact that Agnes passively aggressively threatened us with a room downgrade unless we did her job for her.

The described situation above marked another challenging experience with Agnes. Of course, this again brings up the discussion of leadership within groups, whether or not the assumption that humans are rational and self-interested is based in reality, and member roles and expectations. Another topic that warrants investigation is trust; what role it plays in transactions and exchanges between group members, and how leadership works with or without it. Given that Betty and I had already experienced a negative interaction with Agnes, our trust level in her as a person and as a leader was low. Normally, “we assume other people will see the transaction from the same perspective as we do” (Ariely 175), but this scenario Betty and I knew that this wouldn’t be the case. We never expected that Agnes would see anything from our perspective, let alone a transaction regarding a rooming situation, which she had a terrible track record with handling. According to Ariely, “the brain cannot start from scratch at every new situation. It must build on what it has seen before” (p. 212). Naturally, Betty and I created a stereotype of Agnes based on our experiences with her. These negative experiences resulted in negative expectations of Agnes as a leader.

Since this was not an isolated incident involving Agnes and the way in which she treated myself and other group members, an investigation into her leadership style is necessary. I believe Agnes was a destructive leader, and within that category of leadership she was of the bully type. Harvey and his colleagues describe such behavior in the following way:

Bullying is considered to be a destructive process consisting of a succession of hostile statements and/or actions which, if taken in isolation, may seem harmless, but whose constant repetition has pernicious effects” (Harvey et al p. 119).

Agnes's actions certainly qualify as bullying behavior. She had previously and persistently made hostile overtures towards me in the context of our relationship and living arrangements within the chapter facility in the prior year, and then continued to do so into the next year.

The way in which Agnes attempted to pin her responsibilities on Betty and me is also consistent with the ways in which bullies in leadership positions treat their subordinates. Agnes held herself in such high esteem that she deemed some of her assigned responsibilities to be beneath her. She felt entitled by her role, so she would take power trips at the expense of other members. This common characteristic of bullies is known as destructive narcissism, which can take the form of "... an inflated sense of self-importance, arrogance, and a sense of entitlement" (Harvey et al p. 122). Agnes certainly conducted herself in ways consistent with this definition of destructive narcissism. She was very conceited and smug when she presented the idea that Betty and I would be moved to a smaller room. I am sure doing so gave her a sense of satisfaction. Agnes also seemed to believe that she was superior to the rules and traditions of Gamma in this circumstance, which can be traced back to her notion of self-importance.

When Betty and I were called to the meeting, we were extremely scared of what was going to happen to us and our room at Agnes's discretion. As victims of bullying, common behaviors are "fear, anxiety, and levels of dissatisfaction with the organization that directly reduce performance level and effectiveness" (Harvey et al p. 119). By using intimidation and threats as means of assertion of her leadership and superiority, Agnes was putting our membership at risk. Victimized Betty and I led to our shared feelings of apprehension and uneasiness. In my case, it certainly contributed to my already existing dissatisfaction with Gamma. It discouraged me from performing my own duties in my role within the organization. I

asked myself, why would I contribute in a meaningful way if the very person in charge was going to bully me into a room downgrade? Unfortunately, we weren't the only ones affected by Agnes's actions.

When someone in a leadership role makes use of bullying tactics, there are ripple effects throughout the organization. Betty and I were the victims of Agnes's bullying in this scenario, but the results of her actions were felt by others beyond Betty and me. According to Harvey and his colleagues:

Beyond the direct participants in the bullying process, a variety of secondary effects can affect the organization's culture and thereby create negative consequences for individuals not directly involved in the bullying act (Harvey et al p. 120).

Agnes's bullying behavior established cultural norms within the sorority that justified and normalized bullying behavior for other leaders moving forward. In the following year, many of the women on the executive board in Gamma made use of bullying tactics to enforce rules and assert their superiority over other members. The cultural shift catalyzed by Agnes from cooperative and altruistic leadership to selfish and entitled leadership has impacted other a number of members very negatively.

