LEARNING TO WORK:
THE STUDENT SENATE AS A WORKPLACE

by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study is to examine a student organization and identify how the students’ statuses, roles, and behaviors relate to their experiences within that organization. Rosabeth Kanter’s (1977) *Men and Women of the Corporation* greatly influences the analysis of the data providing insight into workplace culture and employee behavior. The study identifies what roles and statuses the students assume, in what ways the students are given opportunities for leadership, and how peer acceptance is critical to their overall success within the group. University administration withholds all institutional power from student senators resulting in attempts to gain alternative forms of control through social power. While access to the senate is not limited to any university students, opportunities for leadership positions within that group are only given to those senators who have this social power and are validated by their peers. This limiting social structure causes considerable pressure for social conformity and competition resulting in closed groups or cliques. These cliques then exercise social power in an effort to gain
control, but instead find the results to be destructive to the group. Because institutional power continues to be withheld, the internal social hierarchy is maintained. This study suggests that the students are most limited by the hierarchical structure of their organization. However, with the support of university administration, the students will gain tools to create a more positive work environment, reducing need for social hierarchies, resulting in a more productive student senate.
1. INTRODUCTION

*Overview of Men and Women of the Corporation*

In 1977 corporate America was awakened by the publication of Rosabeth Moss Kanter’s thoughtful study of a major American corporation; *Men and Women of the Corporation*. Kanter’s study was based on the qualitative data from over a year’s worth of observations and interviews at one of the largest corporations in the United States, which Kanter dubbed Indsco. Kanter’s research focused primarily on the employees who worked at the administrative level, such as managers and secretaries. Though these people were, in many ways, the faces of the company, they had no institutional power, the ability to influence organizational decision making, within the greater bureaucracy. In her research Kanter found these employees were very much a product of their limiting environment and concurrently their attitudes and behaviors in the workplace were strongly influenced by those experiences. Kanter (1977:3) stated, “If jobs create people, then the corporation is the quintessential contemporary people-producer.”

It is important to mention that Kanter (1977:4) described Indsco as a “people conscious organization” and asserted that any problems that remained in a forward-thinking company like Indsco were the “dilemmas of the large hierarchical organization as a social form,” and not the corporation itself. Therefore, other organizations or
institutions, such as a university, may be similar to Indsco in form, yet suffer the same limitations because of the socially constructed hierarchical structure.

Kanter (1977:7) asserted that future studies of organizations should consider power and authority; equity and fairness; and who governs and who has access to the governing structure, because these concerns exert significant influence over the culture of work and the individual experiences of the workers. By understanding these details Kanter concludes we will be able to understand limitations imposed upon employees and their resulting attitudes and behaviors.

Kanter (1977:10) discovered that the employees at Indsco were capable of more than their organizational positions allowed or gave them the opportunity to demonstrate. Ultimately, Kanter (1977:11) argued for organizational change, as she asserted, “New tools can be provided, the people who are stuck can be offered challenges, the powerless can be offered more influence; the fabric of job relationships can be changed.”

**Purpose of Study**

Drawing upon Kanter’s broad insight, this study examines the Student Senate at a public university and identifies how the students’ behaviors and attitudes directly relate to their experiences and opportunities within the organization. Kanter’s study of Indsco informs the analysis provided here and her concepts and theories are cited throughout. Particular consideration is given to Kanter’s recommendation to take into account power
and authority, equity and fairness, and who governs and who has access to the governing structure in an investigation of work culture.

Drawing from the data collected during senate meetings, interviews, and focus groups, this study considers which senators are given leadership opportunities, how the senators exercise their social power, and how social connectivity and peer acceptance are critical to the overall success of senators within the organization. Kanter’s observations of corporate America are similar to what we see in modern-day higher education. Kanter’s analysis of managers and secretaries corresponds meaningfully to the experiences of the student senators when access to opportunity and power is considered. For Kanter’s managers and secretaries, institutional power is denied and opportunities for advancement are limited. The student senators are restricted in the same ways and social power is the alternative source for recognition. For Indsco employees the importance of peer acceptance in relationship to mobility and advancement in the workplace is comparable to the formation of closed groups and cliques in the student senate. Indeed, the employees at Indsco are quite similar to the student senators studied here, and the senators are in fact employees in their own voluntary workplace.

This study supports Kanter’s key assertion that dilemmas of the hierarchical organization are socially manufactured and not based on the institution itself. Therefore, the student senate is not an inequitable assembly, access is certainly allowed to all students without restriction or bias, but the hierarchical organization of the group causes selectivity and limitations, resulting in a sense of powerlessness and disengagement displayed by a large number of participants. This study also finds that student senators
are capable of accepting more responsibility and tasks than their positions allow, and with proper access to institutional power, senators will gain the ability to initiate organizational changes within their own group and the student body as a whole. In order for the process of structural change to commence the senators must be given access to institutional power by university administrators. Like Kanter’s managers and secretaries, institutional power is withheld from the student senators by the administration, and a substitutive power, which I will call social power, is created in its place.

Ultimately, this study argues that student senators, much like Kanter’s employees, are capable of accomplishing tasks and challenges that are withheld from their reach. If provided with access to resources in the form of finances, physical space, and mentors the student senators could initiate organizational and structural changes within the student senate, the student body, and the university. Access to institutional power will produce a more positive personal experience for the individual student senator and as a group, encouraging a more optimistic attitude and constructive social behavior, resulting in a productive and effective student organization.
“It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness” (Marx: 1859). Within a hierarchical bureaucratic organization, such as Indsco, employees are assigned duties, titles, and roles. These roles translate to perceived abilities, worth, and status. The assigned duties resulting in perceived status of an employee demands from him, or her, a certain image and a particular set of characteristics determined by those in leadership roles. Based on these statuses and images, employees are given opportunities for leadership and advancement, and successful leaders are given access to some form of power. Opportunities for leadership are not awarded to all employees, and those who do gain leadership positions do not necessarily receive proper accolades for their accomplishments. In order to fill this void of lacking recognition, employees create their own alternative sources of recognition in an attempt to grasp a sense of control, resulting in a sort of constructed social power. Ultimately, the divisions of roles and statuses maintain the socially constructed hierarchy in the organization and the general functioning of the group, resulting in a system that limits many, promotes few and inhibits the ability for the organization to progress.
Roles and Statuses

Sociologist Erving Goffman (1961:87) believed that role was a primary building block of social interaction. As stated in his work *Encounters*, “Role, then, is the basic unit of socialization. It is through roles that tasks in society are allocated and arrangements made to enforce their performance.” Kanter (1977:73) focused her observations on the occupations of secretary and manager to examine the role relationships that existed between them. The non-supervisory role of secretary was nearly completely occupied by women at Indsco, most of whom were recent high school graduates. These secretaries took on clerical roles that were completely supportive in nature and allowed little room for creative freedom or influence over the organization. Kanter suggested that one of the unique things about the role of secretary is that it was the only position at Indsco that was completely dependent on the success of the manager. The secretary depended on the relationship with her boss in order to receive praise or any possibility of advancement and upward mobility. Kanter (1977:77) discovered that the secretary’s position in the organization, her privileges, opportunities, and even treatment by others were all contingent upon the relationship to her boss and that boss’s power within the organization.

That said, the role of the boss, or manager, had some importance in the bureaucracy of the organization. The manager was the individual in charge of maintaining the rules and processes of the organization through the productivity and actions of the employees. The manager and secretary relied on each other cyclically in
what Goffman described as a merry-go-round (1961:98). These roles all depended upon one another in some way in order to be successful. However, like a merry-go-round, not all parts are equal, though each individual has a specific function that affects the roles of others. Not all roles must be filled at all times; they are not equally important or critical to the operation of the organization. These varying levels of importance, or necessity, allow for hierarchical ranking and disparate treatment of employees, which serve to both define and cement situated roles and inequality in the organization.

The roles given to employees are often labeled with varying levels of perceived status. More than five decades ago Parsons (1955:3-33) argued that all small groups develop two fundamental types of roles; an instrumental role and an expressive role. The individuals who occupy the instrumental roles are considered to be those who help the group to achieve the given task, while the expressive roles provide emotional support. Traditionally, the literature of social interaction identifies these roles as gendered; men occupy the instrumental role and women occupy the expressive role. Eagly and Johnson (1990:223-256) supported a previously established social role theory that men and women act in accordance with the required behaviors of their assigned role. These assigned roles then account for varying levels of power, and in some cases, gender inequality. A study by Wyatt (1988:147-175), however, suggested that assignment of roles attributed to women may be better explained by the situations and cultural contexts of the group in which they find themselves. For example, women may be expected to take on the nurturing role of a mother or confidant in a mixed sex group, but not necessarily in a same sex group. These role expectations display the close relationship of
power dynamics and gender inequalities. As previously stated, women tend to fill non-supervisory roles such as secretary that allow for little power and control but instead require more nurturing activities and basic maintenance of the organization. Wyatt’s approach is consistent with Kanter’s findings on roles in organizations, as she noted employees who maintained a lower status, and were therefore powerless, were less likely to advance in their careers and instead focused on peer relationships and emotional tasks. Kanter suggested these lower-status people were trapped in their prescribed roles once the roles were assumed. The individual was then perceived as only capable of filling the assigned role and limited in access to any opportunities for advancement.

Status is closely tied to one’s level of power and influence in an interactional setting (Ridgeway 1992:158-160). Status can be determined by economic worth, knowledge, or other such characteristics, and in many cases can create expectations of work for employees. Status characteristics theory argues that power and prestige in task-oriented interaction are determined by performance expectations. Depending on how high the group’s expectation of the individual, and whether the individual meets those expectations, he or she will be given more opportunities to participate. Participation leads to status, and status leads to power. This process of needing status in order to gain power produces a behavioral hierarchy. Those in power are selective of who will be given leadership opportunities and ultimately access to power. This selective process then maintains the social hierarchy that is dominated by those individuals who are viewed as superior by their peers.
Other factors can affect status in interaction. In many cases, age, length of membership, and peer acceptance affect the level of status one is bestowed within an organization. A study conducted by Eakins and Eakins (1983:53-62) at a university faculty department meeting found that status was based primarily on social factors such as rank and length of time in the department, and not so much on other factors such as number of publications and academic achievements. Kanter discovered that those in power at Indsco offered opportunities for advancement primarily to employees who had similar personalities and values as themselves. In other words, those in power were less likely to promote employees who they perceived to be unlike themselves. Organizational roles decide perceived status, and status can dictate one’s opportunities for advancement and access to power within the organization. Therefore one’s role and status in the organization is critical to their ability to influence it. However, in order to maintain such a role or status one must assume the associated image characteristics of a person in that position.

Images and Characteristics

Kanter (1977:47) discovered at Indsco that image was highly important among employees, and especially among managers. Image was communicated non-verbally through appearance at Indsco by way of certain attire, length of hair, and other such physical characteristics of employees. These unspoken physical expectations were not actually important for the functioning of the corporation but seen as indicators of social
similarity, that is, predictors of like values and interests. According to Moore (1962) a bureaucratic kinship system allows managers to reproduce other managers in their own image so that the same type of social individual continues to supervise the organization and maintain like values. Managers who run bureaucratic organizations often rely on outward appearances and behaviors to determine who is trustworthy and capable of leadership in the organization, in other words, who is most like themselves.

According to Kanter (1977:57-58), Indsco employees identified social and interpersonal skills as the most important for effective communication. Peer acceptance was also considered crucial for advancement, and anyone who lacked peer acceptance could not advance in the field. At Indsco, one way to ensure effective communication was to limit management jobs to those employees who were socially homogenous, or the same as the other managers. Thus, managers decided to avoid promoting those employees who were unpredictable in their conduct or required more time to “figure out.” Women were often placed in this category as men constructed them as fickle in decision making and difficult to understand; male managers especially complained that they never knew where they stood with the women employees and felt rather uncomfortable with the changes that the women’s liberation movement had created.

An element of uncertainty and a lack of trust among managers add to the creation of roles and images in the workplace. These roles make certain that tasks will be accomplished, and the managers will remain in control of the employees. As Thompson (1967:159) proposed, “…uncertainty in an administrative process appears due to a lack of cause and effect understanding that limits advanced planning, a lack of independent
decision making and recognition of the importance of other elements in the process, and the important element of human interaction within the organization that can never be fully predicted.” These administrative uncertainties cause a dependence on individual leadership without which chaos and disrepair can be expected. This dependency on leadership relies greatly on a basis of trust. If this trust is violated the organization could be mortally wounded. Therefore, administrative uncertainty in the organization results in issues of trust for the employees that can only be calmed by a sense of safety, and in this case, in the form of similarity to the current leadership.

Kanter (1977:50) suggested that in an older organization, trust is based on similarity of social background and likeness of organizational experience. New leaders often rely on social similarities and homogeneity to determine who is trustworthy. Selection processes for new leaders yield socially closed circles and limited opportunities for outsiders. Organizations must find elements of trustworthiness, such as follow-through, in the leaders who are constantly questioned and reevaluated. In an organization that relies heavily on the work of every member, trust is a critical element for success as it clearly results in follow through and loyalty.

Loyalty to a company is another crucial factor for success. Kanter indicated that part-time management could not exist in traditional companies; it was in a way considered a contradiction of terms because a manager could never be part-time and fully dedicated. A truly loyal manager spends every waking hour at the job and dedicates all of his or her energies to the organization. The dedication of time is therefore seen as a sign of reliability in the corporation; those who commit more time are more reliable than those
who commit less. A survey Kanter (1977:63-64) conducted indicated that nearly half of the employees had considered leaving the company; when they explained why they had stayed, seventeen percent stated they remained because of loyalty to the company. Kanter also found that managers were often overworked, spending much more than forty hours a week at their jobs and constantly taking on additional tasks such as serving on multiple committees or staying after-hours for special meetings and work functions. Though loyalty to the organization can be exhausting, it is a critical characteristic sought in an employee worthy of promotion. Unfortunately, not all employees are able to dedicate great amounts of additional time to a company, which may be misconstrued as a lack of commitment. Female employees, for instance, may find their time to be divided among work and family in ways that may not exist for male employees. This perceived lack of commitment may limit the female employees’ opportunities in the organization.

The images and characteristics the employees exude directly impact the opportunities they are given in the organization. Without recognition by, and the trust of, those in power, the employee will have few, if any, opportunities for advancement.

*Opportunity*

As Kanter (1977:131) stated in *Men and Women of the Corporation*, “One must be promoted or perish,” because jobs are valued differently; some viewed as pathways to success and others as dead ends. Advancement is seen as an indictor of personal success, and stagnation implies failure. This process of advancement is not necessarily one of
skill but of opportunity. Kanter encountered especially advantaged individuals at Indsco who were fast-tracked into management positions. These individuals were called names such as “boy or girl wonder,” “water walkers,” “high fliers,” and “superstars.” The signs that employees were being fast-tracked for advancement included being given opportunities to interact with senior officers, receiving placement where they “wore two hats,” and being approached by and complimented by more senior people. People who become aware of the fast-tracking often become seduced by it then taking on multiple tasks, thinking about the company constantly, and participating in organizational politics (Kanter 1977:134). These efforts toward the company can afford an employee status and opportunities within the organization, and according to Hedley and Molm (1992:9) opportunity can be determined by status. The person with “higher status” will have higher performance expectations and therefore will be given more opportunities within the group. For Kanter (1977:133-136), opportunity played a pivotal role in the emergence of leadership at Indsco. The “super stars” were fast-tracked up the corporate ladder more so than other average employees.

