

A DIFFERENT KIND OF NUNNERY¹

Cecilia M. B. Sardenberg
Deborah J. Donnellan

One cannot compare the peaceful and quiet atmosphere of a convent to the everlasting 'slumber party' air of a sorority house, nor can one claim any similarities between the neatness and drabness of religious houses, with the constant 'Spring cleaning' look of certain sorority houses. Obviously, comparisons of the values held and behavior manifested by nuns and sorority 'sisters' are also unjustified. However, both of these types of organizations share common characteristics in function, structure, and operation, as well as in the recruitment and training of their members. Likewise, they manifest those 'encompassing tendencies' which give them the character of 'total institutions.' While these encompassing tendencies in convents and religious orders have been demonstrated by Goffman (1961), sororities have yet to be examined as such.

Although never in a convent as nuns, the authors spent many years in convent schools, and are familiar with many of the characteristics of convent life. For five months, one of us (Sardenberg) was a house-mother in a sorority house,² which gave us the opportunity to learn much about the internal dynamics of social sororities. In this article, we will attempt to demonstrate that sororities, like convents, which are voluntary total institutions, thriving on a high degree of self-regulatory changes in the thoughts, manners and attitudes of their members, depend for their success and perpetuation, on the maintenance of a family structure. Unlike other total institutions, sororities do not separate the individual

¹ This paper was published as a chapter, under the same title, in the book *Exploring Total Institutions*, edited by Robert Gordon and Brett Williams, Champaign, Illinois: Stipes, 1977:111-125. The study upon which it is based was conducted in the Spring of 1976, while the authors were undergraduate students in the Department of Anthropology, at Illinois State University (ISU), Normal, Illinois. We would like to thank our teachers, members of the ISU faculty body, particularly Drs. Edward Jelks, Robert Dirks, Martin Nickels, and Brett Williams, who guided us in our studies there, providing an excellent academic environment for our learning. We would also like to give special thanks to the members of the sorority house where the study was conducted, who were not only the subjects of our observations, but also friends.

² For the purposes of this analysis, the sorority of our study will be called 'Eata Bit a Pie'. We shall avoid any data which could immediately give its identity, unless deemed essential to our discussion.

from the intercourse with the outside by locked doors, or the walls of a 'cloister'. They do so by a process of self and peer regulation, peer pressure, and almost constant demand by the organization for the time of its members.

Social sororities are organizations where 'nice young ladies' are fed, housed, and protected during their college years, while being directed in their mental, social and moral development.³ Nunneries also feed and house females, and provide them with training of the development of moral standards, such as humility, chastity, obedience and self-mortification, in order to prepare them to become the 'brides of Christ.' Contrastingly, sororities prepare females to become 'brides-at-large', successful wives and mothers, married to husbands chosen according to the ideal type proposed by the sorority. Like a convent, therefore, a sorority provides its members with an appropriate setting for the development of the qualities which will best ensure the fulfillment of its functions.

Since a sorority purports to enhance the status of its members, the sorority house itself must have the appearance of affluence. The house should be large, well kept, in a nice neighborhood, close to campus and to fraternity houses, in order to offer its members ready access to prospective grooms. However, it should not be located too close to other sorority houses, to avoid unnecessary competition and to maintain its identity.

As in convents, each room in a sorority house has a specific function, and specific regulations for its use. Since social functions are very important to the life of the institution, the house must have a large room for parties, as well as dignified living-room for solemn occasions such as the performance of rituals, and the entertainment of special guests. Certain props are also necessary, such as a rich polished silver tea-set, punch bowl and silver trays and accompanying silver candelabra;⁴ if possible, the house should also have a fireplace and a piano. The decoration of the house should follow that of a 'nice family home', for a sorority aims at being 'a home away from home.' The house must also maintain an air of

³ Among its officers, a sorority house will often include vice-presidents for moral, mental and social advancement.