14. The Quad Living Together Again

August 2018

Meredith, Mary, Betty, and I were so excited to begin senior year together. We were living in the same room as we did our junior year, and the Quad Squad was all back together again after a long semester and summer apart. Things were going swimmingly, except there was a small divergence in our dynamics. Meredith and Mary were busy with soccer, so we weren't able to hang out as much the four of us. Naturally, Meredith and Mary spent more time together and Betty and I spent more time together.

Usually, it would just be Betty and me in our room. We constantly goofed off together. Even when I would try to go take a nap, Betty would message me and say "come play with me!". We were really never apart. The same went for Meredith and Mary with soccer. They were always at practice together, or traveling to games together. Unfortunately, since we weren't spending as much time together as a foursome, we started to drift apart into our respective duos. None of us were doing this intentionally, but rather it was just a result of time and circumstance. I was a little disappointed that Meredith and I didn't seem as close as we used to be. Out of the three women, she was the one I thought understood me the most. At that point in the year, however, she was not usually in the greatest of moods and didn't seem interested in talking to me about what was bothering her.

15. Insomnia

August to September 2018

A big part of my mental health condition is insomnia. I had trouble sleeping at Gamma my sophomore year, and the same issues began to proliferate my senior year. I spent most of my nights wide awake; for some reason I just couldn't fall asleep. I was prescribed two sleeping medications. One of them was addictive, and was for worst case scenario only, so I didn't want to take it on a regular basis. The other medication was not effective. I felt like I had energy all of the time, and was struggling to be myself again. I was in a constant 'elevated' state. Being around so many people all of the time was a huge challenge. I think having constant interaction with other people and no personal space really fed into my mania.

16. Meredith and the fight

September 2018

Over the course of the month of September, Meredith and I drifted apart. There was palpable tension between us. She always seemed to be in a bad mood because of an injury she had which was affecting her senior year soccer season, and she frequently took out these issues on me. I would try to ask her how she was and how soccer was going, but all I received were short, snappy responses. One time, I had texted her asking how her away game was. She never responded, but I noticed she was texting other people around me when I was out at a bar, mostly a boy she was talking to at the time named Andrew. This was super upsetting to me. I didn't understand why she had the time and the energy to talk to him, but not to me. I confronted her about it when she got home that night, and she yelled at me for asking about the game and stated that I didn't get to ask or say anything to her regarding soccer anymore. As soon as she left the room I broke down into tears. It was so hurtful for her to ignore me, then berate me.

Unfortunately, our problems would not stop there.

At the beginning of senior year, I started dating one of my best guy friends, Tim. We had been friends since freshman year, and things sort of just fell into place perfectly. I had him over to Gamma quite frequently because he was also friends with Meredith, Mary, and Betty. He would spend the night often because I was able to sleep when he was with me. I would always ask Meredith, Mary, and Betty if this was okay. None of them ever objected, until one day Meredith pulled me aside to have a conversation.

She described that Tim had come over too much, and that when she got back from soccer, she just wanted it to be the four of us girls. She said she missed spending time with just me,

Mary, and Betty at night. Meredith also described how she was looking forward to senior year with me, and that she felt like I was spending too much time with Tim... acting like a girlfriend instead of a 'girl's girl'. I took this conversation to heart and started to change by behavior. I felt terrible that I had overstepped the boundaries of our quad and that I had upset Meredith in doing so. I began to spend my nights at Tim's place of residence instead of having him over at Gamma.

The weekend following our conversation about Tim, some unfortunate things happened between Meredith and me. It was the first weekend Meredith and Mary could go out (soccer limited their schedules), so we were all super excited. We hadn't hung out the four of us in a long time. So, we all got ready together and before we left, Meredith proclaimed that "this was a night for the quad".