Just as some people are fast-tracked, others are stuck, or blocked from mobility. In Kanter’s (1977:137-142) research, clerical workers were the most likely to be blocked. These “blocked” people often developed support systems through close social bonds with other low-mobility employees. These social recognitions seemed to substitute for organizational recognition and promotion. Those employees who were blocked from advancement and opportunities also often participated in disengaging behaviors to shield themselves from the rejection. At Indsco, disengagement included depressed aspirations,
low-commitment and non-responsibility. Depressed aspirations were particularly common among women. They tended to think the idea of advancement was more desirable than practical. They did not consider the idea of promotion to be likely for them, so they simply did not try. Workers with low-commitment seemed to be stuck in a vicious cycle of limitation. Kanter found that people in upper-management levels of organizations tended to be more committed than those in lower positions, those who experienced the greatest career mobility also seemed to be the most committed to the organization (Kanter 1977:143). Mobility strengthened the employee’s commitment, but mobility for the employee could not occur without the initial base of commitment to his or her work and workplace. Therefore non-committed employees had little to no chance of advancement. Those with low-commitment often felt the company did not care about them; in turn they did not care about the company. The final stage of disengagement is the state of non-responsibility. Kanter found that employees would eventually shut down emotionally in the company. These people were often referred to as “zombies,” “mummies,” and “mystery men in the office” (Kanter 2977:146). These employees would come to work, do the minimum amount of work required, and take no additional initiative. This behavior was a key indicator that the employee would likely be leaving the organization shortly.

Some employees are given opportunities in the organization more readily than others. Those who do not receive such opportunities often continue to occupy lower status non-supervisory roles and maintain the status quo. Those employees who are
identified as worthy of advancement are fast-tracked into leadership in the organization and are given access to power.

*Power*

Power, as defined by Kanter (1977:166), is “The ability to get things done, to mobilize resources, to get and use whatever it is a person needs for the goals he or she is attempting to meet.” Power, therefore is very important in an organization because it allows one to create change in the organization. Not everyone is given access to power. Often those who wield power pass it on to new or rising leaders who they choose to mentor or encourage. Therefore, Kanter argued, the power elite reproduced themselves and chose future leaders by excluding those they did not wish to see in a position of power. Those who are often elected to advance and gain power are those individuals who are most likely to increase the overall success of the organization and are most likely to be well-liked in the process.

Power can not declare itself; it must be given by others through power alliances in the form of sponsors, peers and subordinates. According to Erickson (1975:44-70) another term for sponsor is “the gatekeeper,” or the one who is in charge of admitting new members; he or she may be an admissions counselor, job interviewer, or speaker of the senate. Sponsors are often regarded as teachers or mentors for those coming into power (Kanter 1977:181). Sponsors often have attained a certain level of power and credibility themselves, and then pass down this knowledge and support to upcoming
leaders. These sponsors must have the clout to fight for the new leaders and support them in the process of advancement. Sponsors also wield great social power in their connectivity to others; they are able to provide inside information and advantages to the new leader. These sponsors also are able to share some of the credibility they have with the new leader by supporting him or her and therefore giving him or her instant credit.

Peer relations and acceptance are critical pieces of gaining and maintaining power. Most importantly, once someone has been given power by a sponsor this person must be liked and respected by his or her peers in order to maintain that power (Kanter 1977:184-185). Peer alliances allow for exchange of insider information, doing of favors, and general consideration of each other. If someone is not particularly liked by his or her peers, power will be difficult to wield and impossible to maintain.

It is important to have alliances with subordinates as well as sponsors and peers. Subordinates tend to manage daily routine tasks and it is crucial to have their support. Though one can be given power, he or she may not use it wisely; competence and power in combination are referred to as credibility (Kanter 1977:169). Powerlessness is a plight for those without sponsors, peer connections, or a network of subordinates.

According to Kanter (1977:186-188), those who have authority but lack system power, or what I refer to as institutional power, are in fact powerless. The powerless are those who lack political influence, access to resources, outside status, sponsorship, or the prospect of advancement. Anyone who must work through another individual directly in order to accomplish a goal is essentially powerless. Kanter identifies other forms of powerlessness as more intra-personal and includes in that category employees who could
not manage or maintain their relationships with peers, sponsors, or subordinates and those who psychologically remain in a state of self-doubt and defeat due to their own insecurities.

One way in which the sense of powerlessness can be combated is through peer relationships and conversation tactics of joking and gossip. Gossip and rumors are often used to disperse information to those who would not otherwise be privy to such details. The use of rumors and gossip is an alternative source of social power for the powerless (Kanter 1977:31). Kanter’s study found that secretaries, or subordinate female employees, used gossip as a tool most frequently. The secretary’s access to privileged information allowed for an exchange of gossip that could bypass any formal authority or censorship. The only trouble with gossip is that it can mark the individual as not trustworthy making advancement impossible and sealing his or her fate as a less desirable employee (Kanter 1977:97). Joking, for the most part, is an innocent behavior used to strengthen peer bonds and interaction, but it also has additional meaning for the powerless. Kanter found that often lower status employees would use joking to test the waters, for example jesting that they would bring an illegal substance to a company function, or teasing women with crude or dirty jokes (Kanter 1977:42). This joking is used to gauge one’s freedom of expression and status within an organization, but it can turn cruel if used for humiliation and bullying.

Powerlessness can be quite serious in its consequences creating debilitating feelings that manifests into self-doubt and a sense of worthlessness. These feelings often lead to various behaviors unique to those who are powerless. Horney (1937:190-192)
suggested that people attempt to dominate others when they are feeling anxious or powerless in order to defend or protect themselves against ridicule or their own feelings. Protective devices often involve being bossy or controlling. Because these individuals have less control over resources or decision making they tend to boss those who are somewhat subordinate to them, therefore exercising what little power they do have in the form of verbal control and even threat.

*Dominance*

Dominance is one of the most widely studied predicators of leadership in single sex groups, and is often utilized in mixed-sex group interaction analyses as well. One of the first studies of dominance in a mixed-sex group by Megargee and Anderson (1966:377) observed participants as they completed group tasks, such as working through a simulated business problem. This study found that women who have superior leadership ability fail to assert their roles in the presence of males. Other researchers (Carbonell 1984; Davis and Gilbert 1989; and Sidanius, Pratto and Brief 1995) noted that women may inhibit expression of dominance in order to avoid criticism. Women assert their dominance less frequently than their male counterparts, when they do it is more covert than overt. However, Carbonell (1984:44-49) asserted that high dominance women do not give up all the power, but assert it covertly as they tend to determine who will be the leader of the group, and generally assign someone other than themselves to the task. Carbonell dubbed this practice as “The power behind the throne.”
Dominance in interaction does not operate independently, but must be in combination with other factors such as group composition in order to gain noticeable results. Aries, Gold and Weigel (1983:779-786) discovered that dominant behavior was recognized to be a joint function of internalized dispositions and social functions based on situational context and group composition. Their study concluded that personality or situation alone did not affect dominance level of an individual, but the combination of both impacted the expression of dominance. Therefore dominance is not necessarily a male behavior but a trait of personality and social situation. As Aries (1996:60) suggested, sex composition of the group is a very important aspect of dominance, men express higher levels of dominance in all male groups and tend to mitigate their behavior when around women. Women also tend to show higher levels of dominance when around other women, but then often later express fear of social rejection due to their dominant displays.

Dominance over group decision making and functioning is often exercised in order to gain control of the group. Though the term domination does have a historically negative meaning, it is often responded to more positively when defined as a leadership characteristic. When asserted appropriately, and without physical threat, dominance can be a strong predictor of leadership ability for the organizations who consider dominance to be a favorable trait.
Leadership Characteristics

Leadership is the display of purposeful action working toward a goal in the interest of the organization, or situation, at hand. Characteristics of leadership are visible indicators of the ability to lead and Kanter (1977:169) determined that at Indsco the characteristics most desired for a leader were credibility, action, and visibility.

Employees are not usually rewarded for doing what is required of them, but instead are praised by going beyond requirements. Doing something new and inventive, risky or cutting-edge demands attention and, when successfully completed, earns respect. There must be action in order for accomplishment and actions must be thoughtful and successful in order to advance in the corporation. It is important that leaders take action in order to maintain a certain level of distinction and possess control or power over a period of time. Vocal expression is often regarded as a strong leadership characteristic; when group members are asked who is a leader in the group the person who talked most during the study and did the most to help the group achieve its goals is the one who is identified (Aries 1990:46). A study by Mullen, Salas and Driskell (1989) showed rate of participation to be a clear indicator of increased visibility and leadership emergence.

In order for actions to enhance one’s power in an organized group they must be visible to those people who will award power and those who will obey it (Kanter 1977:179). The trouble with visibility is that it can be misconstrued or abused. Kanter discovered that managers who made their actions visible for the betterment of the corporation were respected and praised. Those managers who chose programs due to the
level of visibility for him or herself, but not for their adherence to company ideals, were
ridiculed for their lack of caring. A manager must be careful to highlight his or her work
and the accomplishments of his or her team but not to focus on visibility so greatly that
he or she seems arrogant or opportunistic. Visible actions must be relevant and
thoughtful in order to be credible and well received.

Exhibition of leadership style can also be influential of one’s credibility as a
leader. Chapman (1975:649) suggested that leadership behaviors among men and women
reflect sex role stereotypes. When women were put into a leadership position they
exhibited leadership behaviors that were much more relationship oriented, while men
exhibited more task-oriented roles. Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin’s (1999) data considered
this claim but also that these differences of leadership behavior were not indicators of
differences based on sex, but gendered status expectations which then affected
distribution of tasks, type of work assumed, and ultimately role or rank in the
organization. Similarly, Lorber (1994:241) argued that men’s and women’s leadership
styles are socially constructed in interaction and influenced by both situational context
and how others perceive them. If a leader is more accessible and willing to give
autonomy to subordinates he or she may be viewed as weaker than a stauncher leader.
Aries (1990) simply stated the best way to identify a true leader is to ask the group
members who he or she is, the group will be able to easily identify who stands out as a
group leader, based on the characteristics the group values. Eagly and Johnson
(1990:223-256) mentioned that leadership characteristics may be difficult to identify at
first, but that clearly men and women do not vary in socio-emotional orientation. Good,
and even great, leaders must focus on both task and establishing and maintaining good relationships creating a nurturing balance for the employees.

Great leaders are able to maintain the crucial leadership characteristics of action, visibility and credibility while maintaining positive relationships with their subordinates.

Leadership exists in many forms and is not always identified with a title or status. For those who do lead an organization or take on a prominent role without official authority the job may not always provide the credit he or she so desires. Therefore, leaders, as well as other group members, often seek alternative forms of recognition from their peers.

*Alternative Sources of Recognition*

Kanter (1977:147) concluded that people with leadership characteristics who were restricted from opportunity for advancement often clung to social recognition in the form of peer groups as a substitute for the lacking organizational recognition. Kanter was not attempting to sound critical of social ties and solidarity, instead she wanted to communicate that blocked opportunities caused lower status individuals to focus more on their social connectivity than those who were busy climbing the corporate ladder.

Structures that encourage high-mobility seem to create a tense and competitive atmosphere for employees, inhibiting social bonding, while low-opportunity situations contrastingly inspire camaraderie (Kanter 1977:148-152). These resulting social groups typically are rooted in support or protection, but occasionally are centered on the open rejection and criticism of those in power. These groups of employees who openly support
resistance are often chaired by resisters who are funny, witty, easily likeable, and quick on their feet. These groups do not necessarily attempt to confront the hierarchy but instead situate themselves in a web of gossip and verbalized discontent as a less confrontational and disruptive means of protest. These social ringleaders are described by Kanter as “social professionals.” Social professionals are those who become well known for their gossip and storytelling. These employees focused their energies on outward social activity by way of entertaining customers or those people outside of the company. These employees often spend more time outside of the office than in it, limiting their opportunities for advancement within the organization but sustaining their social network. Finally many employees with lower opportunity seek social recognition downward, looking to younger or more junior people for recognition. These employees tend to be from lower opportunity circles; they have advanced enough to be removed from the lower circle, but not enough to become upper-level management. They seek approval from the lower-status people when they do not, or cannot, receive it in the workplace.

Another way of responding to the lack of opportunity is to openly criticize everyone who has advanced, and any changes they may be making as an expression of knowledge and experience in the organization. These conservative resisters behave as though they have been through everything an individual can experience and that they are all-knowing as a result of those experiences. These resisters claim the past was the golden age and they continue to hold true to those ideals as “keepers of the faith,” (Kanter 1977:155-156). The past acts as a safe place for those who lack opportunity for
mobility and who fear change; they simply remain loyal to tradition and stay comfortable in their conservative space. Some people within this space are more vocal, however, and take on a state of constant complaint, or as Kanter called it, “chronic criticism.” These employees still maintain their knowledge and experience level, stating that any new ideas have been tried before and failed. Though this behavior can claim some recognition from lower-status people, it can also cause tension with upper-level management, and in extreme cases, possibility of removal. A final method of resistance is low-risk conservatism. These individuals recognize there is risk associated with new ventures and initiatives. In order to prevent any chance of failure, these people set standards very low for themselves and their peers; they take little to no risk and rarely create change. Although these conservative actions often help the individuals to fly below the radar, they also guarantee no chance of promotion or advancement.

The employees of Indsco and the student senators are very similar; indeed they are all small characters in the larger bureaucratic hierarchy in which they work. The individuals from both groups alike seek recognition from their peers and superiors. If not readily given leadership opportunities, recognition must be sought in other forms, most easily found in peer relationships and group communication. This communication creates solidarity and bonds among the members who may otherwise feel undervalued; establishing and maintaining power relationships and dynamics within these groups.
Office communication and encounters range from water-cooler gossip to formal meetings and presentations. These various types of communication create environments for different meaning. In informal encounters talk is often based on forming relationships and consists primarily of jokes and storytelling. Talk is indicative of many social factors and statuses such as age, race, level of experience and gender. Zimmerman and Boden (1991:3) identified the relationship between talk-in-interaction and social structure. It is suggested that social structure in the form of age, sex, or class can be connected to everyday language usage (Zimmerman and Boden 1991:5). Just as a symbolic interactionist perspective recognizes that meanings are created by individuals in the context of interaction, so talk interaction is an activity within its own right and should be considered as both influenced by societal and institutional formations, as well as independent from them (Zimmerman and Boden 1991:9). Simple parts of conversation in group organizations, such as usage of titles, manner of addressing members, and interruptions are very telling of group dynamics and behaviors.

Affiliative, or pro-social, communication is often gendered with feminine characteristics and attributes. Maccoby (1990:515) for instance, suggested girls play separately from boys because they are repelled by aggressive “rough and tumble play;” girls use polite requests as opposed to boys’ direct demands. Other studies have concluded that women use more cooperative language, take turns in speaking, display more verbal organization of group behavior, acknowledge what other have said, and
express agreement with others more frequently (Tannen 1993:87). According to Gilligan (1987:19-33) pro-social communication styles focus on relationships, assume connections between the self and others, show greater tolerance or compassion for others, emphasize understanding and communication, seek agreement, show less willingness to make exceptions to rules, and appeal more to an understanding of others than a universal point of view. Though these examples are typically associated with female communication styles, they may actually be attributes of low-status individuals. Low-status individuals recognize they have a lesser chance of advancement and therefore focus their energies on the group as a whole and their relationships within that group.