⁴ It is common for the National Chapter of a particular sorority to bestow these silver props on a local chapter when it is first formed.

dignity, therefore it is necessary to have a live-in housemother who acts as the chapter chaperone.⁵

COMMUNITY AND PRIVACY

Lack of privacy is one of the main characteristics both of convents and sororities. In the sorority house in which our study was conducted, the 36 inmates slept in bunk-beds in three 'dormers', each housing 12 individuals. Each dormer consisted of a barracks-like sleeping room, a common dressing-room, a single study-room and one bathroom. This latter reinforced the rule that all activities must be public: there were three showers closed off with flimsy curtains, and the toilet stalls were enclosed only by semi-walls and half-doors which did not lock. Although some residents did not seem to mind these arrangements, and would talk and gossip while attending to their physiological necessities, others would often complain that "I can't even be alone in the bathroom!" Indeed, there was not one single room in the house where one could be truly alone, except in the housemother's quarters, which were, for the most part, off-limits to the other members of the house. Even the privacy of one's bed was not sacrosanct; it was common practice to put flour and water, and on one occasion, a beef liver (although wrapped in plastic) on the beds.⁶

While a convent relies on silence as a means of ensuring community, a sorority house is almost always extremely noisy. The constant comings-and-goings of the house members, the almost perpetually ringing telephone, the sounds of the record player, piano, flushing toilets and the chattering of typewriters were a constant reminder of the fact that this was a community, rather than a private,

⁵ Although the housemother need not be an alumna of the organization, nor meet the model idealized for the 'inmates', she must comply with certain regulations, as her reputation may also reflect on the reputation of the house. A sample of the rules of conduct to be followed by the housemother and appearing on the 'Housemother's Manual', are: attend Mothers' Club meetings if and when invited; advise girls in matters of social courtesy; act as hostess at parties, dinners, teas, and so forth, held at the chapter house and to entertain any guests that may arrive during the absence of chapter members; advise girls in health matters when necessary and be present during call of a physician; assure at all times the maintenance of a proper air of dignity in the chapter house.

⁶ Most residents preferred the top bunk beds, in the upper corner of the room, where the two-by-four space became a private world. These bed spaces are drawn by lot because they are so desirable!

lifestyle. Even though house policies required '24 hour silence' in the dormers, one was still assured of being awakened during the night by the 'bumping in the dark' arrival of a late-nighter or the alarm clock of an early riser. Even if all members were home and tucked quietly in bed, silence was never assured for long: late night panty-raids, kidnappings and TP-ing (draping toilet paper over every available surface) and other incursions inflicted by other 'Greek' houses were in the offing. After the pandemonium caused by these interruptions, it would be another two hours before spirits quieted again, and one could return to the dream left off.⁷

To assure equality within a religious community, a nun is dispossessed of her 'identity kit' (Goffman, 1961:2), and clothing. A sorority sister brings her kit and clothing into the community, but her personal belongings must be shared with her sisters. Although a scarf may have come into the community as 'Sally's' possession, it may be seen around Jane's neck on Monday, Patty's on Tuesday, and so on, until it has been around so many necks that it has become communally owned. Since Patty and Jane usually have little sense of possession,⁸ the house soon becomes draped with these items. As soon as a large enough stock of these 'possessions' has accumulated, the house manager (responsible for the upkeep of the house) auctions them off at a community gathering. If the former owner recognizes a particular article, she is obliged to buy it back. Quite often, one's underwear is waved in front of the entire community, as one embarrassedly claims ownership. The privacy of one's body is thus violated, as the particular size and state of wear of the garment on display is broadcast, accompanied by non-flattering general comments.

⁷ Here is a typical example: Late at night, one young man from a neighboring fraternity knocks at the house door. When the door is opened to the apparently solitary male, a large group of other students from this fraternity push in behind him and kidnap some of the girls (in one instance someone even tried to carry off one of the authors). The purpose is often to the girls to bake cookies for them. After a few hours, the girls are returned "unharmd", so to speak. Those who were not kidnapped (but who were certainly awakened by the commotion caused by the screams of their sisters), watch as their comrades are carried out and pour water on the heads of their departing kidnapers.