We made our way to Warne, where a lot of Meredith and Mary's soccer guy friends lived. A boy that I used to be romantically involved with, Joe, also lived there. Things did not end well between us and I was nervous to see him. Betty and I were going mostly because Meredith and Mary wanted to. As soon as I got there, Joe threw a temper tantrum about my being in his space and proceeded to make a scene. I tried to ignore it to the best of my ability, but the damage was done. Meredith didn't seem to notice or care because as soon as we got to the party, she left us to talk to Andrew. I was so uncomfortable and sad that I had to go to the bathroom to cry. Thankfully, Betty realized how upset I was and suggested we go see Tim. Mary also recognized the tension, and suggested I do the same. She said she would stay with Meredith, so the four of us used the buddy system well.

I was so upset the next day that I couldn't stand to be around Meredith. I felt like she was being hypocritical by abandoning us girls for a boy that night. That Monday, I wrote her a letter.

I called her out for being a hypocrite, among other things. She had been complaining so much about soccer lately and was taking out her issues on me. I was the scapegoat for all of her bad moods, her emotional punching bag so to speak. It was a tough letter to write and read I'm sure. I was definitely too harsh, and she didn't take it very well.

17. Moving

September/October 2018

The tension between Meredith and I only got worse. The first night after she read the letter, she didn't even sleep at Gamma. I didn't expect my letter to hurt her as much as it did. I started to feel guilty and being in our room made me sad. We barely acknowledged each other. In order to give Meredith space, I began spending more and more of my time at Tim's place of residence. I felt horrible for hurting Meredith, and I didn't want her to spend any more of her nights not at Gamma. So, I was the one that accommodated her. I was the one that left the room whenever she came around. I was the one that sacrificed, not her. Looking back on it now, it's so strange that her problems suddenly became my fault. I was the bad guy for writing the letter and hurting her feelings. I put in a lot of effort to make things right with Meredith. I wrote her apology letters, I apologized to her over text many times, and tried to set up a time for us to have a face to face conversation. She bailed on me each time I tried to talk to her. Nothing seemed to resolve the damage I had caused.

My mania soon became all-consuming. I couldn't sleep at night, period. It got to the point where I decided to move out of Gamma. I thought that being around so many girls all of the time was contributing to my mania and my inability to sleep. All of my bad experiences at Gamma came crashing down on me. The weight was unbearable. I just wanted to reject it all and no longer be there. When I broke the news to Meredith and Mary, both of them wanted me to do what was right for me and endorsed it as a good idea. Betty, however, was not convinced. She began to sob uncontrollably, which was stunning to see because she never cries. She left the room because she was so upset. It was truly heartbreaking to watch. She kept saying that I should

be around my friends at such a difficult time. Despite her cries, I didn't yield. The decision had been made; I felt like I needed to get out of there.

18. Care Squad Breakfast and Group Chat

September and October 2018

Meredith, Mary, and Betty got breakfast with my parents the Sunday of family weekend in September of 2018. I was not invited and was not aware. My parents got breakfast with me after their meeting and described how the girls shared information about me with them. They were concerned, which is understandable. I was, however, bothered that both parties would go behind my back in order to discuss me, my mental health problems, and my behavior. My parents left that day, worried about me, which is understandable. In October of 2018, the Care Squad group chat was formed. Meredith, Mary, and Betty formed a group chat with my parents. I was completely unaware of this as well.

It was strange to me finding all of this out in retrospect because none of them tried to reach out to me first. Neither Meredith, Mary, nor Betty really talked to me once I had moved out. I tried to reach out to them, and one time I even went over to hang out in our quad. When I did, they seemed apprehensive of my being there and were very surface level with me.