Adversarial or aggressive behavior is typically associated with male interaction. According to Maccoby (1990) boys are more likely to refuse another’s demand, heckle a speaker, or use conversation as performance. Aggressive communicators use talk for egoistic functions like establishing or maintaining turf (Ridgeway 1990:127). Maltz and Borker (1982:196-216) claimed that aggressive speech can be characterized as competition oriented, or adversarial, creating competitive groups. Carol Gilligan (1987:19-33) proposed that adversarial associated communication style focuses on the self. The person who operates from this orientation frames conflict in terms of individual rights that must be respected. This person then assumes separation and the need for external structure, stepping away from the situation to resolve conflict. These characteristics, like those of pro-social behaviors, may be unfairly gendered as male, when in fact they are the characteristics of a high-status individual. High-status
individuals are primarily focused on themselves, while low-status individuals are considerate of the group and have less interest in personal pursuits.

Regardless of who initiates the conversation various forms of communication and interaction among employees in the workplace create environments for group solidarity as well as exclusion. These closed groups, or cliques, allow access to power and advancement for the chosen few, while ensuring seclusion and inopportunity for the outsiders. Indeed, peer acceptance is a critical factor in determining success in an organization; a factor that not everyone is capable of attaining.

Women in the Workplace

Kanter (1977:16) stated “Between 1960 and 1969 there was disproportionately small growth in the numbers of women in the professional and technical group, in skilled trades, and among salaried managers and officials, but a disproportionately large increase in women clerical workers.” According to the U.S. Bureau of Census in 1973, in over half of U.S. companies only two percent, or fewer, of first-level supervisory jobs were held by women and in over three-quarters of those companies, women held no management positions (Kanter 1977). In 1969 women made up approximately ninety-three percent of U.S. corporation stenographers, ninety-four percent of the typists, ninety-four percent of the receptionists and ninety-seven percent of the secretaries. Glenn and Feldberg (1995:263) found in a 1990 study that four out of five clerical workers were women, of which two of the largest categories were secretary and receptionist. Now,
according to Elena Silva (2003:2-12), research director for the American Association of University Women (AAUW) Educational Fund, for the first time in history (excluding the brief period of female dominated employment during World War II) women make up nearly fifty percent of the paid work force in the United States. A separate study conducted by the AAUW entitled *Women at Work* (2003:33) discovered that as of the year 2000 the top five most common occupations among women were secretaries, bookkeepers, sales supervisors, nurses and teachers. According to the same study the top five positions for men in the year 2000 were truck drivers, sales supervisors, janitors, carpenters and cooks. Though women have entered the workforce at a rate comparable to men, women are still over-represented in clerical work serving as secretaries and in other such fields that are often identified as “women’s work.” As stated in a study conducted by the AAUW entitled *Women at Work* (2003:3) “Quite simply, women do not appear well-positioned to access high paying, high-quality jobs in emerging information-and technology-related segments of the labor market,” (2003:3). Despite significant gains women still have access to fewer opportunities for advancement and leadership in organizations. Women are also compensated inequitably, earning approximately seventy-seven cents to every man’s dollar (Silvia 2003:2-12).

One of the reasons why women fill these clerical roles and accept less money could be related to personal expectations and desires. According to the AAUW Educational Fund, female employees place more emphasis on self fulfillment (i.e. educational attainment and family) than their male counterparts. Because of this need for additional satisfaction, women may be willing to take a back seat to male managers in
order to gain personal fulfillment. The hours required and duties associated with the role of a clerical worker allows more flexibility for a female employee to fulfill her primary role expectation as suggested by Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin (1999); that of a mother and wife. The fact that women fill so many other roles in their lives outside of the workplace may be a reason why they are still unable to advance as readily as men. Though life choices may be contributing factors to women’s workplace status, gender stereotypes likely remain the main factor forcing women into revolving doors and trapping them with glass ceilings, making career advancement not as easily accessible.

Aries (1996:17) claimed, gender stereotypes control us by providing prescriptions for behavior. Even in the workplace, gender is not something we are but something we do, and therefore the behavioral effects of gender stereotyping may be unavoidable. West and Zimmerman (2002:13-16) affirmed “Doing gender means creating differences between boys and girls and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biological.” Gender then is given socially constructed meanings of difference and these meanings are reinforced by behavioral expectations which are therefore perceived as essential. Gender is not simply an aspect of what one is, but, more fundamentally, it is something that one does, and does recurrently in interaction with others. These gendered behavior expectations create internalized assumptions of appropriate masculine or feminine behavior, causing gender stereotypes. For instance, in a study by Smith, (1985) research participants listened to a man and a woman read an identical passage and then the participants were asked to give their impressions of what the male and female speakers were like. The participants saw the male speaker as more masculine, arrogant,
dominant and aggressive while they saw the woman as more feminine, friendly, and sincere. Though these participants had no pre-existing knowledge of the male and female readers other than their sex, they made many assumptions about the individuals based on gender stereotypes. Kanter (1977:230) also provided an illustration of gender stereotyping with her concept of role encapsulation of tokens. According to Kanter, tokens were individuals who are often distorted to fit preexisting generalizations about their category as a group. Kanter (1977:232) found that women were especially victims of external gender stereotyping and tokenism and were often made to fill “the woman’s slot” or clerical roles in the workplace.

Though gender inequality in the workplace may seem to be decreasing, there are still certainly differences in roles and expectations of male and female employees. As Kanter discovered, Indsco was a very forward thinking company that could not help but fall into familiar ruts by recruiting large numbers of young women as clerical workers and men as managers. It is not necessarily that the individual employees are sexist, but that the structural hierarchies within these organizations remain intact making leadership opportunities inaccessible for many lower status employees. Kanter’s research showed that the most direct route to advancement and power for employees was through the display of leadership characteristics that were identified by those already in power.

In closing, Kanter discovered that the employees of Indsco were given roles in order to maintain the functional hierarchical structure of the greater corporation. These assigned roles resulted in perceived status and ability to gain leadership positions, solidifying a recurring hierarchy that is inaccessible to most employees. The corporation
administration denied the managers and secretaries institutional power in the company in order to maintain control and reproduce a like version of its self again and again. In order to maintain a sense of wellbeing, the employees who could not achieve this institutional power instead chose to focus on peer relationships and acknowledgments to satisfy their needs for recognition.

Power and recognition is commonly sought by individuals situated in all types of workplaces and organizations. Depending on status, some individuals may have greater opportunities to claim desired levels of power and recognition. Those already in power look for images and leadership characteristics in others which are similar their own in order to maintain a like leadership style within the group. Those individuals who have similar images and characteristics to the current leaders will likely be privileged in their opportunities for advancement. For those individuals who are not already pre-destined for leadership and power, alternative sources of recognition are sought through peer relationships and acceptance. The division between these groups of individuals creates a hierarchical structure within the organization that is easily maintained by the repeated social behaviors and actions of the individuals. This systemic structure is not found only in for-profit companies, but in many types of organizations. A system quite similar to Kanter’s researched population at Indsco was found in my study of a public university’s student senate. The senators were very much like the employees, seeking power, leadership, and recognition, while only a select few ever received it. The students continuously entered into this system, accepting social rules, and maintaining the hierarchical structure. How the students continued to be part of this system can be
explained by the limitations placed upon them by administration, the social pressures applied by their peers, and their resulting actions and behaviors that cultivated an oppressive environment. While the divided system is likely noted by outsiders, its complex meaning can only be fully understood by an insider willing to examine its intricacies.
3. METHODS

Research Preparation

I began my research of the Student Senate in the fall semester of 2006 in order to collect qualitative data in the field for my graduate-level qualitative methods course. During four weeks of observation, I completed two semi-structured interviews, one focus group interview, and three sets of field notes from formal senate meetings. Upon completion of my qualitative methods project it became quite clear that the group was of great interest to me, and I chose to pursue the organization as a subject group for my graduate thesis paper. I immediately began the human subjects review process and gained approval for new research in March of 2007. In the three months that followed my Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) approval I interviewed eight senators (four male and four female), conducted three focus groups, and observed twenty committee meetings, nine of which were audio-recorded. In April of 2007 I received approval from the HSRB to use my previously collected data from the fall semester.

My total data pool, resulting from various observations from September 2006 to May 2007, consists of ten semi-structured interviews (five female and five male senators,) four focus groups, and twenty-two senate meeting observations resulting in thirteen sets of field notes and nine audio-recorded meetings. All participants were active
student senators at the time of data collection, full-time undergraduates, and between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three.

*Physical Setting*

The University is a suburban campus situated in the greater metropolitan Washington, D.C. area. Because of proximity to the nation’s capital many university students tend to have strong political interests and are very active in the community. The Student Government office is located on the main level of the newest student building on campus, and though perfectly positioned for activity, the office is normally rather quiet and under populated. During the day, only the dull roar from the multiple television media center nearby provides any background noise for the office. The office is quite small for over fifty senators, but with only one or two present at a time, space limitations are not pertinent. The office is enclosed in glass so that any student can walk by and view the activities of the senators, and the front glass doors are always open to encourage students to drop in. There is a desk next to the front door which is intended to serve as a reception area, but it is nearly always empty. There are three meeting spaces within the office that have individual doors to provide added privacy. The smallest of these rooms is no larger than a walk-in closet, this is where the student supreme court meets, and will serve as an office for a full-time advisor when he or she is hired. Most observations took place in the senate committee meeting room which measures approximately fifteen feet by nine feet. Within the space there is a small table with chairs for meeting, but most
senators prefer the gray lumpy couch against the wall. There are also two computers in this room where senators multitask during meetings by taking minutes, editing bills, and of course updating their Facebook pages. Finally there is a third room that is reserved for the student body president, vice president and their cabinet. This room is nearly always locked and empty.

The student government office is always a bit messy; covered in papers, abandoned clothing, and food trays from the dining room. Personal messages are scrawled on every available space throughout the rooms. The office feels more like a fraternity house than the meeting space of a governing body. However, this disorganization is not an indicator of laziness, but a testament to the culture of the student government and those student leaders who reside in the space. The office is a free space for students uninfluenced, or hardly ever visited, by University Administrators. The mess represents the hectic lives the senators lead, the continued effort and love they put into their work, and the great importance of their social bonds.

Participants

The student senate consists of approximately fifty student senators. Senators are determined by general election held every spring. It is not difficult to become a student senator, in fact, currently only one vote is required for a senator to be elected. The senate is disproportionately male and white. Only one-third of the senate is female, and during the time of my research, approximately a mere ten percent of the senators were students
of color. This ratio is disproportionate to the University’s general student body. During the 2006-2007 academic year approximately forty-five percent of students attending the studied institution claimed to be of a race or an ethnicity other than white or European-American.

The student senate is organized in a hierarchical manner. The organization is headed by a leadership team consisting of the Speaker, the Speaker Pro-Tempore, the Secretary, the Historian, the Parliamentarian, the Sergeant of Arms and the Clerk. These members sit at the head table during student senate meetings and also have their own closed meetings once a week. Next in line are the committee chairs. The committee chairs are the heads of the four individual committees of the student senate; the student services committee, the advocacy and outreach committee, the finance committee, and government and academic affairs. The formal organization of the student senate has no other positions of leadership thereafter, and all other members are classified as Senator. However, some of the committee chairs do assign senators within their committee individual roles of secretary or head of smaller sub-committees. Though these are unofficial positions, they are occasionally mentioned in the data.

The leadership team, like the senate, is not very diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, or gender. When my research began there were no women on the leadership team, and only two of the committee chairs were women. Of the ten total leadership positions only two were filled by women. Halfway through the spring semester a female was given a leadership position to fill a vacant spot increasing that percentage to about thirty percent.
Upon most recent inspection of the newest senate leadership team there has not been a change, but there is now one fewer female committee chair.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. All data collection was conducted face-to-face with the written consent of the participant and audio-recorded. All interview participants were given the opportunity to be interviewed at a time and in a place of his or her choosing. Focus group and committee meeting participants were observed and recorded during their normal meeting times in the student senate office. Only the focus group of committee chairs had to arrange a special time to meet with me, because they do not normally meet as a group.

Over the course of eight months senators willingly participated in semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. Significant effort was made to balance participation in the study so that an equivalent number of men and women were observed and interviewed. Though no preference was purposefully given to any one person or group of people, women were the minority group and more effort was needed in order to recruit these participants for observation.

Procedure

Before all interviews I would introduce myself to the participant and engage in a brief casual conversation to ease any uncertainties or tension. I would then present the consent form to the participant, encourage him or her to read the document, and make
myself available for any additional questions (See Appendix A.) Interviews began with a pre-established question; all following questions were based on the student’s responses. The semi-structured setting was much more natural than a direct line of questioning. The interviews which strayed most from my pre-established list were more useful to me than those interviews in which the participant answered quickly and awaited my next question.

I reassured all participants of the voluntary nature of the research for all interviewing purposes. I asked committee chairs to excuse senators who elected to not participate from any missed meeting time and openly accepted requests to omit senators who wished to not be included in the study. All qualitative research for this study was approved by the George Mason University Office of Research Subjects Protections.

Participant observation activities included attending many student senate committee meetings and formal meetings and listening to the procedures and informal conversations. I stopped by the office almost daily during various hours just to say hello, and engage in more natural conversation. These informal observations included story telling, joking, and occasionally exchange of personal advice, because I was once a student senator myself. I observed several social events as well. I attended the student government banquet in May, a movie on campus with a few senators, a banner signing for a memorial service, stress-relief events for finals week, and an office clean up day. I was invited to several birthday parties and graduation parties, but reluctantly chose to turn those offers down to avoid confusing the professional relationship. These various observations and experiences took place over an eight month long period, from September of 2006 to May of 2007. All observations, interviews and focus groups
occurred during weekday events, Monday through Friday, and they were almost always in the late afternoon and evenings. The social events tended to occur after 7:30pm when students were finished with all classes for the day, so I found myself in the student senate office until midnight several times.

Collection of Data

Semi-structured individual interviews

Ten student senators were interviewed individually for this study, five were female and five were male. Only two of the interviewed senators were not white, or of European decent; both of these senators were female and did not hold a leadership position at the time. Seven of the interviewed senators were members of the leadership team; two were committee chairs, and the other four were officers. The other three interviewees did not have a formal leadership position in the organization.

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted in a private or semi-private location of the student’s choosing. Interviews lasted between sixteen and fifty-seven minutes with the mean interview lasting thirty-five minutes.
Focus groups

A total of twenty-seven student senators participated in the four focus groups completed over the course of eight months. Some of the senators were present in multiple focus groups, when taking repeat participants into account, a total of twenty individuals participated in the focus groups.

The first focus group was completed in the fall of 2006. This focus group consisted of student service committee members. A total of eleven senators participated in the focus group; six were male senators and five were female. Of these eleven senators only one held a leadership position; a first year female senator and committee chair.

The second focus group was completed in the spring semester of 2007. This focus group consisted of advocacy and outreach committee members. A total of six senators participated in the focus group; three were female and three were male. Of these six senators, three held leadership positions within the senate. These positions included a female sergeant of arms, a male parliamentarian, and a female committee chair.

The third focus group was also completed in the spring semester of 2007. This focus group consisted of government and academic affairs committee members. A total of six senators participated in the focus group; three were female and three were male. Of these six senators, one female senator held a leadership position within the senate, her position was committee chair.
For the fourth and final focus group only student senate committee chairs were interviewed in the spring of 2007. All four of the senate committee chairs attended the focus group; two were male and two were female.

The focus groups were semi-structured and encouraged group discussion more so than question and answer (See Appendix B.) The focus groups ranged from twenty-one to seventy minutes, with the average time being forty-one minutes.

Committee meeting observations

Varying numbers of senators attended committee meetings. The largest meeting had twelve members and the smallest had two; the average size being six. Male senators almost always outnumbered female senators. A total of nine committee meetings were audio recorded, about twenty-three were observed without audio-recording.