⁸ The absence of a sense of possession is also manifested when members sleep on the beds of absent fellow sisters. In one instance, the housemother (one of the authors) became highly 'annoyed' when in an overnight stay away from the house a visiting alumna slept on her bed, used her soap, dried herself with the housemother's towel, and dirtied her ashtrays without the owner's previous knowledge and consent.

IDENTITY

As in convents and other total institutions, sorority members are also stripped of their individual identities. When an individual joins a sorority, she steps into a prefabricated identity, which varies by sorority. As one can speak of Dominican nuns as being more liberal, or Ursulines as more rigid, one may also speak of “DZ’s” as good sportswomen (or jocks), or ‘Tri-Delta’s’ as proper and prim, the stereotypical ‘Suzy Sorority’. This reputation is self-preserving and self-perpetuating since a sorority will select members with attitudes which reproduce that image.

Both in convents and sororities, the prefabricated identity is reinforced by the use of symbols and props. In religious orders, the cross is the principal symbol, along with the habit and veil characteristic of their particular affiliation. Sometimes nuns may wear a wedding band symbolizing their marriage to Christ. This habit or uniform when worn immediately identifies the nun with her particular religious order. Similarly, each sorority has a symbol of its organization, along with the Greek letters of its order, which operate in the same manner as do the nun’s accoutrements. Thus, for instance, the symbol of a sorority may be an arrow or a heart with the Greek letters inscribed on it. This symbol many times hands outside the house, and it is worn on rings, pins, pendants, earring, jackets, t-shirts, key chains and other paraphernalia. In wearing this symbol the individual wears the reputation and identity of the house. Sororities also have specific organizational colors, which are worn by members and glorified in songs. One of the songs of the sorority we studies demonstrates this:⁹

“The wine and silver-blue
Were made just for you,
As symbols of ideals
Of Eata Bita Pi...”

According to the study by Good and Good (1974), those who manifest the desire to join a sorority and those that are members in it share the same values and attitudes. It may be inferred that the desire to join a particular sorority also

⁹ There are two basic types of songs: the sacred and the profane. The words to some of the songs are ‘traditional’, but each new group must make up its own song. The tunes are usually traditional airs, ranging from Russian folk tunes to Army marching tunes.

implies the desire to acquire the institution's prefabricated identity and reputation. Thus, one may say for both convents and sororities that "conversion seems already to have taken place, and it only remains to show the neophyte along what lines he can best discipline himself" (Goffman, 1961:118).

Formal admission and training of volunteers in sororities have striking parallels to the admission and disciplining of volunteers in religious orders. After sororities, like convents, have selected the candidates who most closely meet their institutionalized personality-type requirements, the 'rushees', like postulants in convents, formally pledge the organization in a rite of passage similar to that of entering nuns (Hulme, 1956). They must wear white dresses and hold a candle, while pledging allegiance to the institution and to its ideals and goals. After this ritual is performed, 'rushees' become 'pledges' to the sorority, like novices in a convent, who must then experience a training period.¹⁰

Each pledge is assigned a "Mom", an active member who is to guide her during the training period. This is for life, or for as long as she is a member of the sorority. A new kinship system is thus established, where mothers, grandmothers, and even great-grandmothers are recognized. These kinship relationships can be traced back to the founding of the sorority, the original members of the sorority being called "Founding mothers". There is also a 'pledge trainer', who, like a Mistress of Novices, is in charge of teaching the pledges about the goals, tradition, and rituals of the institution, as well as informing them about house rules and regulations, special privileges and penalties for infractions of the rules, thus cueing them on what Goffman (1961:53) calls "institutional lingo."¹¹

¹⁰ The first stage in the initiation of a new member is formal rush, or during 'Rush week'. This involves the selection of possible members by the active members and selection of the sorority by the prospective members. After the 'undesirables' have been selected against, a period of pledging begins. This is a training period. During this period, the rules and regulations, goals and ideals of the sorority must be learned. During this period, the pledges may not live in the house. However, a great deal of their time is spent in the house. At the beginning of what is called "hell week", when the pledges will be tested with tests and pranks, they move into the house. After this week, they are initiated and become active members, 'actives'.