19. Intervention

October 2018

At the end of October, I experienced a full-blown manic episode of which I have little recollection. I briefly remember calling Ashley, my best friend from high school. Other than that, the rest of the day was quite a blur. I engaged in some pretty erratic behavior, which I found out after the fact. I did things, said things, and sent things, which now knowing about them, I regret. What I do remember, however, is Meredith, Mary, and Betty reaching out to me asking if they could come over to my new room. I was thrilled, as I thought this signified they were finally coming around. At this time, however, they were staging an intervention. They had been contacted by multiple people that day about me, including my friends from home. Everyone was worried about me. Meredith, Mary, and Betty wanted to take me to a medical stress center to check if my medications were working properly. I obliged. They had also called my parents, and my mom was on her way down to pick me up.

20. Time At Home

November, December 2018 and January 2019

I spent the rest of the fall semester of my senior year at home in Michigan with my parents. This was a difficult and trying time. Via the “Care Squad”, my parents found out things about me that I would not have told them myself and wished they had not have discovered. They berated me many evenings about my choices, and how I could be so careless to let myself get to the low point I reached prior to being picked up from school.

For a while, I was angry at Meredith, Mary, and Betty for doing what they did. To me, it didn't seem like it was out of care or support, but rather that they just wanted to get me off of their hands and out of their lives. I think this feeling was fed by the images they posted of the three of them on social media. It was always about just the three of them, living their lives to the fullest, as if nothing terrible had ever happened to me. They seemed happy without me, and it hurt to think that was true. These feelings were also confirmed by the fact that they didn't really respond to me when I reached out. Mary would say things like ‘we’ll discuss this when you’re better’ or ‘it’s too painful to see you this way’. Betty seemed concerned about me getting better, but said she needed space. Meredith would just not respond. These three different forms of rejection from my best friends, who I had been through so much with, saddened and infuriated me.

21. Visit

November 2018

At the end of November, I traveled down to school to give a presentation in one of the classes I was still in and worked on remotely. It went well. Afterwards, I had a meeting with university officials and another student about our concerns regarding the discourse or lack thereof surrounding mental illness on campus. After the meeting, I went to Gamma to drop off candy canes and give Meredith, Mary, and Betty their Christmas gifts. I gave Mary a sweater and a rosary; I gave Betty a fish because she had one last year but it had since passed; last but not least I gave Meredith her favorite painting of mine, which was hard for me to part with.

I told them what time I would be at Gamma, and none of them responded to me. When I arrived at our room, the lights were out and no one was in there. They were clearly avoiding seeing me. I began to cry uncontrollably, wondering what I had done to deserve being treated like this. I didn't understand... if they cared so much to intervene in my darkest hour, why wouldn't they follow-up? Why wouldn't they want to see me?

Within a moral and psychological framework, Sebastian Junger addresses situations such as this in his book *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging*. He describes that “the most dangerous cost to modern society is the loss of community” (Junger 109). Our ancestors lived in tightly-knit groups, which Junger refers to as tribes. The structure of our society today is unfortunately not conducive to the formation of tribes and the bonds that hold them together. Human survival no longer depends on mutual cooperation as it did when we lived in egalitarian communities; we are

now able to succeed virtually on our own. When we do join groups that serve as quasi-tribes, such as sororities, we are able to experience a level of support otherwise unknown to us.

We can also experience a certain degree of isolation if we are unable to join quasi-tribes or are excommunicated from them. As Junger says, “the ultimate betrayal of tribe isn’t acting competitively-- that should be encouraged-- but predicating your power on the excommunication of others from the group” (Junger 128). I experienced excommunication from my friend group by the ways in which they ignored and avoided me. When I went into our room that day in late November, all of the paintings I left behind for Meredith, Mary, and Betty to enjoy were taken down and discarded in my closet; hidden away from the world. My decorations were replaced by fraternity memorabilia Meredith and Betty had stolen on their escapades.

They hung up three stockings, with each of their initials on them, in lieu of the ones I bought the four of us last Christmas. I looked around the room, and began to cry. They visibly attempted to erase every trace of me. The pictures they had of me were gone and replaced by photos with others. The only things left in the room that was mine were the presents I just placed on their desks, the fridge, and the couch. The girls obviously didn’t rid themselves of the fridge and the couch because they served a purpose for them.