The committee meetings did not appear to be influenced by the researcher, and were simply observed. The shortest meeting time was recorded as thirteen minutes and the longest meeting time was recorded as forty-five minutes. The average time for an audio-recorded committee meeting was twenty-eight minutes.

Analysis of Data

This study examines collected qualitative data for themes of interaction among male and female senators with consideration given to the effects of group status, displays
of leadership, and identification of social factors in order to contribute to explanations of senator interactions in this particular situational context. The data analysis was largely inductive. Themes emerged after several months of analysis and sustained readings, allowing me to realize the similarities between my data and the theoretical work of Rosabeth Kanter (1977.) The qualitative data analysis provided here is grounded in Kanter’s theory of work and gender as outlined in her groundbreaking work *Men and Women of the Corporation*. I draw on her theory to express the relationships of interaction and opportunity resulting in institutional power. Kanter’s observations of corporate America are all too similar to what we see in modern-day higher education. Kanter’s analysis of managers and secretaries corresponds meaningfully to my analysis of the student senators when access to opportunity and power is considered. The importance of peer acceptance in relationship to mobility and advancement in the workplace is also similar to the formation of cliques in the student senate. The data are analyzed in relationship to Kanter’s workplace theory showing similarities and differences in access to peer acceptance, opportunity, and power. Ultimately, the role of university administration in the struggle for power is considered along with the internal social power struggles the senate creates.

**Limitations of Study**

The focus of the study evolved from a study of the relevance of gender to the consideration of the effects of peer acceptance, opportunity, and power after collection of
the data was completed and codes began to emerge. This change in focus required equal attention to be given to female and male senators. The collection of data was purposefully inclusive of both male and female senators in attempts to witness the ways gender differently structures interaction. The result of this equal data collection is a much smaller pool of data on female leadership.

Different assumptions may be concluded based on the previous experiences of the researcher. Those experiences differ greatly between an insider and an outsider. As a former student member of the researched organization I have formulated some pre-established views and biases due to my pre-existing familiarity with the group. My history resulted in occasional formation of assumptions throughout the data collection that later had to be reworked as they proved to be irrelevant to my study and limiting of new ideas.

Finally, little age difference between myself and the students in combination with the constant contact we had allowed me to quickly develop a role in the group and an emotional connection. I found myself looking forward to time spent in the small senate office and often asked university administrators about the students’ wellbeing. Around the time I contemplated applying for the position of full-time advisor for the organization I recognized I had officially gone native, and forced myself to limit the emotional interaction with the students. Though this is not necessarily a limitation of my study, it was painful to break away from the group and emotionally limiting and restrictive for me. However, I realized I had to move away from the participants physically and emotionally in order to reflect on my observational period and work toward an analysis of those data.
4. FINDINGS

The student senate is a bureaucratic hierarchical organization situated within a public institution of higher learning. It is not difficult to become a senator but it is certainly a struggle to become a leader within the senate. Similar to Kanter’s managers and secretaries, the senators work within a structured power dynamic composed of the leadership team and everyone else. The leadership team works like managers providing tasks and orders to the senators then the senators perform these tasks like Kanter’s secretaries. The only way to become a part of the leadership team is to be appointed by the speaker of the senate, the head of the leadership team. This process of appointment requires peer acceptance and positive recognition by the speaker. Senators are very clear on what characteristics they look for in a leader, these characteristics include accountability, loyalty to the group, trustworthiness, initiative, and visibility. Such characteristics are not easily accomplished and maintained; they require time and energy that not every senator can afford to give. The truly successful senators are those who have plenty of extra time to devote to the senate, and are often seen in the office for countless hours at a time. When a new senator joins the senate, he or she is immediately selected for special recognition if leadership potential is recognized or he or she has previously existing social connections in the group. Kanter (1977:133) referred to these selected people as “superstars.” Superstar senators are fast-tracked to become the new
leaders usually by leadership team members themselves. These superstars tend to be selected by leadership team members who see similar values and characteristics to themselves within the new senator. These reproduced values are then cultivated, and the leadership team continues to reproduce a like version of itself year after year, explaining the lack of diversity, new ideas and initiatives.

Though these students do not receive monetary compensation and their participation is voluntary, they do possess all of the other characteristics of Kanter’s Indsco employees. In order to be a senator one must be accepted into the organization, learn the values of the organization, take on a role in the organization, and play by the social obligations and expectations of that group. In this sense, the student senate is a workplace. Similarly to Kanter’s findings at Indsco, in order to be successful, a senator must possess the characteristics that others judge necessary, be well liked by the other senators, and be given opportunities for leadership and access to social power.

Roles and Statuses: Leadership and Senators

The Student Senate is like any American workplace in many regards. One of the similarities is through assumption of roles assigned to each of its members. Within the senate there are few leadership roles, and students who are given these positions are then identified as members of the leadership team. The leadership team consists of the Speaker of the Senate, Speaker Pro Tempore, Historian, Secretary, Parliamentarian, Sergeant of Arms, Clerk, and the four Committee Chairs. The four committee chairs are
regarded as part of “leadership” when referenced in interviews, but they are one step below the rest of the leadership team on the conceptual flow chart of the organization. This differentiation is particularly visible at formal senate meetings. The meetings are usually well attended, with thirty or more senators positioned around a large square table. At these meetings, the seven leadership executives give their reports first and sit at the head of the table. The committee chairs give their reports last and sit around the sides of the table with their peers in no particular arrangement. Everyone else in the student senate is simply a senator with no report or title. When asked to describe their role, many senators without additional leadership roles related their tasks to others, describing how these role relationships impacted their tasks and effectiveness. Instead of crediting themselves, their ability to achieve is seen as a product of the group dependent on others. During a face-to-face interview Tara, a second-year senator, expressed her role in relationship to others as she was not empowered, or appointed, to take on an official leadership role herself.

*Whitney:*  “What is your role in the committee meeting?”
*Tara:*  “I’m technically vice-chair, but what I do basically is take minutes I don’t know if you’ve noticed but I have a hard time getting a word in generally with, I donno, there are more powerful voices I guess…”

Tara’s role of “vice-chair” does not technically exist, but is an honorary title given to her by the committee chair. Tara received the title from the committee chair Tiffany as recognition for her contributions to the committee in the form of time dedicated and willingness to take minutes. However, without appointment by the speaker of the senate
to a formal position she had no elevated status within the organization, and claimed that she felt silenced by the more powerful voices.

Other senators who did not hold a leadership position also recognized their lower status in the organization and down-played their individual roles within senate. Like Tara, these senators often elevated the role of the committee chairs and spoke more highly of those individuals than themselves. During a face-to-face interview Allie, a first-year female senator, was very optimistic about her future as a senator, but made sure to clarify her novice status and inexperience compared to her more senior peers, and committee chairs, Jeff and Erin.

Whitney: “What is your role in the committee?”
Allie: “My role in the committee is basically that, which is equivalent to all the other people on the committee, except for Jeff or Erin.”

Tara and Allie both referenced other senators when asked about their own role. It seems as though neither Tara nor Allie identified themselves as individual leaders, but as a part of the senate as a whole. This feeling of group connection is useful to the maintenance of the senate as it increases solidarity among senators. However, the lack of recognition of personal ability inhibits leadership growth among individual members and restricts those senators from potential success. This process is quite similar to Kanter’s managers and secretaries. The managers, like the leadership team, hold all of the social power afforded to them while the secretaries, or senators, in this instance carry out simple tasks and the emotional up-keep of the group. This structural dynamic empowers few and limits many and it is all the senate knows.
Talcott Parsons (1955) suggested that there is both an expressive role and an instrumental role in leadership. Parsons saw that the expressive role was normally filled by women and the instrumental role was filled by men. Within student senate both roles exist as well, though not necessarily predicted by sex, but by status. Often, the leadership team takes on the instrumental role, making decisions and distributing tasks, while the senators without appointed leadership roles take on more of an expressive role completing basic tasks and cultivating the group dynamic and feelings of solidarity, as indicated by earlier talk. It is worth mentioning here that the leadership team is composed entirely of men, and only two of the four committee members are women. The seven executive leadership team members, all men, are purely instrumental in their behaviors, while the four committee chairs, two are women, vary in their behavior, some filling an instrumental role while others an expressive role. During a committee chair focus group Tom and Tiffany both discussed their roles in the senate. Tom, a fourth-year senator and committee chair, filled a more instrumental role perhaps due to his more senior status in the organization and appointment as the finance chair, while Tiffany, a second-year senator and committee chair, filled a more expressive role due likely to her lesser experience in the organizational politics and great desire to empower students. These variations in their leadership styles may also be a product of gendered role expectations.

Whitney: “What is your role in the committee?”

Tom: “I guess my…. The thing I do as a committee chair, and I see myself do, is an overseer type big picture person, umm, like this is how the budget is supposed to run at university, have like a big picture of it and let the committee do little tasks, and let the committee give their opinions in the committee and what they think a bill should be and how the plan should be
done and make sure a bill is organized correctly, loose ends are tied up; just the glue that makes sure things are together.”

_Whitney:_ “What is your role as a committee chair?”

_Tiffany:_ “I’ll go, I’ll go. Honestly, my role, my sole motivation when I am running my committee is to empower. *(group laughter)* No seriously! Empower people to believe that they can make a difference, and to take on… when a student comes forward that they feel like that the can take that idea and make it happen, make it a success, because you can’t, in my eyes, one person can’t do it all.”

Other committee chairs played both roles at the same time, taking on expressive and instrumental qualities at once. These senators who embodied dual roles appeared to be more secure in both their leadership status as well as peer acceptance. During the same committee chair focus group Erin, a fourth year senator and committee chair, and Jeff, a third year senator and committee chair, both expressed their dual expressive and instrumental roles in the organization.

_Whitney:_ “What is your role as a committee chair?”

_Erin:_ “I just like direct… directing people. Giving people a sense of direction, I guess. When they come in with an idea the first step is letting them know that they can do this, but also giving them helping them find the first step after the idea, like where to go next. I donno, I always like at the end of my committee meetings we spend like a half hour to forty-five minutes just bitching about the organization and what is good and what’s bad and I think that really gets people either pepped up or excited or wanting to change even more, because all of the frustrations of the past are let out…”

_Whitney:_ “What is your role?”

_Jeff:_ “Yeah. I would saaaaay a mediator between the speaker and the senate and also a messenger, umm and making just regular senators feel like we are all on a level playing field. I mean, I make jokes, that’s the way I do it, but anyway you can do it, just let them know, let’s use the empowerment word, just to give them a sense of self-worth like that you’re not just some loser in this organization.”
Erin and Jeff embodied both roles at once with their combination of high expectations and harsh language, attempting to create a space for growth and challenges for the senators. It is important to mention that Erin is the only female senator who projects characteristics of instrumental leadership. She also engages in several non-traditional gender role behaviors such as harsh language, bullying, verbal dominance, and membership in Rebel Row, which I will return to later. Indeed instrumental and expressive leadership styles do appear to be gendered practices. These roles of expressive or instrumental leadership are important to consider when analyzing group involvement. Those who hold a leadership position take on more instrumental roles than those with a lower role and status. While those with a more prestigious role are respected for their perceived social power, those with greater personable skills, and likely a lower status, are well liked for their attention to the group and individual senators. The students who hold leadership positions may be well respected for their position, influence, and experience in the senate but the senators with more social power tend to maintain a higher level of respect and acceptance among the senators. The images and characteristics associated with leadership opportunities are not present in all senators, and some never attain that desired role or status. Having the proper leadership images and characteristics award the senator with respect and nearly ensure advancement in the senate.
Images, Characteristics, and the Importance of Respect

Just as Kanter discovered at Indsco, peer acceptance is critical in the student senate in order to advance. There are many ways in which senators determine who is accepted. These decisions can be made through shared experience, humor, policy or ridicule. Throughout many interviews and focus groups the qualities that continued to yield the most peer acceptance were leadership ability, credibility, visibility, and trustworthiness, consistent with Kanter’s findings. The student senate as a body values credibility and accountability very highly in the senators. In a volunteer organization run by students it is critical that senators follow through with the tasks they say they will do. The success of the organization depends on the accountability of these students. When asked what qualities make a good senator, students responded with the characteristics of credibility and accountability. During a face-to-face interview, Bill, a first year senator and member of the leadership team stated his opinion as to what characteristics are most important for a leader to exhibit.

Bill: “My biggest thing is leading by example, Umm it’s one thing to call yourself a leader or have other people call you a leader, and you can have a wide array of opinions and thoughts and you can have a ton of great ideas but if you don’t act on them and if you don’t stand by your words…umm…you have to walk like you talk in other words, and in my opinion if you profess one thing and act an entirely different way in my eyes you have no credibility from where I stand, I am going to look at you and not believe anything you say because I can’t match actions with words.”
Another very important factor in the student senate is visibility and initiative. The senate only meets as a whole once a week for a total of fourteen times a semester. Each senate meeting lasts about sixty to ninety minutes, hardly enough time to accomplish many tasks or allow everyone to speak. Because of these short meetings, time outside of the weekly meetings must be spent wisely, and requires the senators to take great personal initiative in order to continue to create change and progress for the university student body. In addition to initiative it is very important that students are active and participate frequently. Many senators spend all of their free time in the office. I visited the office multiple times a week at varying hours throughout the day, and I always found at least one senator present. These senators were occasionally working on projects, but more frequently they were eating lunch, chatting with one another, or checking their e-mail. What the senators accomplished in this space was not necessarily as important as the simple fact that they were there. Visibility in the organization is a key determinant of activity and loyalty to the organization and in turn earns the senators a certain level of respect. During a focus group, Erin declared her feelings on how a senator can gain respect within the organization.

*Whitney:* “How does one gain respect in the student senate?”

*Erin:* “Being in the office. I think that is the biggest thing that you get respect, like if you, ya know, as you were saying, if you are gonna talk it you better walk it and you also better be in this office so people can see you, because if you’re not a visible member of senate people aren’t going to listen to a word you say it does not matter what position you’re in…but I think that is one of the main things to get respect, is to be in this office, and not to talk a lot of B.S. If you say you are going to do something, do it, accountability.”
Other senators agreed with Erin. During another focus group, Terry, a first year male senator also responded on the characteristics he felt were valuable for a leader. A quick response by Caleb and Ted, fellow first year male senators, solidified the importance of visibility and activity for student senators.

_Terry_: “I think attendance has a lot to with it, I mean the less often you are here then the less visible you are…”

_Caleb_: “You also lose people’s respect ya know when you don’t speak up enough and you tend to opt out of decisions because you don’t speak up and get the information need then you tend to lose my respect at least about however you feel about that. Just sitting there doesn’t do anything to take action.”

_Ted_: “I agree with you guys, I think, initiative is probably the single biggest thing people respect because there is such a lack of initiative and umm I think being knowledgeable is something that is very important. I don’t think results, well I mean results after that, but I think initiative is more important. Umm, if you can get results that are visible that is a huge plus, but we don’t really see a whole lot of that so I would say initiative is the driving force.”

Another important characteristic that coincides with accountability and visibility is trustworthiness. The student senate is regarded as having a unique history of deceit and lies that is well documented in accounts by senators and the student newspaper. There is a good deal of talking behind other senator’s backs as well as multiple attempts to remove senators from office throughout the academic year; a few were successful. Due to this experience of watching senators being removed from office, many senators feel uneasy and insecure about their own stability in the group, and therefore demand honesty from their peers. During a focus group, Erin and Bill both discussed the importance of truth in order to gain respect and trust.
Erin: “Truthfulness. Even if it hurts we want the truth…I think being trustworthy is a big part of respect and if you’re not trustworthy then you’re definitely not going to have any respect in this body.”