¹¹ Some of these house rules and regulations are transcribed here from a pamphlet given to house members upon moving into the house: 1) The formal living room is off-limits to eating, drinking, and smoking at all times. A demerit will be issued for disobeying this rule; 2) It is the duty of every member to come to chapter meetings on Monday nights at 7pm. After missing a meeting, excused or unexcused, you are to read the minutes of the meeting by Thursday; a \$50.00 fine will be given to any member not abiding by this; 3) We are on a very tight food budget so it is important that you eat only what is allotted per girl, 2 glasses of milk per day and 4 slices of bread. 'Free food' is popcorn, crackers, peanut butter, coffee, tea, kool-aid and tang. Two demerits will be given for eating house food. 4) The demerit system is

For pledges and well as novices, mere compliance with formal rules is not enough. All conflicting attitudes, orientations and allegiances must be relinquished totally. Pledges are always being tested by all the active members of the sorority, who must make the final decision on their acceptance into the organization. If they receive too many 'demerits', or transgress any cardinal rule, they will be formally de-pledged.¹²

During the training period, there is an institutionalized ritual of rebellion which is not part of convent training. At this time, the pledges come into the house, turn up all the waste-baskets, spread towels and clothing around, and 'kidnap' some actives, whom they take on a runaway trip, usually to another chapter house at another university. There, they reverse roles with these actives. The sorority house is desecrated by the general mess left behind. However, once they are back from their trip, the pledges must again become inmates and are viewed as children again.

The final act of obedience with which the pledges must comply takes place during the 'inspiration week', more commonly known as 'hell week'. During this week, which takes place at the beginning of the school semester and starts on the first night the pledges actually move into the house, the pledges are given a formal invitation to their initiation, during a ritualized ceremony. They are instructed on the special rules for the week: they will be confined to one room of the house, where they must spend all their time, and can only leave with special permission; they must even ask permission to go to the bathroom. They must all eat at one table, and may not leave the house, except to go to classes. There are numerous ceremonies and meetings during the week. Every night, the pledges are informed of their daily transgressions and given demerits. They must all tell about a good deed they did during the day, and if the good deed is acceptable to the community, pledges will then receive token prizes. Pledges are constantly accosted and asked: "Do you have your pledge pin on?", which like in Goffman's descriptions, includes

set up also as a penalty for disobeying house rules. When you accumulate 8 demerits you will be given double duty on a house job. If you do not do your double duty a fine of \$5.00 will apply.

¹² Demerits usually pertain to violations of house rules, however, during 'hell week' they may also be given for faults in appearance and manner. Any violation in form of address, standards of dress and deportment are subjects to demerits. Rude language, loss of the 'pledge book', and other violations are written in the pledge book and signed up by the active giving the demerit. Offenses varied in terms of the demerits they receive, for example: 'indecent exposure' receives 2 demerits, 'swearing' also 2 demerits, while 'not calling an active honorable active' will cost the pledge 30 demerits.

“simultaneous searching by the staff which physically discloses the facts, making these verbal questions superfluous” (1961:45).

“Hell week” may also be viewed as the climax of the pledges’ indoctrination, as they must go through several song practices, as well as pass an oral test on the history and constitution of the institution, which is given in front of the entire community. Like novice nuns, a pledge must also “engage in activity whose symbolic implications are incompatible with his conception of self (Goffman, 191:123), like eating pudding with the hands tied back, serenading fraternity houses, wearing special clothing, begging actives to do her special favors, begging permission to smoke or go to the bathroom, and other similarly humiliating acts. Pledges must also cook every night and do all of the housework.¹³

These rules and self-mortifying acts all have parallels in convent initiations (Hume, 1956), including the ‘silence rule’. At one point during the week, a “no talking between actives and pledges” rule comes into effect. Sometimes this rule is extended to cover even conversation with other non-sorority friends, strangers, store clerks, etc., and pledges may only speak to each other. This effectively isolates the pledges from the outside world, and reinforces the sense of community and fosters a sense of dependence upon the new ‘family.’