I still to this day don’t understand why they essentially removed me from campus and failed to follow up with me. Junger says that this type of treatment is detrimental to an individual in the context of war veterans returning home from war, as “you could be a mildly traumatized... and experience long-term PTSD simply because of a lack of social support back home” (Junger 95). I considered those girls to be my best friends, the women who would be my bridesmaids, the sisters I could always count on. I had never felt so alone, so rejected, so downtrodden. Although,

“there are obvious stresses on a person in a group, but there may even be greater stresses on a person in isolation” (Junger 93). I was severely isolated. I sat by myself in the room for a time, thinking back on all of the happy memories I shared with them in that space, and realizing that I would never be a part of their group again.

22. The Return

January 2019

At the end of January, I made my return to campus. This semester, I am living in university owned apartment-style housing with four fellow members of Gamma that are a year younger than me, a member of Iota, as well as other girls that are not affiliated with any Greek chapter. So far, the living situation has worked out well and it is nice to have people to be around. I am able to enjoy my personal space in my room as well, which I have all to myself. Part of me wonders how much of this living situation was my decision though. I asked Mary back in the fall if she, Meredith, and Betty would want to live with me again. She stated that it would have to be a conversation for when I was “better”. It never got readdressed. So here I am, alone in my room, while Meredith, Mary, and Betty enjoy being together at the Gamma chapter facility in the room that I earned with my house points. Sitting on my couch, using my mini fridge, enjoying what I earned for us while I am alone.

It has been a difficult transition back in regard to Gamma. We had formal recruitment as soon as I arrived, so all the hustle and bustle of acquiring new members really hit hard. I didn't get the feeling that people were overwhelmingly excited to see me, which was disappointing. When girls from my pledge class first saw me, they hugged me and said how excited they were to have me back, but none of them really asked how I was doing or how my time at home was.

What was even worse, however, was the way in which Meredith, Mary, and Betty interacted with me. Meredith and Betty completely ignored me when I arrived at Gamma for recruitment. I didn't know what to do. They kept taking pictures the three of them, not thinking about me or wanting to include me. Thankfully, Mary was kind enough to say hello and ask how

I was doing. This doesn't take away from the fact, however, that I still remained completely excluded from their group.

Being excluded from my original group of the four of us has been extremely difficult and disheartening. My pledge class is extremely cliquy; I have friends in other groups within my pledge class, but I am not as close to them as I was to Meredith, Mary, or Betty. The other girls I am friends with would never place me in their friend groups. It breaks my heart that people didn't want to live with me my junior year because of my mental health issues, and it breaks my heart even more to know that Meredith, Mary, and Betty feel the same way. Their rejection of me makes me feel like an unlovable monster, someone that is not worthy of the company of anyone else. Someone who is forced to be isolated, and in the same sense, institutionalized. I contemplate, am I normal? What do I deserve? Do I have friends? Do people even care about me? Are my former friends truly better off without me? I've never felt more alone.

Concluding Remarks

April 2019

Using psychological, philosophical, and economic research perspectives to analyze my experiences with social groups and organizations, namely the sorority Gamma, has allowed me to better understand how certain situations have either positively or negatively impacted me throughout my time in college. Groups are very powerful; they have the potential to be uplifting and supportive. When an individual is excluded from a group, or put on the peripheral outskirts of a group, groups have the potential to be hurtful and psychologically damaging to the individual. The culture of groups and organizations are largely determined by leaders: the ways in which they interact with other members, how they conduct meetings, and how they manage conflict between other group members. Some themes throughout this paper are exclusion, inclusion, leadership dynamics, and mental health. Isolation, and resulting depression, has been a clear outcome in my time as a member of Gamma as well as groups within Gamma. My highest hope is that my experiences were out of the ordinary, and that others do not endure something similar.

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