Bill: “Yeah that’s, I guess that’s a good point, I guess trustworthiness or confidence. It just amazes me, umm quite frankly, when you say something to someone in earnest and you give your trust to them and … just how quickly they can turn around and try to use it for their own personal benefit or gain. It’s just amazing.”

The leadership team is especially concerned with the trustworthiness of senators. As a result, senators deeply fear deception and therefore demand total truth from one another and shun those who lie to them. This process could be witnessed during committee meetings. During my observations, when a group-proclaimed liar arrived to the meetings conversations among senators would often change, limiting information in front of the individual in attempts to shield their secrets, resulting in a less friendly and open environment. This scenario was explained by Erin during a focus group.

Erin: “That’s just the environment that [the speaker] created in the beginning of the year, like umm ya know like we were supposed to be like ‘Let’s keep all of our ideas secret.’ Then that is the environment that is going to be created and we are going to have the same backstabbing, keeping secrets, worrying about people lying, worrying about who you can trust and not trust.”

This history of deceit and lies can be explained by a desire to create a sense of importance where little exists due to limited institutional power by university administration. The changes they can make in the organization are very basic, including field trips, food court selections, and t-shirt purchases. Though never verbally expressed by the senators, the desperation due to powerlessness cannot help but be sensed by an
outsider looking in. This powerlessness produces a need for importance and purpose creating an anxious and mistrusting group of student senators. Therefore, when asked what qualities were required in a good senator, truthfulness always emerged as a key factor.

*Tiffany:* “Just be honest about what is going on, being honest is a good leader, being honest.”

The characteristics desired by the senators are no different from those desired in a politician, teacher, or co-worker; visibility, accountability, and trustworthiness are all critical elements required for success. Just as Kanter found Indsco employees demanded such characteristics from fellow colleagues, so do the student senators from one another. Though these characteristics seem basic in nature, they can be quite demanding of time and energy. Not all senators are able to dedicate themselves fully to the organization and be as visible as others may like, but those senators who can dedicate their time are often well liked and trusted by the leadership team and are therefore given greater access to opportunities within the organization. These few senators who maintain the desired characteristics and images for leadership and who receive and accept leadership positions are often rather similar to the leadership team before them. This group then continues to reproduce a like image of itself that the senators dubbed the elite minority.

*The Elite Minority and Opportunity*

Like many corporations and organizations, student senate has a tendency to fast-track student senators who are widely liked, and block those who are less desirable
candidates. These processes of fast-tracking and grooming, versus blocking and discouraging, result in varying levels of opportunity for student senators. When asked if opportunity for leadership is available to all senators equally, those who have been given multiple opportunities stated yes. When asked if everyone has an equal opportunity in senate Caleb, a second year senator, responded affirmatively but then followed up by saying that in fact everyone has an equal opportunity to prove themselves worthy of that opportunity.

**Whitney:** “Do you feel that everyone in senate has an equal opportunity to become a member of leadership?”

**Caleb:** “Yeah I mean ... Everybody has the same amount of time throughout the year to prove themselves worthy of being able to direct and guide others to get goals accomplished. And that is really what leadership is a guiding team and everybody has the same amount of time and it is just how they wanna use it, and if they don’t use it right then they’re not going to be on leadership.”

Caleb mentioned that all senators have the equal opportunity to prove themselves worthy, but he does not mention if everyone who does complete this task is offered a leadership position. When asked the same question Erin, a fourth year senator and committee chair, also stated that senators must prove themselves worthy of a leadership position. However, according to Erin, once a senator has proved him or herself worthy of a leadership opportunity and is offered a position, not all senators accept the opportunity to join leadership.

**Erin:** “In the beginning of the year everyone has the same opportunity to prove themselves and whether they do or they don’t. If they don’t they are not going to be on leadership next year unless the speaker is their best friend. And if they do prove themselves even of the speaker hates them, they are
going to be on leadership. You can’t deny that sometimes there is an inequality; there are some people on leadership this year that [the speaker] didn’t even know last year, and they are on leadership, but you can’t ignore a good quality. And so I think that everybody does have an equal chance, it is whether or not you take that opportunity or not.”

Some student senators, however, do not feel that opportunity is equal for all senators. These senators tend to be those who are not chosen by the selective peer groups or cliques. When these senators were asked if opportunity was available to everyone equally they normally referred to these selective groups or their personal feelings of being blocked from advancement. Tara often voiced her discontent in the organization and mentioned that she felt held back, or blocked from opportunities.

*Tara:* “My main thing, like the theme of everything, is that I think it is really difficult for someone to have an opportunity is this organization to move up, like I said people tend to make friends with people who are similar to themselves so even if its not intentional exclusion or bias it’s still there and I think it’s a problem.”

*Whitney:* “When you say ‘like themselves,’ do you mean personality?”

*Tara:* “Everything; personality, background… just everything.”

Tara especially expressed discontent in her comments. She desired so greatly to be a member of leadership, but was never offered the opportunity. Tara was not given the chance to advance simply because she was not liked by her peers, as was evident in their general disregard of her actions and comments. The reason as to why some senators are well liked and others are not is a difficult science, indeed it is one we have all wished to understand since grade school; why some are selected first and others are left to be chosen last. Tara offers her insight by suggesting that those who do the selecting chose
senators who are like themselves in every way, “Personality, background… just everything.” According to Kanter, Tara may be correct. Kanter also found at Indsco that employees who were selected to be fast-tracked into management positions were very similar to those managers who selected them. They shared like values, background, and even physical appearance. At Indsco, and in the student senate, likeness translated to safety and trustworthiness. By choosing similar candidates for leadership the outgoing leaders feel confident that the organization they created will be maintained by their similar protégé.

Senators who are members of these elite peer groups, those who often make leadership selections themselves, and even those who are simply a witness to it were aware of the socially selective nature of senate, and acknowledged its existence. Erin admitted openly that the senate is a closed environment unwelcoming of change. Erin suggested even the individual committees are competitive with one another, attempting to hide any new ideas as not to lose proper credit.

_Erin:_ “Yeah, and like I don’t know how much I shared with [the other committees] last semester I know I tried to share more this semester but again it’s all with the environment and that we created and it is a secluded closed environment and you gotta work your way into it. Each committee is its own group, I would never bring any ideas I got from student services into this committee and ‘I like I think that like it is just a very weird environment, lot different than last year.”

Ironically, this organization is an open one, accessible to all students who wish to be a part of it. Membership into the senate is rather simple to attain, a single vote is required, but once admitted advancement and leadership are difficult to come by. Indeed,
this seemingly open group made for the students and maintained by the students can be rather limiting and emotionally destructive to the students. Those students who do become senators have no way of knowing if they will be socially accepted and allowed to fill the roles they desire within the organization. When asked about opportunities for senators, Tiffany, a second year senator and committee chair, responded that senators do not feel valued or important in the organization.

\[ Tiffany: \text{"Senators don’t feel part of this organization, they don’t feel valued, they don’t feel credible, they don’t feel important, they don’t feel like they count and because of all that they feel like it’s a waste of time they feel like they can’t make a difference."} \]

Tom, a fourth year committee chair also acknowledged the socially selective environment the senate creates without remorse for those senators who may be lost in the process.

\[ Whitney: \text{"Because you keep saying this is such a secluded environment, closed, do you feel that then makes it even more difficult for some senators to participate?"} \]
\[ Tom: \text{"It might scare people off, or get people frustrated and they will just be like ‘Ok. I donno what’s going on,’ and then they might just drop out."} \]

Like a workplace, the senate recognizes some people are more likely to advance than others. This process is mostly accepted and rarely challenged, and those who do challenge it are often rejected and choose to resign. This closed group creates a cyclical process of reelection and appointment resulting in a similar type of incumbent year after year. These incoming leaders then repeat the mistakes of their predecessors and do not
challenge the system, thereby ensuring their invisibility to administration and their powerlessness in the university.

Because institutional power is unattainable, the senators seek power in another form, social power. Social power can be harmless resulting in shared meanings, joking, or storytelling. However social power can also be harmful when abused, manifesting into frustrations and manipulative tactics such as cruel teasing, bullying and demanding of control. Because the senators cannot exercise institutional power, they create a different social power to create the appearance that in fact they do have some form of control.

*Playing with “Power”*

The student senate is a small student organization that has no influence over the greater university or student body. Because of the lack of institutional power; the senators must establish a substitutive power within their own body; social power. This social power is expressed by limiting and controlling others. One of the ways the senators limit the power of others is through playing around and wasting time that could potentially be used by other senators for a chance at recognition. During a focus group Victor, a first year senator, expressed his frustration due to the manipulation of meetings by some senators. Ted, a first year senator, agreed with Victor and pointed out to him that the senators who are doing the manipulation even go so far as to write bills condemning their own behaviors in an attempt to control even more of the senate meeting time.
Victor: “Sometimes, also they attack an issue as a joke. Keep, delaying it, delaying it, making inappropriate motions to delay the issue, and feel like it’s funny, but it’s not, they are wasting our time.”

Ted: “Listen, real quick. Not to point fingers, but, it seems like that the people who are doing this joking thing are the same people who sponsored the bill to say ‘Stop doing this joke… messing around thing.’” (Laughter)

Other senators share the same sentiments as Ted and Victor. Bill, a first year member of the leadership team and Sarah a first year senator discuss their frustration with an older dominant senator who insists on joking around constantly and abusing his knowledge of Robert’s Rules of Order for no other reason than to feel a sense of control over the senate meetings and to waste everyone’s time.

Bill: “I think, ya know Eddie, ugh Senator McCoy is great, He’s awesome but he ….”

Sarah: “Gets annoying.”

Bill: “…along with other people spearhead the whole thing to force Jeff to read that entire four page bill, which was entirely not necessary, last week. Umm, but he did it just to…”

Sarah: “To be funny.”

Bill: “… to make a point and be funny, and that took a considerable amount of time. And we went forty-five minutes over our meeting!”

These senators manipulate meeting time in order to gain control, where they seemingly have none. This manipulation is positioned as a joke, but is only humorous to the self-proclaimed “elite minority” who are allegedly in control, and not to the other senators who are forced to wait. The elite minority, as dubbed by Jeff, a prominent committee chair, is seen as the group who dominates meetings. Many senate meetings are wasted on this manipulative control in the form of inside jokes. For example, one entire meeting was spent on a bill to condemn the scientists who deemed Pluto a dwarf planet,
removing its once full planet status. Though this argument may have seemed funny to outsiders who were not present in the session, many senators felt it was a waste of their time. This abuse of meeting time is a way to control participation of senators and limit student voice. Erin, Tiffany and Jeff all discussed during a focus group how humor is used sometimes in a controlling manner to dictate the flow of the meeting. Erin and Jeff, more senior committee chairs who normally advocate student rights during meetings, openly admitted they occasionally abused their power in order to silence other senators. However, Tiffany a first year committee chair seemed surprised by and unaware of their purposefully controlling tactics.

Erin: “And we’ll just makes jokes like, ‘Oh we’re just gonna say neigh.’…”
Tiffany: “I didn’t know that.”
Jeff: “Yeah.”
Erin: “I think I have only really seriously sat down and done it once... but like I know I’ve overturned a motion to adjourn because I have said ‘I wanna speak,’ and then overturned like the motion…”

These “elite minority” stifle other senators more aggressively in order to ensure their inability to participate. This aggressive way of silencing others can be hurtful and upsetting to younger senators, and occasionally causing embarrassment and disengagement. As Erin stated, the more inexperienced senators often attempt to participate and are stifled by more senior senators.

Erin: “I think this is an example, I don’t know if it is the best example but I think that there a lot of times when people really just don’t know what they are saying and they try to speak. Like Tara the other time when Ted started yelling at her, I mean yeah she was speaking out of turn, but should
there have been a big fight about what she was saying? No. And you could
tell she was really upset about that.”

The aggressive leaders in the senate also use Robert’s Rules of Order, a
procedural language many senators do not understand, abusively in order to suppress
senators. Tiffany and Tom agreed that often senators are picked on or treated
aggressively during meetings though these senators without leadership positions do not
know they are breaking any rules of order. Often, during meetings, senators would
hesitate to speak out of fear of misusing the parliamentary procedure. Occasionally, the
younger senators who would try out the language were immediately stifled by the sound
of the gavel, as the senators called it; the individual was “gaveled down.”

\textit{Tiffany:} “But you have to also think though if you are trying to speak up and you
don’t know how, you saw it! What happened to Chris at the impeachment
trial? He was like ‘Something’s wrong here!’ He was just getting smacked
down by that gavel. I am just saying who…”

\textit{Tom:} “But that wasn’t the time to speak, you gotta learn the \textit{time} to speak up…”

\textit{Tiffany:} “Exactly, but, but people see examples like that and they are like, ‘Oh my
God! Even if I want to say something it may not be the right time, I don’t
know!’ There is all this confusion…”

Through the use of aggressive joking and abuse of parliamentary procedure,

senators feel unable to participate and stifled by the abusive behaviors of more senior

senators. As Tiffany and Jeff discussed, dictatorial senators cause other senators to feel

overwhelmed and unable to contribute resulting in a majority group of quiet non-

participatory senators.

\textit{Jeff:} “The average senator does not speak; sits there and kinda looks
dumbfounded at times. And I’m not saying that they are dumb, just some
of the stuff kinda gets overwhelming and instead of getting it explained to them a motion to call to question and vote is thrown in their face before they may finally muster up enough strength to ask a question and they are either shouted down or the rules used in favor of people who wanna get their way and have loud voices.”

Tiffany: “I second that one hundred and ten percent. From what I have experienced those two roles have set the tone, based on my freshman and sophomore year. I am probably wrong. It shouldn’t be that way though, completely, that’s not fair. That’s… what is it, it’s ugh… it’s a … what was Hitler?”

Whitney: “A dictator.”

Tiffany: “A dictator. That’s dictatorship, that’s dictating your character. That’s not right. That should be the way it is, everybody should have said that to him.”

Some dictatorial senators demand control over all situations at all times, including control of an interview. It seems this control is sought not by a confident leader but by the seemingly powerless in search of confirmation. These senators who demand constant control are uncertain of their power within the greater university and even their value as a friend or leader within the senate. For example, often interviews and focus groups took a dreary turn of topic near the end. Many senators took this opportunity to voice concerns, frustrations, and insecurities. Few recordings or sets of field notes end with laughter or positive energy. During the tail-end of a focus group, I expressed my excitement that the focus group would end with a rare and positive energy. Upon my comment, Erin immediately demanded attention and control of the conversation making the positive ending impossible.

Whitney: “Should I end [the focus group] on a happy note?”

Jeff: “I mean judging by the other ones that you’ve had, you might as well end it on a happy note.”

Whitney: “This would be the first recoding that ends on a happy note!”

Erin: “We can turn it down, we can talk about…”

Tiffany: “NO!!! Leave it alone!”
Erin: “I can tell you every single reason why everyone is in Relay for Life and you will all leave here unhappy!” 

Laughs

Tiffany: “No!”

Jeff: “That sounds sooooo bad!”

Tiffany: “Definitely shut it off!”

This demand for control is an attempt to regain her possession over the flow of the group. Erin cannot truly embody the role of leader if her control is compromised. As an outsider and a researcher, I controlled approximately twenty minutes of Erin’s meeting time during our focus group, and when I indicated we were nearing a close, she immediately regained control in the only effective way she knew how, by manipulating the conversation. Her attempt was effective to the extent that it could be; I withdrew my participation and the group responded, however, her control was limited and will be tested in similar ways in many situations again.