At the end of the week, pledges take their ‘final vows’ in a ceremonial ritual, and are thus initiated into full participatory status in the sorority, and from thereon are known as ‘active members.’ A study by Jacobs and Galvin (1974) reveals that members of social sororities (and fraternities) can be differentiated from non-members in personality, voting practices, and attitudes towards several social groups. Although, as demonstrated by Good and Good (1974), these characteristics are already present in the individuals before the pledge-training period, training and subsequent communal living accomplish the goal of molding these characteristics along the lines of the particular sorority’s ideal type.

Most individuals in a sorority house arrive at full “conversion”, while a lesser number reach “colonization” (Goffman, 1961:62-63); a very small minority

¹³ During hell week, the normal situation of non-separation of ‘inmate’ and ‘staff’ is reversed. The actives must be addressed by formal titles, they are permitted and encouraged to harass the pledges, invade what little privacy the house affords, and degrade the persona of the pledges.

remains at the 'intransigent line' (Goffman, 1961:62).¹⁴ The latter, obviously, are the ones most likely of 'messing up' (Goffman, 1961:53). Within the context of sororities, 'messing up' means either endangering the reputation of the organization, or for one reason or another, failing to participate fully in the activities of the institution, thus threatening the image of the institution and the fulfillment of its functions. However, like convents, sororities have institutionalized means in the form of rituals, to cope with these threats, as we shall see in the next sections of this paper.

CANDLELIGHTING

In joining a sorority, the individual acquires the sorority's pre-fabricated reputation. But this reputation is constantly in jeopardy. If we view sororities as 'teams', and the perpetuation of this reputation as a 'performance', one may say that "each teammate is forced to rely on the good conduct and behavior of his fellows, and they, in turn, are forced to rely on him. There is then, perforce, a bond of reciprocal dependence liking teammates to one another" (Goffman, 1959:82). Both in sororities and in convents, the bond of dependence is dramatized in the family-like structure of the institution, communal living, and the creation of kinship ties. Peer regulation is facilitated by constant time demands and by encroachments on the privacy of the individual. The institution can better regulate the 'performance' of individual members when all activities are undertaken in groups and in public. In this manner, the preservation of the institution's reputation and structure are assured.

Since a sorority aims at preparing brides-at-large while offering housing for college coeds, the institution must assure the maintenance of the appearance that its members do possess those qualities expected in the ideal bride type: high social status, adequate college education, good skills as hostesses and mothers, among others. It also expects that the members behave as respectful and chaste young

¹⁴ At the Eata Bita Pie house, the 'intransigent line' was represented by two individuals who remained away from the house as much as possible, and refused to participate in communal activities. They were recognized as 'not very friendly'. However, some excuses were made for them, and one, in particular, was 'absolved' from this fault, because "she had a hard time with her parents."

ladies should. In selecting its members, a sorority will thus investigate their social status and background, and the scholastic status of the pledges.¹⁵

'Messing up' is a threat to the institution's reputation. Thus, members whose activities require prolonged absences from the house, with subsequent estrangement from the group, are also a threat to the family structure. Members may be de-activated if they lapse into a poor scholastic showing, although this is not viewed as vital threat to the institution's reputation.¹⁶ Certainly, it is not as dangerous to the house's reputation as endangering the chastity myth of the institution.

It is not that the institution requires that its members remain celibate all through college, but rather that they maintain the appearance of being 'nice young ladies'. Sexual activity is tolerated, as long as appearances are maintained. An inmate who does not conform to this appearance requirement is severely criticized by her sorority sisters. Sexual activity is acceptable and may even be sanctioned, but only when a marriage is pending, and only after the member has gone an institutionalized rite of passage – the Candle-lighting.

The Candle-lighting is a ritual through which a member publicly announces to the community her attachment to a man. The ceremony is conducted with props similar to those used in other rites of passage, and it includes specific songs and 'lingo,' as well as a ceremonial baptism, when the person announcing her engagement is thrown in the showers (perhaps a symbolic gesture of cleansing the individual member of sins committed against the institution, such as sexual activity prior to the formal rite of passage). Through the Candle-lighting, the inmate receives the community's sanction to engage in sexual activities, and acquires a new status within the group. She becomes a full adult and a role model, since she has achieved the highest goal of the institution (engagement and subsequent

¹⁵ There is a minimum grade point average required (2.5/4.0), but exceptions are made. The house also has required 'study hours'. Here is an example from the pamphlet on house rules: "Study hours are determined by your previous semester grade point: 0-2.49, 5 hours a week; 2.50-2.99, 4 hours, and 3.0 – 4.0, 3 hours a week."

¹⁶ There are two ways to remove a member from the sorority. A pledge may be depledged. This is a fairly simple procedure, as she is not yet a complete member of the 'family'. Although it involves some trauma to the sorority, it is not as serious as deactivating an active. Members may either request to be deactivated (or depledged), or be removed for a variety of reasons, most of them summed up in the words of one member: "She was not Eat Bit a Pie material". She did not fit the ideal type of the sorority.

marriage, usually right after graduation). Her engagement ring is the prize won for adhering to the institution's model.

But the Candle-lighting ceremony is not optional. As soon as an inmate starts dating steadily, she is constantly bombarded with questions such as: "when is the candle-lighting?" These questions and insinuations serve as a warning to the inmate that her sexual behavior is at question within the community and that she must do something about it. Pressuring for a Candle-lighting is part of the deal for, while it raises the status of the individual member within the institution, it simultaneously raises the reputation of the house. It demonstrates that institution's goals are being achieved. However, too many engagements may endanger the fulfillment of the same goals, as this comment by an inmate demonstrates: "We already have 13 people engaged. Any more engagements and guys won't be coming around to see us anymore, 'cause they will think the whole house is engaged!".

RITES OF INTENSIFICATION

A sorority, like a convent, relies on a family structure and atmosphere, where one is expected to love and cherish one's sisters. Both sororities and convents involve groups of women living together in an atmosphere that must be kept as harmonious as possible. When groups of people live in such close association, conflicts and tensions inevitably arise, many times due to a member's failure to participate in the activities of the community or refusal to cooperate in maintaining the family-like atmosphere. The total institution must have ways of coping with and minimizing these tensions. Convent rites, as described by Goffman (1961) and Hulme (1956), for example, include ritual prayers, communal confessions, sharing of symbolic food, etc.... Sororities have remarkably similar methods of reducing outward displays of conflict and reinforcing or restoring group solidarity. One such ceremony is described by Sardenberg:

"When I took the position of house-mother in the local chapter of Eata Beta Pi, I was told by my 'house-daughters' that the sorority was for them "a home away from home", where love and cooperativeness prevailed. The events that took place on one of my first nights at the house seemed at first to confirm their claims. At just past midnight, as I was almost asleep, I

heard a soft singing and a knock at the door. My “house-daughters”, in pajamas and robes, stood at the doorway holding candles. I was given a candle and led into the chapter room, where we gathered in a circle, around a large white table-cloth spread out on the floor. Over it, dozens of cookies were laid out, formed into the organization’s symbol and frosted with the same design. On a silver tray was a cake-size cookie with the same emblem on the frosting. “Welcome to our cookie-shine,” they sang, as we sat around the cloth, candles flickering. As songs of friendship and of “how great we are because we are Bit a Pie’s were sung, the tray with the large cookie was passed around. Each participant turned the tray counter-clock wise three times, made a wish, broke off a section of the cookie, ate it, and passed the tray around to the left. It was a ‘communion’ of love and friendship among ‘sisters’. The silver-tray was passed around until the cookie was gone and all participants had partaken of it. Then, the mood of the songs changed: from the sweet songs to loud, fast paced ones with ‘bad’ words and sexual connotation, or putting down other sororities. There was much joking and laughter, intermingled with ore songs, until all the cookies were gone. Single file, we marched out and I was escorted back to my room. Along the new initiates, I had been welcomed into the house, into the ‘family’ with a traditional ‘cookie-shine’.”

As other cookie-shines were carried out during the semester, we were able to establish a correlation between the build-up tension and the celebration of cookie-shines. Once, the ritual was celebrated to entice alumnae members into donating money toward the purchase of the chapter house. It was a way of reminding them of their love for their sisters, a rite of intensification.