All of the senators are limited in their power and how they exercise it, just as Kanter’s managers and secretaries are limited at Indsco. These minor characters have no institutional power in the company, or university, but only social power in the microcosm of their small group. Perhaps, because they are limited themselves, they exercise control over others with lower status in order to maintain some form of power. This controlling can be expressed in the form of joking, use of rules, or aggressive dominance. Indeed, the senators can only play dress-up with this make-believe power and never truly own it. The university administration refuses the senators institutional power, creating a group of students seeking meaning and the ability to control. The lack of institutional power results in a competitive group of senators, with those who are on top more interested in limiting than empowering one another. For these young adults, this organization is not
simply a pass-time but one of the first adult encounters with politics and power. These students run for election into the student senate in anticipation of proving their peer acceptance; they hold formal meetings to try out the professional language to test their political savvy; and they attempt to make organizational changes in order to be recognized by mentors and be remembered for the talents. The desire to feel important and powerful in the university is one of the reasons the student senate continues to exist; even if that power is unattainable leaving the students seeking recognition in other alternative forms.

Rebel Row and Recognition

Rosabeth Kanter discovered at Indsco that some employees did not receive the recognition they desired or deserved in their work environment, so they constructed alternative means for recognition. The student senate also sought additional means for recognition. Most of these sources were simple friendships and peer groups, while others had the potential to be harmful such as cliques and bullying. During a focus group the senators explained who has the potential to lead and who joins the closed groups.

Jeff: “It is uh, by the elite minority. I mean the people who speak up at senate meetings and the people who dominate meetings, and I am one of the elite minority…”
Tiffany: “The inner clique…”
Jeff: “I definitely, I definitely dominate meetings when I talk too.”
Tom: “Ok, well all of us are part of that.”
Jeff: “Exactly, because we are all committee chairs and everyone looks to us. [This is] one of the problems, I think, and I am to blame…”
Jeff, Tiffany and Tom are all committee chairs. Committee chairs maintain an interesting position in the organization. They are considered part of leadership, but they are a step below the seven executive members. They sit slightly elevated above average senators, and the see themselves in this way, therefore other senators look-up to them and regard them as more knowledgeable and socially powerful. Because of their middle-level status they are more sensitive to the needs and feelings of the senators. As stated above, Jeff, Tiffany and Tom are all aware of the “elite minority” or the “inner clique.” They also feel some remorse that they are part of the problem. However, they do not actively attempt to change the power dynamic. Any real change requires total power, which they do not have, and would require the destruction of the current system destroying the artificial or social power that they do have. And no senator is in a position to sacrifice what little power he or she is barely grasping; therefore the cycle continues.

Whitney: “And why is it not possible to be part of leadership?”
Tara: “In my case, umm well it’s kinda redundant but in order to be on leadership you need respect, in order to get respect you need to be on leadership its hard to break through. And you really do have to be friends with someone, personal buddies, otherwise you are overlooked, because if you are friends with someone you can attest to their character you can say ‘Oh, he’s a good guy we should choose him.’ If you don’t know the other person it’s just a question mark, so it counts as a negative, and it is unfair.”

Whitney: “What makes it exclusive?”
Tara: “Well the first thing is the parliamentary procedure which intimidates people if they are new, that’s one part of it. The other part is the overemphasis of leadership like in the committee meeting there is only one member of leadership which is the chair whereas in the main meeting there’s umm ten… ten leaders and it is pretty much dominated by them.”

The “inner cliques” or “elite minority” are not necessarily harmful, unless their social power is abused. This abuse can often be in the form of domination of a meeting,
limiting access to leadership roles, and in extreme cases, verbal bullying. An example of this abuse can be seen in the earlier quote when Erin demanded control of the focus group, forcing a positive ending to become rather bleak. Gossip is also a form of control. Kanter described those employees who engaged in gossip as “social professionals.” They were always aware of the latest rumor and willing to openly discuss the private details. In my research I identified several social professionals, and one who was the head of all of the gossip, Erin. She made it her business to know everyone’s business, and as a social professional she made sure to get the news around to the entire group. Conversation is a natural part of group communication. It is one of the ways we connect to others and create shared meanings, but in Erin’s case, gossip was the one way she felt she could exercise her social power, as demonstrated in the following excerpt recorded during a focus group.

David: “Oh, passionate is good.”
Bill: “That word is banned in this office.”
Erin: “If you use it correctly empowerment is an awesome thing.”
Bill: “But not if you use it every twenty seconds.”
Erin: “Mmmhmm.”
Whitney: “Ok. Explain further, what is going on with empowerment?”
Erin: “A certain senator loves the word empowerment and uses it all the time, it’s one thing like, I donno, like if I felt like the senator really was empowering people maybe, I think she is to a certain extent,” (everyone chuckles) “but the word empowerment is just kind of overused and just kinda now has no meaning anymore. Kinda like our resolutions last semester. We wrote so many of them by the end of the semester they meant nothing; it was like ‘Oh, another resolution?’ kinda like ‘Oh, your empowering again? Oh.’ Kinda like one of those things. It’s lost its meaning I think.”
Senators recognized that there is a hierarchy within the organization that is controlling of lower status senators. As Tiffany stated in an interview, some senators are forced into certain acts by other higher-status senators for the simple fact that these higher-status senators can control them.

Whitney: “You said it is a hierarchy?”
Tiffany: “Oh Yeah!”
Whitney: “Do you think it has always been that way? Have things changed?”
Tiffany: “Davis told me he left because he was in the room and he was saying ‘I don’t wanna do it, I don’t wanna be the prosecutor for this. I don’t have time and this, I don’t agree with this, this is against my values,’ is what he was basically saying and I am gonna let you guess who did this to him but they said ‘You need to suck it up, you need to suck it up and you need to do it and we will be behind you but you need to do it, it is your responsibility to do it.’ And he was like, ‘Screw this! Why am I going to do something that…’ and I feel bad because Jeff and I were not there, I wasn’t there that day and I think we would have been like, ‘You guys are psychotic, you guys are crazy, how can you be doing this to him?’ Ya know? But we weren’t! We weren’t there. And I am happy that Davis dropped out, but at the same time though if you feel like you are losing your sanity because people are asking you to throw away your morals or values how you value things, then I would probably drop out too just to keep my sanity and keep me from crying.”

A few of these lower status senators began to rebel against the senate in the only way that they could, verbal displays of resistance and discontent. These senators began sitting together in the back of the meetings and would occasionally voice their opinions out of order. They named themselves “Rebel Row.”

Whitney: “Can you just clarify what Rebel Row was founded on?”
Jeff: “Rebel Row was founded on the rights of a minority in an organization and the right to speak up on something that nobody wanted to speak up on and the right to actually have a debate and not actually just be a rubber stamp legislator for anything the president wanted, ya know? As much fun
we have with it is actually a serious organization because we, I think, we started being like ‘Why are we doing this? Why are we spending money on tailgates?’ Like this dates back to the past year’s administration, why did we spend money on tailgates? And it just has affected everyone and now it has become a real, I know we all four can speak on it last year was like ‘Oh, Rick says its ok, let’s go!’”

Rebel Row created a glimpse at freedom for the senators. It is a group without rules or limitations where senators could express their thoughts and feelings openly. This group was dominated by men and used a loud and masculine style of communication to express their beliefs. The members of Rebel Row were especially well known for their outbursts of explicit language and thunderous laughter. Though they seemed rather aggressive at first glance, Rebel Row was mostly regarded as a humorous bunch of senators without any serious convictions. Tiffany and Tom, for example, stated their reactions to the group as based in humor and freedom.

Tiffany: “I think that’s because the character from Rebel Row, or the people on Rebel Row are able to find humor in things and let their hair down, if you will.” (Laughter) “And I think that is the reason why some people only see the humor, because that is the most obvious thing, you know? You just hear it right away, you hear the laughing right away but you don’t hear the direction right away. Ya know what I mean?”

Whitney: “Right and the meeting I saw consisted of, ‘Oh bullshit!’ and running out of the meeting.”

Jeff: “Rick!” (Laughter)

Tom: “He had a very good reason to run out of the meeting.”

Jeff: “I agree. I almost followed him. We are definitely known for our antics; once again we are not talking about Rebel Row. We are not.”

Jeff, a member of Rebel Row and a self-claimed co-founder soaked up the recognition, but then immediately insisted the conversation be moved away from the topic of his group. After all, if this renegade group is made part of common conversation
in the senate, it becomes a part of it, thereby vulnerable to infiltration and no longer a rebellious and free entity.

Other senators who do not partake in the same aggressive verbal displays of their opinions do not have the access to the same peer support like Rebel Row members. These senators tend to seek recognition and release through other means, particularly through social networking on the internet by means of Instant Messenger and Facebook.

**Erin:** “There is no communication and everyone gets shot down.”

**Tiffany:** “I think that is why Tara is so upset. She’s never had a chance to talk about these things and I feel like she is almost oppressed in a way and like her mentality, ya know what I mean?”

**Erin:** “Do you have her screen name?”

**Tiffany:** “Oh yeah!”

**Erin:** “She wrote a poem have you seen that? That is so about student government. The one, that is, on her profile. It was a little creepy, it was a little creepy. I read it yesterday and I was like …”

**Tiffany:** “Yeah she’s… really, really, really angry, but I think she has recognized how to speak out and I think, I think she’s feeling better, but you are exactly right, and honestly, she’s not the only one. I think she’s the one that is the most angry about it but I think she’s not alone, I think most senators hold the same concept embody the same concept that Tara holds within them, just how angry they are about it differs.”

Finally, some senators have access to recognition through subordinate senators who do not hold leadership positions by way of continuous praise or control. These leaders do not typically overtly demand recognition, but on occasion they do. In one such situation Erin openly demanded praise from her committee during the end of a regular meeting. Though her comment was situated in a tone of jest and playfulness, it was a legitimate request if not a demand that resulted in the cooperation of the committee members.
Erin: “Why do we love Erin? Let’s go around the room.”  
Keisha: “Because she has on a Pink Floyd shirt and I happen to like Pink Floyd.”  
Erin: “Yea!!!!”  
Eleni: “I love Erin ‘cause she yelled at me…” (Everyone laughs)  
Kevin: “Oh seriously?” (Surprised they are actually saying why they love Erin)  
Eleni: “And for not putting up fliers, I said I would hang-up fliers, and I did, I did!”  
Erin: “Five, you hung up five!” (laughs)  
Eleni: “I hung up all over president’s park thank you! But she yelled at me, and I like cried!” (Everyone bursts out hysterically)  
Erin: “I didn’t know you cried!” (Erin references this comment a few days later with genuine remorse)  
Eleni: “And so now I do my projects! I am a good senator because Erin really yelled at me!” (Everyone laughs and applauds)  
Erin: “I yell at you a lot!”  
Kevin: “Because she is always concerned about what everybody is doing always wants to make sure people are getting stuff done and even if it is kinda out of love sometimes, I donno, umm it always works out!”  
Erin: “It’s only because I love you and I know you can do better!” (laughs)  
Keisha: “Sometimes people they have potential you just need to push.”  
Erin: “I am a pusher.” (laughs)  
Whitney: “Alright I will cut it off with ‘Erin is a pusher.’” (Everyone laughs)  
David: “Nice!”

Just as Kanter discovered at Indsco, the senators desire to be recognized and feel part of the group. Senators and employees alike seek recognition through social connections and through recognition by subordinates. These means of peer recognition and acceptance are crucial for the senators because they do not receive them outside of their organization as the student body is hardly aware of the group and the administration is not supportive or empowering. However, these social recognitions may not be equally attainable for every senator, and gender may impact these interactions.
The Generation without Gender

The study of the student senate was originally intended to focus on the relevance of gender in a student organization. When asked about gender, most senators seemed surprised, caught off guard, or even a bit uncomfortable. Some provided prepared and politically correct lines, others starred blankly, and a few responded with a sense of inspired interest and intrigue.

When asked, the senators who tended to avoid the topic of gender were generally those who are situated within a leadership position, but constantly seek reassurance from their peers. Senators who fit very closely to this category were those who claim not to notice gender at all. These senators seem to be new in the organization and unfamiliar with the group’s practices and nuances. For example, Tiffany, a second year senator and committee chair, responded to a posed question on the topic of women in the senate during a face-to-face interview.

Whitney:
“I am going to back track. Do you have any theories as to why there are fewer women in student senate?”

Tiffany:
“Umm, no. I was raised to not put a gender on anything, my dad is a neuro-psychologist, so growing up he gave me non-gendered toys and all that fun stuff… dad was the only guy in my life, I had all sisters, so I was never in a male dominating environment, it was like a whatever environment. But, I read about theories about how like women approach issues in a different manner, and also I am not going to lie, guys like Shawn who think that guys are better than females. Like, honestly I can’t tell you any…I think Josh like ya know has a higher respect for guys versus girls but don’t think that is the sole reason, I donno. I can’t tell you, I really don’t pay attention to that stuff.”
Tiffany, a usually outspoken and thoughtful student, seemed befuddled and out of her element when the topic of gender was raised. She simply did not know how to discuss gender in any concrete way. Instead, she reduced gender to an action, and spoke of the men who came to mind. Josh is a fifth year senator and member of the leadership team and the senator whom Tiffany considers to be more respectful of men than women.

When Josh was asked why women are the minority in senate he seemed defensive. He mentioned it is easy for anyone to become a member of senate and gender is simply not an issue.

*Whitney:* “Okay. Do you think there is potentially a reason, or something to do with the structure of the organization, why there are so fewer women senators?

*Josh:* “Don’t know the answer to that question. I donno, I look at gender, race, sexuality, everything, if you view something in that prism, that is all you are going to see. I tend to think along the lines of personal responsibility, it is so easy to get into senate, it is ridiculous. It is so easy to get anywhere in this office. All you have to do is come in the door and say, ‘I wanna do this, I wanna be in student government,’ Great, there are three branches. Each one is ridiculously easy to get into. Except for the student body president, it is the only thing you have to compete to get into, anything else is a joke. To get into it is quite a joke, I mean elections, there are forty seats open… and generally only about twenty to thirty run, so if you get one vote, your own, you’re in. You just have to go fill out a packet, so I don’t understand why it is the way it is, but my only… to me is well, I guess for some reason women just don’t want to join. I don’t know why, it is probably the same reason why other people, other men don’t want to join they either don’t know or they don’t see the impact we can make, and that is, I think that would be a de-motivator for anyone to join, not just a specific subset of the population. So I try to see it as a problem as a whole, not just a gender subset, if that helps you.”

Josh was defensive about the topic of women in the senate likely because he was uncomfortable with the potential implications of his answer. Instead, Josh turned the
question into one of effort and action of senators. He explained senate is easy to access, but as he proposed, simply undesirable to some. Access, for most workplaces and organizations, is granted for all qualifying members regardless of race, ethnicity, and gender. Access, therefore is not the issue, but ability to advance within the accessible organization is limited. Though Josh may not realize it, his defensive response alludes to a revolving door for female senators in the student senate. These female members are easily ushered in, and for many, just as quickly out. For the majority of those women senators who do remain, they are stuck in a cycle that discourages their leadership.

When Allie, a first year female senator, was asked if she ever felt like the only girl in the room, because in fact she usually was, she found the mere question amusing. She interpreted the question to imply that there is a threat in being the only woman in the room, and felt the need to reassure me of her safety. In the end she insisted, like many other senators, she simply does not notice gender at all.

_Whitney:_ “Do you ever feel like the only girl in the room?”
_Allie:_ “That’s funny! I’ve never really noticed it to tell you the truth. I mean, it’s interesting that you say that. I don’t really feel threatened or anything I feel like I have good support base, like, I’m more comfortable… well no I don’t wanna say that, I’m comfortable around guys. So I don’t really umm like it doesn’t bother me but also like Erin’s been really helpful to me, and a lot of the older kids. I haven’t really been focusing on gender, but that is interesting that you say that. Truthfully I haven’t really noticed it.”

The two senators who claimed that they did recognize a difference in male and female participation were both the only women of color in the group. Because of their unique positions and experiences as minority women they were likely more aware of difference and inequity both in the senate and the university as a whole. Tara, a first year
senator and woman not of European descent, mentioned during a face-to-face interview that the men are more likely to participate in political games that are required for advancement and recognition more so than the women.

_Whitney:_ “Do you see a difference in involvement between men and women in student senate?”
_Tara:_ “I do, I think women tend to be turned off by all the… the games and the scheming and trying to climb the ladder. I think the guys surprisingly, I don’t know the reason why, but I’ve noticed they like the competition they almost enjoy it. Like, I heard Bill say once ‘I’m playing the game’ and you can tell there is a sorta fun-ness to it, ya know? Shawn said the same thing ya know ‘It’s why we love senate.’ One day when I was steaming mad, my face was red and he was like, ‘Ya know, ya gotta love it!’ And I really don’t enjoy it, I don’t like fights, I like calmness and that’s it.”

_Whitney:_ “Do you think there is also a reason why fewer women run for senate?”
_Tara:_ “Fewer of them stick around, a lot of them quit, a lot of my friends who were women have quit throughout the year.”

_Whitney:_ “So there is higher turnover with women?”
_Tara:_ “Yes.”

Tara also mentioned the high turnover of female senators. Josh had stated above that it is easy for anyone to be a senator, and Tara stated that resignation is the problem.

The revolving door emerges again. Perhaps access is not a problem for the females, but something about the organization of the group is not conducive for female senators to want to stay. When Keisha, a second year female member of the leadership team and woman of color, was asked during an interview why there are fewer women in senate she added to the puzzle by stating that there is an intimidation factor.

_Whitney:_ “I have noticed that there are fewer women in student senate, (Keisha responded solemnly, ‘yeah’) I wanted to know if you have any theories or ideas on maybe why fewer women seem to be interested in senate.”

_Keisha:_ “Umm... I guess going back to the question that you asked a long time ago, it might be a sense of intimidation, I do know that there has been a
change like I have been out of high school for almost two years, and when I was in SCA in my old high school there were actually women, the only two guys on our exec board were actually treasurer and vice president but the rest of us were actually women. When I came here I noticed that especially as a freshman senator, there are very few women and it could be that they are intimidated, pretty much I think that they are intimidated, I donno it could be other reasons, but yeah.. I really do want to see a lot more women in student senate, that is the reason I am trying to start the diversity committee for senate, that way we can get more women, people from other schools that go to [our school] and people of other races because I have noticed we have lacked in that too.”

Whitney: “That’s by far the minority.”
Keisha: “Yeah. So hopefully that is something I can accomplish with the diversity committee, is trying to see if I can get more women to join senate.”

Keisha suggested that women are intimidated, yet she was unable to explain why. Keisha instead spins the question in a positive manner by focusing on her action and plans to create a diversity committee. Gender is not the biggest concern for Keisha either, but she does recognize the need for a friendlier environment for women and minorities.

Finally, when a co-ed focus group of men and women were asked about gender their responses were very revealing of the fact the gender resides at a deeper level of consciousness for the senators while peer acceptance remains in the forefront of their minds. When asked if there was a gender divide in the senate, a female responded first hesitantly but affirmatively, and then the men chimed in and said that gender was not an issue in senate, finally the same female retracted her original statement and agreed with the men.

Whitney: “And I want to ask you another question, and this may seem sensitive, so I hope I don’t offend anyone, but I was curious, does anyone feel that there may be a gender divide in student senate?” (Random answers from group)

Alma: “I donno some…”

Ted: “No.”
Marko: “Not at all.”
Bill: “I don’t think so.”
Alma: “Yeah.” (In agreement with Bill)
Sarah: “Amazingly, this is one place where it really doesn’t happen.”
Whitney: “Do you think there are any other divides other than old senators and new senators?” (Long pause)
Marko: “You mean like race, or anything like that?”
Whitney: “Right, anything like that.”
Marko: “I don’t think so.” (Pause)
Alma: “I just thought of another divide.”
Whitney: “Yeah?”
Alma: “Well a lot of the people in the senate are from out of state and a lot of them are residents and a lot of them are government majors.”
Group: “Yeah!”

The topic of gender is still a delicate one to address. As can be noted above, even I felt the need to sugar-coat my questions and practically apologize for even posing a question about gender. Especially in the environment of the focus group, it is not surprising that the minority senators were impacted in the decision making by the others. Alma changed her comment as soon as male senators disagreed with her. It is doubtful that Alma retracted her comment because she felt intimidated as a woman, but that she was influenced by groupthink, a concept developed by Janis (1972), and desire to be regarded as one of the group and to minimize group conflict, just as I did.

After several months of observations, interviews and focus groups the instances of overt gender stratification or sexism could be counted on one hand, but the subtle suggestions of gender difference were discovered constantly. The senators protested that gender was irrelevant, but the data argue with their claims. This study was originally intended to focus solely on gender, and therefore my questions were centered on that topic. I found these questions to be off-putting to the senators, and constantly reworked them throughout my eight month observational period. Near the end of my interviews,
gender difference questions were rarely posed, but these differences were steadily observed. Gender differences were clearly visible in some ways such as the disproportionate number of females to males or the fact that the language of the constitution only began to include the words ‘she’ and ‘her’ in 2007. However gender seemed most relevant when addressed directly by me, and responded to hesitantly or defensively by the senators. I argue that the obvious discomfort with gender discussions is not necessarily an indicator of discrimination or sexism within the group, in fact the group seemed more comfortable with gender differences than I had anticipated, instead their hesitation in verbal response is a testament to the students’ unfamiliarity with the topic and concern with its possible implications. This generation of students has simply not been exposed to sex and gender conversations like some generations before them, and certainly not in the way that sociologists may understand sex and gender. To these students, women’s liberation is a chapter in their history books, and not so much a current struggle. Additionally, the fact that the senators so quickly defend the equality of their organization is likely a product of a generation where mothers and fathers both have careers, girls play sports nearly as frequently as boys, and women even govern entire countries across the globe. This generation of young adults is more familiar with new struggles that particularly center on ideas of identity. The concepts of diversity, multiculturalism, socio-economic status, and the like are all notions well ingrained in their minds, and these are the topics of difference they are most comfortable discussing. According to these student senators’ persistent claims, the presence of gender is vanishing and its meaning is changing with this generation that claims to have no gender.
However, evidence discovered in the senators’ actions and words support this study’s suggestion that gender inequality and difference have certainly not disappeared and its meanings are still relevant though its physical operations may seem invisible.

*Struggling with University Administration*

The Student Senators love to sit around the office and casually discuss the university on-goings. During this time they will often brainstorm ways to improve the university and how to appease the student body. Occasionally, these concepts will actualize into real projects or initiatives. For various reasons such as insufficient economic resources, lack of emotional support, or other such rationale these projects are often pushed to the wayside or entirely forgotten. The senators often blame the failure of their projects on the lack of support from the university administration. Kevin, a second year student senator, took on a major project to add Halal meat, an Arabic term for meat that is permissible by Islamic law, to the university menu. He found this project to be an uphill battle that was only made worse by unsupportive administrators. During a small focus group, Kevin discussed with some difficulty his frustration with the administration.

*Kevin:* “Kinda like for me when I got shut down for the whole Halal thing… So it’s like I have been trying this whole entire thing. I guess I am still trying, like we are having a meeting this Monday to get together and say, ‘This is what we are doing this year,’… but I am still trying to go through it, but it is a complete, like after all that work, ya know them just going back on what they originally said and then not having (inaudible)…”

*Whitney:* “So they are saying ‘no’ with the Halal meat?”

*Kevin:* “Pretty much.”
Kevin was often quiet during meetings, and his comments reflect on his less confrontational personality. However, some senators were more vocal with their feelings of dissatisfaction, overtly complaining about their thoughts of being disliked and abused. Erin, a fourth year senator and committee chair, often expressed her feelings without reservation, and in this case, her extreme discontent with her perceived sentiments of the student paper and administrators.

*Whitney:* “Ok. Why are senator resigning or why do senators resign?”

*Erin:* “Because there is no return. You do so much work and you get so little return; because the [student paper] hates us. You will have people stand in this office and say administration hates us, [the student paper] hates us, blah, blah, blah. You just have people who say that to you then you do things such as Neighborhood Watch and six people show up and there’s just so little return and there is so little recognition or credibility. That’s…why do you want to be part of an organization that you do so much and you feel like crap when it is done?”

The student senate had an especially trying year during my research. Several senators resigned, a well liked advisor accepted new employment, and the student body president was nearly impeached. All of these occurrences caused heavy scrutiny from the student body, student newspaper, and the administration; more attention than had ever been received before, and most all of it negative. The senators spent the first half of the semester attempting to fight any stigmas they had assumed by reaching out to the student newspaper and blaming other parties, but in the end found these attempts irresolute. Eventually the senators expressed a desire to move on from the rocky year toward a new beginning. These resolutions include comments about breaking away from bad images and regaining the respect of university administration. They began these attempts by
cleaning the office, having a cubicle wall torn down to allow for more meeting space, and applying for funding to create a new banner. Though these minor attempts were successful to an extent, they still did not accomplish the university wide impact the senators desired, which led them to fall back into their familiar excuses and blame the administration. New senators were made familiar with this growing blame culture, and during an interview Allie, a first year female senator, expressed her developing feelings toward the administration.

*Whitney:* “Right now is there dominance of a certain group?

*Allie:* “Uh, I wouldn’t say that, I would say that senate, because I came as a freshman, each year is different and I hear that a lot, but this year in particular was different because it wasn’t as stable. Umm, I think they were more, umm, more directed towards the administrators and the administration, and that’s just kinda the vibe I got. And I didn’t know really what other people thought but I feel like there could have been a more prominent presence of student activities. Like Tiffany’s committee, she does wonderful things and really we should like really support that. And we’re not...not supporting that it deserves its, kinda, own group, cause it’s such a big deal.”

The rhetoric of university wide distain for student senate only added to the blaming practices of senators and increases feelings of uncertainty and insecurity. Other senators articulated their great frustration in regards to fear that the image of senate could be permanently damaged. Erin expressed her concern when discussing the lack of respect from the entire university, including the administration.

*Erin:* “The first time we get compared to this year’s student government next year you should really write an editorial, like ‘No we’re not!’ There is such a lack of respect from everyone, from the students, from the [student
paper], from the administration, senators to senators, senators to the exec., senators just to the administration. There are so many Debbie Downers and Ted is one of them, big Debbie Downer, everybody just needs to get off the Debbie Downer pills. Like, be happy, ya know!? Stop saying that we haven’t done anything!”

Many senators feared that their efforts were not recognized by the student body and administrators. Just as Erin mentioned the impact of “Debbie Downers,” during a focus group, Eleni discussed the ridicule she felt from her peers and the administrators.

_Eleni:_ “I think that the student body and the administration like if they were to realize that it’s a new senate I think that would be a tremendous help to the senate cause I know like people come up to me and they are like ‘Oh, why are you in senate? They don’t do anything.’ And I am like ‘Well actually, we’ve done this, this and this.’ And they are like ‘Oh whatever, student government didn’t do that.’ Ya know? I get it at home, and I get it here and I get in the car. I get it in the [student union], I am sitting in the office and they are like ‘Come on!’ I think like next year, and I know there are administrators out there that are like (in frustration) ‘Student government!’ they are tired of hearing about it… But I just think if they would take a deep breath and realize that this is a hard year and that next year is different I think that would relieve so much off the senate.”

Though the senators often express feelings of powerlessness and ridicule, there is still hope for the group within the younger, and less jaded, members. These senators recognize there is a chance to regain their previous status and demand more rights from the university. During an interview, Tiffany expressed her feelings as how to address adversity.

_Tiffany:_ “When administrators were like ‘No we aren’t going to get you the Halal thing, we are done,’ I was like no, ‘No! They said that would be our goal and that we would do everything possible to strive until we get it.’ No! Like now, administration, they have crossed the line and now you need to
prove them wrong, and you prove them wrong through student voice and student power and I think people get confused, it is important to work with administration that should be your first avenue, work together to get something done. But once you feel they are wrong, if your morals tell you they are wrong you should not be afraid to make a stance you should not be afraid to have everybody know about it. If something is ethical you would be afraid to tell your mother and the mass media and the mass of people and that’s if you truly believe what you are doing is right and that’s when student senate comes in too.”

Like many student organizations, the student senate often found obstacles in the way of their success and frequently blamed others for their failures. The University Administration determines student access to financial resources and therefore holds all institutional power and decision making. As Kanter (1973: 188) claimed, those who must work through another individual in order to accomplish a goal are essentially powerless. The senators often felt limited by this inaccessibility, and complained as a method of releasing frustration. While some senators dwelled on the alleged injustices, others looked toward the future. Tiffany suggested that when something feels truly wrong it should be addressed. If the administration is truly the limiting entity, the senators should address the situation instead of wasting energy on ineffective complaints and self-defeating acts. Just as the student senators are limited in their access to resources and power they are limiting themselves by not taking action. If the senators would begin to empower one another through mentoring of new senators, encouragement of original ideas, and support of members actions they would receive more positive responses from the student body and university administration. Access to power requires a partnership between the senators and the administrators, one that must be initiated by a united senate and accepted by a willing and benevolent administration. However, until such a bridge is
constructed, the divide between the groups remain, and the senators continue to hold firmly to their socially constructed hierarchy identifying roles and statuses in attempt to maintain some sense of control.

This voluntary group of student senators was formed, like any other student senate, to create an organization where students could organize and express their opinions regarding the university administration and its policies, and then turn those ideas into actions. Somewhere along the way the student senators lost their hold of institutional power and their ability to articulate a vision of themselves and affect change. Students have attempted to regain this power through the creation of roles and statuses, developing a social hierarchy that empowers the very limited leadership team, but not the other senators. This leadership team demands adherence of the senators through conversational control, the only way they know how. These tactics accomplish no tangible results, but only discourage participation. Without the presence of new senators and new ideas, the senate remains stagnate and ineffectual. However, the group is not without hope. The younger members seem optimistic about the future, and unless they are socialized to accept the older forms of behaviors, these optimistic attitudes coupled with proactive behavior will witness positive results to their thoughtful actions. These few younger senators continue to welcome new members to the meetings, and proudly wear their insignia. Though the social hierarchy in place makes the plight of the student senate seem rather grim; a new system of operation with the support from university administrators will allow for the development of an effective student organization.
5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine a student organization at a public university and identify how the students’ statuses, roles, and behaviors directly relate to their experiences and opportunities within the organization. This fresh consideration of workplace culture, when viewed through the workings of a student organization, allows insight into the changing dynamics of the workplace and how social interaction influences that environment. The student senators are hardly different from the Indsco employees, partaking in the same peer cultures and demanding of the same social recognitions. Upon entrance into the organization, senators are identified based on a variety of images and characteristics that the senate values at the given time, depending on which qualities the new senators embody they will be given roles with varying levels of social status. Because of the importance of peer acceptance, opportunity for leadership is given to some senators, but not to others. Some senators are given access to knowledge and mentors while others are discouraged or ignored completely. Existing literature suggests these disadvantages may be due to gender or other minority statuses, and in several situations the data does suggest that gender or race difference can be a limiting factor in an organization that finds reassurance in the similarity of its members. The data collected during my research also strongly suggests that peer acceptance and social conformity may be most explanatory of the senator’s attitudes and behaviors that result in
varying levels of leadership opportunity for the socially accepted senators. Peer acceptance may be especially difficult to attain for senators who are viewed as outsiders due to various social differences such as age, cultural background, and other such factors. Additionally, many of the student senators balance work, school, and multiple leadership positions in other organizations. These other commitments demand time that cannot be given to the senate. These students who are juggling other commitments will not have the same freedom to lounge around the office and engage in various social activities as others do on a daily basis. Even for those senators who do have the extra time to commit to the senate, they may feel unwelcome by the closed groups and cliques that dominate the office, and they may therefore purposefully choose to avoid unnecessary social interaction. However, this voluntarily group of students thrives on this social time in the office, and without peer interaction shared experiences and group understandings cannot be attained. Therefore, these socially inactive senators are not as well known and therefore they are likely viewed as less committed to the organization, and as a result, they are less likely to be trusted and accepted by their peers.