Another ritual which is similar to public confessions in convents (Goffman, 1961; Hulme, 1956), is the ‘fireside’, when all members sit in the living-room, with the fire lit in the fireplace. It is a therapy session as well, as all participating members (and all had to participate) invited to voice their complaints and frustrations. Yet complaints were never addressed to any particular person, tget were directed to the center of the circle. The fireside is similar to the cookie-shine in function, but it is reserved for more threatening situations: one was held when four pledges decided to de-pledge, immediately after formal rush, which is an extremely tension-building period. Tempers flared, tears flowed like rivers, and the executive council called a fireside. After everyone with complaints had spoken, they sang songs that celebrated friendship and were cheered upon becoming loving sisters once again.

It could be said that the weekly, mandatory meetings of all active members was similarly a rite of intensification. Although we were never allowed to attend them, it was possible to perceive that all the lights are turned off as members march into the chapter room holding candles and singing Eata Bite Pie songs. Sometimes they leave the meetings with tears in their eyes, hugging each other, which leads us to believe that this must also be a rite of intensifications.

Like the required daily prayers of nuns, the sorority sisters must have weekly 'singing practice'; there are mandatory and penalties are given for failing to attend them. Since they contain praise of the ideals of the 'order, they also function like prayers.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, sororities and convents were found to be remarkably similar in the recruitment and training of their members, use of props and symbols, performance of similar rituals, and primarily, in their organizational structure. Although the functions of these institutions are similar, such as the housing of females and their preparation for future life by the development of certain qualities ideal to the institution, their ideal-types are clearly different. However, both types of institutions were found to rely on communal living and on a family structure, which are preserved by the constant performance of reinforcing rituals.

In his discussion of total institutions, Goffman states that:

"Total institutions are also incompatible with another crucial element of our society, the family. Family life is sometimes contrasted with solitary living, but in fact, the more pertinent contrast is with batch living, for those who eat and sleep at work, with a group of fellow workers, can hardly sustain a meaningful domestic existence" (1961:11).

According to our findings, however, a "meaningful domestic existence" is, not only compatible with, but, in fact, one of the aims of total institutions of a voluntary nature such as sororities and convents. Furthermore, the preservation and perpetuation of these total institutions can only be achieved by the existence of a family-like structure and fictitious family bonds. In sororities and convents, maintenance of this structure and bonds is achieved through the performance of

periodic rituals, which in both types of institutions disclose striking similarities, not only in terms of purpose, but also in terms of performances, propos, procedures, and so on.

This brings us to the question of universals. If this type of structure is necessary to sororities and to convents, is it also necessary to other voluntary total institutions? Studies of all-male and of mixed institutions should reveal this. If, as we suspect, this 'domestic existence' is necessary only to all-female voluntary institutions, what are the reasons for this necessity? Does the socialization of females involve the inculcation of such dependence upon family ties that the female is unable to function outside the realm of such a family structure? If this is true, and we believe it is, then the institution not only provides the female with this necessary environment, but also perpetuates her dependence upon kin-oriented groups. These groups thus serve as a means of fulfilling one of society's goals: the maintenance of the traditional role segregation of men and women.

In sororities, as in convents, the female is removed from her natal environment, from her nuclear family of origin. In return, the total institution which she voluntarily joins does not stress the severance of family ties, as Goffman indicates, but simply substitutes a new set of kinship relations for the old.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Goffman, Erving, 1961. *Asylums*. Garden City, N. York: Doubleday & Company, Inc.

_____, 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, N. York: Doubleday & Company, Inc.

Good, Lawrence R., and Katherine C. Good, 1974. "Similarities of attitudes and attraction to a social organization." *Psychological Reports*, June, Vol. 34 (3), pp.:1071-73.

Hulme, Kathryn, 1956. *The Nun's Story*. Boston: Little, Brown, & Co.

Jacobs, Keith and Kathryn Galvin, 1974. "Variables which differentiate members and non-members of social fraternities and sororities." *Southern Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 9 (3), pp.:342-52.