Those senators who have settled into their niches find themselves situated in various groups defined by status and social power. Those senators with the most social power are unofficially called the “Elite Minority” or the “Inner Clique.” Kanter (1977:68) claimed that the closed circles at Indsco made it difficult for outsiders to break in, and the only way to reduce this limitation is to reduce pressure for social conformity. Kanter’s suggestion for the dissolution of the closed circles rings true for the student senate as well, but requires further attention as to why these pressures exist and how to remove
them. The pressure for social conformity appears to arrive from a sense of powerlessness and lack of control that is created by insufficient support and recognition as well as the denial of institutional power from university administrators. In response to this lack of institutional power the senators attempt to create a substitutive social power and recognition within their own group by means of a socially constructed hierarchy. The senators continue to compete with one another, draw some senators into their cliques, keep others closed out, argue in meetings, and verbally abuse one another in private and in public. In order to eliminate these behaviors and negative results, the senators must create a more supportive environment that encourages the participation and leadership of all members, and the senators must initiate these changes themselves.

After several months observing these student senators, reviewing the literature, and connecting rhetoric and practice I have formed several recommendations for the student senate and university administration. First, access to structural decision making and financial resources must be given to the senate. Second, more intentional advising and mentoring, and less supervision, by university administration must be initiated. Third, the closed groups and self-defeating environment of the senate must be identified and dissolved. And finally, a peer-mentoring program within the senate must be established.

The first step in this process of correction and improvement of the student senate requires access to structural decision making and financial resources. I argue that the students create their closed groups and selective leadership hierarchy because they desire to simulate power where they have none. If the senators are given some institutional
power they may redirect their attention to larger university issues instead of self-defeating behaviors. The students claim they desire to create change in the university; however structural changes require funding and access to top university administration. These needs can be met through a working partnership of administrators and students allowing them to work together toward common goals. This partnership requires better communication between senators and administrators and the sharing of institutional power. For example, many universities allow the student senate to manage student organization accounts and funding, I recommended that this control of resources should be given back to the student senators allowing them to have some institutional power. Additionally, university administrators should begin to invite student senators to meetings that effect university development initiatives, and allow them to voice their opinions at those meetings and forums. The incentive for administrators to partake in this process and relinquish some institutional power is that they will be taking part in an educational system which they promote by creating more competent and capable student leaders. Administrators will find the student government to be a more self-sufficient and productive organization that will meet the student body’s needs and produce more independent and knowledgeable student leaders that will only strengthen the university’s success.

The second recommendation for the improvement of the student senate is to implement more intentional advising and mentoring, and less direct supervision, of senators by university administration. The senators have had plenty of supervision over the years and will likely benefit from a less structured system allowing more creative
freedom and internal decision making. The senators may not need as much supervision as previously assumed, but they do however require the support and mentoring of administrators. The group may be able to stimulate more positive behaviors and actions on its own with the new optimism associated with gained power, but without mentoring from the administration it will likely fall back into old habits when disappointment and insecurities that typically follow difficult transitioning resurface. These advisors should be university administrators, graduate students, and faculty who have an interest in student learning and development. These advisors will not only serve as sounding boards and advocates for senate initiatives but will also provide a mentoring relationship for the students as they navigate their academic careers.

The third recommendation for the student senate’s success is to dissolve the closed and self-defeating environment the senators have created by opening these closed circles. This process will require a greater understanding of varying backgrounds and commitments of senators, a great effort that will demand a change in the culture of the group. Kanter (1977:103) claimed it is important to eliminate injustice and enhance opportunity while still providing personalized relationships and support networks in the workplace. These suggestions must also be applied to the student senate that would greatly benefit from some structured conversations around issues of diversity, race and gender. Once the issues that are creating the cliques have been identified, the senators can begin to eliminate them by developing a stronger teamwork structure. This teamwork structure should include all senators in the decision making process regardless of length of membership or status, the teamwork structure should delegate various tasks
to all members throughout the academic year, and should encourage participation from all senators during all meetings regardless of leadership position. These steps will likely increase group understanding of individual senators, develop a greater sense of purpose and usefulness in younger senators, and reduce the attrition rate of all senators.

Finally, a peer mentoring program must be established in the student senate. The senators must be given the opportunity to train and educate themselves once they have integrated the advice and support they have received from administrators. In the past thirty years a more inclusive environment has begun to take shape in the workplace. The desire to create a more nurturing environment by way of additional employee services is taking the workplace in a more forward direction that Kanter envisioned. Employees with a desire for more self-fulfillment will help in this process of change and growth in a positive manner by influencing their peers and the structure of the organization. For the student senate this peer mentoring program should connect older senators with newer senators so that they can educate one another. The new senators will learn parliamentary procedure, how to create legislation, and important university administration contacts. The older senators will learn what new student needs are developing at the university and new ideas for the betterment of the organization and student body. These peer mentoring groups should be paired randomly, preferably to cross lines of gender and race to ensure that senators will be paired with others they do not already know so as not to encourage previous relationships that valued a type of group homophily. The student senators have the ability to create these changes and improve their group, but first they must initiate this process themselves by inviting administrators to partake in a partnership, requesting
access to institutional power, and accepting administrative guidance and mentoring as they begin to navigate these new waters.

As Kanter (1977:3) claimed, “If jobs create people, then the corporation is the quintessential people-producer.” These student senators are not simply members of a student organization, but the future of the American workplace and the country as a whole. Like the Indsco employees, the statuses attributed to the senators and the roles they receive in the organization influence their behaviors and actions within that group. These actions create division among group members resulting in various social groupings and cliques. The lessons these senators learn in their student organization will translate into their working lives after college. The student senators who are given no power or ability to influence, like Indsco secretaries, only find a sense of authority in social control tactics and gossip; these senators will eventually become employees who do not know how to wield power ethically when it does finally come their way. If the students are instead readily given the tools to make structural decisions early in the learning process, they will learn to work within an environment that has purpose and can function without destructive social control. These students will then enter the workplace with a better understanding of the meaning of work where bullying, gossip, and controlling behaviors are not utilized in order to achieve.

As stated by Kanter (1977):

New tools can be provided, the people who are stuck can be offered challenges, the powerless can be given more discretion, more influence over decisions.
Tokens can be provided with allies. And more. If it is organization structure rather
than intrinsic character that determines organizational behavior, then self-
defeating, self-perpetuating cycles can be interrupted. The fabric of job
relationships can be changed. (P.11)

Like Indsco employees the senators work within an organization structure that
limits their abilities to achieve; therefore they need guidance, challenges, and rewards for
their accomplishments in order to break the self-defeating cycles in which they are
currently stuck. By studying these students in their place of work, and learning more
about the individuals within the organizational structure, we move toward a greater
understanding of social interaction within the workplace and the needs of those
employees. The research of organizations and corporations must continue so that our
understanding of organizational structures develops, and our ability to provide those tools
for advancement continues. As we gain greater understandings of hierarchical
organization structures and the behaviors they encourage, we can develop new and
equitable systems, and then, power relationships in work, school, and social interaction
can begin to change.
Appendix A
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES
This research was conducted to better understand how gender may be relevant to the activities and organizational practices of the Student Senate. You were interviewed in the Fall Semester of 2006. This interview took place in the Student Senate Office at George Mason University or in another location on campus and was audio taped. The interview consisted of approximately fifteen questions posed by me and lasted approximately 60 minutes. This interview will be transcribed and the collected data will be used by the researcher in her thesis paper.

RISKS
There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS
There are no benefits to you as a participant.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The data in this study is confidential. (1) Your name is not included on the interview transcriptions and other collected data; (2) A code is placed on the interview transcriptions and other collected data in place of your name; (3) through the use of an identification key, the researcher is able to link your interview to your identity; and (4) only the researcher has access to the identification key. Any audio tapes that were created are only accessed by the researcher and will be destroyed after the completion of the study.

PARTICIPATION
Though the interview has already taken place your participation is still voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason without prejudice. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

CONTACT
This research is being conducted by Whitney Jorns at George Mason University. She may be reached at 703-795-3425 for questions or to report a research-related problem. You may also reach the Research Advisor, Dr. Amy Best, at 703-993-1426. You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Subject Protections at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT
I have read this form and agree to participate in this study.

_________________________
Name

_________________________
Date of Signature

Version Date: May 2007
Appendix B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Introduction

Upon meeting with students I immediately introduced myself, explained that I was a former student senator myself, and now pursuing my M.A. in Sociology. I offered basic information to students about the purpose of my study including an interest in leadership, communication and gender. I always prefaced my interview by noting that I had a list of questions already constructed, but that I would likely add questions throughout the course of the interview.

Consent Form

I would then deliver the consent form(s) to students and ask them to read over them in their entirety. As they would sign the form I would remind them that the interview was voluntary and they may refuse to answer any questions or even end the interview at any time. I then collected the consent form(s.)

Audio Recording

After I had collected the consent form(s) I would inform students I was about to turn on the audio recorder. When the audio recorder was on I would always state, “We are now tapping.” This statement was to remind the students that from this point until I turned off the recorder everything they said would be recorded.

Interview Questions

Interview 1
Describe to me a typical senate meeting.
What are you doing to increase new senators’ knowledge?
Do you feel you are working with a diverse group?
What kind of impression do you think you are making on new senators?
What is going well in senate?

Interview 2
What does arguing entail?
Do you think meetings are intimidating for new senators?
Can you tell me a little bit more about the writing of legislation?
Is there a different experience in senate for male senators and female senators?
What do you feel senate needs to improve on?

Interview 3
How would you define a leader?
Who would you identify as a leader?
How does one earn respect?
Do you feel that everyone is given an equal opportunity in senate to assert themselves?
Can you explain the difference between old senators and new senators and what classifies one as such?
How is leadership determined?
Do you feel having knowledge of Robert’s Rules is fairly important?
How is interaction among senators different in the two meetings (senate and committee)?
Do you see a difference in involvement between female senators and male senators?

Interview 4
What is the difference between senate meetings and committee meetings?
Is it important to be vocal in meetings?
What is a leader in the student senate?
What is the difference between old and new senators?
How does one earn respect?
Do you see a difference in involvement between men and women in senate?
Do you think there is a reason why fewer women run for senate?
Do you think there are certain personality traits that are required to elevate status?
What do you feel senate is doing well, right now?

Interview 5
How is leadership composed?
Do you see examples of good leadership in senate?
Do you feel there are differences between older and newer senators?
What criteria do you look for in a potential committee chair?
What do you feel senate is doing well?
What is your return rate next year?
What do you feel senate could improve?
What initiatives are you trying next year?

Interview 6
What committee(s) are you a member of?
What is your role in your committee?
Will you be a senator again next year?
Within your committee, what kind of tasks do you do?
Do you ask to do these things or are they appointed to you?
Do you feel that you have the opportunity to participate more so in committee or formal meetings?
Who speaks primarily in formal meetings?
Do you have an opportunity to learn Robert’s Rules?
In what ways are committee meetings different from formal meetings?
What qualities does one need to be a leader?
Do you think there is a certain way people earn respect in senate?
Do you think there are ways you can lose respect?
What are some things you feel have been difficult or you would like to see changed?
Do you feel there is a certain group of people that are more attracted to student senate?
What made you want to be a senator?
Do you see a difference between old senators and new senators?
What are you looking forward to next year, and changes you want to see?

Interview 7
What committee(s) are you a member of?
How long have you been a senator?
What is your role in the committee?
Do you volunteer to do things?
Are you returning next year?
Do you feel everyone has an equal opportunity to participate?
What qualities do you look for in a leader?
Do you think there are certain ways one can gain respect in student senate?
Do you ever feel like the only girl in the room?
What would you like to see improved next year?
Is there a difference between old and new senators?
Do you think there is a certain group of people who are more likely to join senate?

Interview 8
What is your role in senate?
What makes a good leader?
Are there certain qualities or criteria you think a person should have in order to be a leader?
Do you feel there are good leaders in senate?
Do you feel there is good leadership potential?
Can you explain the difference between old and new senators?
Do you think other senators have the same mindset as you?
Do you think there is a reason why there are so fewer women in senate?
Do you see hope for senate?

Interview 9
How is your committee organized?
What makes your committee different or better than others?
Does every committee have a vice chair?
What are the strengths and challenges in your committee?
What does empowerment mean to you?
What qualities do you feel a good leader embodies?
Do you think there is a difference between leadership style and leadership behavior?
Why do senators resign?
Are you returning next year?
What do you see in senate’s future?
What do you think there are fewer women in senate?
In what ways do you think senate can improve?
Interview 10
What is your role in senate?
How has your participation changed since you were ‘promoted?’
What is the difference between a formal senate meeting and a committee meeting?
Is there a difference in opportunity to participate in formal and informal meetings?
Do you feel it is important to be vocal in senate meetings?
How long have you been a senator?
What is the difference between old and new senators, in your opinion?
What qualities make a good leader?
What quality of leadership is currently in senate?
Do you think there are a good amount of leaders right now?
Do you see a positive outlook for the future?
Do you see senate as a hierarchy?
How do people express they have respect for each other?
Do you have any ideas why fewer women seem to be interested in senate?
In what areas do you see room for improvement next year?
Do you think there will be a difference when your full time advisor begins?
What do you think senate is doing well right now?

Focus Group Questions

Focus Group 1
What is a typical student senate meeting like?
In what ways do people gain or lose respect?
How are working towards change in the future?
To the new senators, do feel empowered?
Do you feel there may be a gender divide in the senate?
Do you think there are other divides?
Do you feel there is a dominate group in the senate?
Do you feel there is a homogenous group in senate?

Focus Group 2
What qualities do you look for in a leader?
Do you feel there are currently displays of good leadership in senate?
How do you feel leadership could be more effective in senate?
How does one gain respect in senate?
How does one lose respect?
You say this is a closed environment, do you think that makes it difficult for senators to participate?
Why do senators resign?
How would you like to see senate improve next year?
Focus Group 3
What are the qualities that make a good senator?
What makes a good leader?
How does one gain respect?
How does one lose respect?
Does everyone have an equal opportunity to become a member of leadership?
How would you like to see senate improve next year?
What makes you proud to be a senator?

Focus Group 4
What is your role as a committee chair?
What does the average senator look like?
How do you divide tasks?
What is a leader?
Why do senators resign?
Why do you do senate, why are you here?
REFERENCES


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CURRICULUM VITAE

Whitney Jorns was born in Arlington, Texas in 1983. She spent most of her childhood moving around the country, settling in Northern Virginia in 1998. She graduated from Oakton High School, Vienna, Virginia, in 2002. She received her Bachelors of Arts degree in Sociology from George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, in May of 2006. She has worked as a Graduate Assistant for Student Activities and as an Undergraduate Admissions Representative for the University during her graduate studies. She will receive her degree of Master of Arts in Sociology in May of 2008.