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Experiences of Historically Black and Traditionally Latino Fraternity and Sorority Members at a Predominately White Institution

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Fred McCall entitled "Experiences of Historically Black and Traditionally Latino Fraternity and Sorority Members at a Predominately White Institution." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in College Student Personnel.

Terrell L. Strayhorn, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Norma Mertz, Jane Redmond

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Experiences of Historically Black and Traditionally Latino Fraternity and Sorority
Members at a Predominately White Institution

A thesis

Presented for the Master of Science Degree

The University of Tennessee-Knoxville

Fred C. McCall III

May, 2007

Abstract

Research on college students and student groups is so important because student populations are continuously changing and administrators must keep up to meet the needs of evolving students. In particular, African American and Latino fraternities and sororities are different from majority Greek organizations. Their differences are sometimes clustered together although these are two very different cultural groups. Through interviews with these two groups of students, the principal investigator attempted to better understand the experiences of African American and Latino fraternity and sorority members as well as their similarities and differences. The examination of results identify several themes outlining the experiences of these groups of students as well as explained the differences in the initial contact with the organization and the membership intake experiences.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Higher education has become increasingly diverse over the last century with several minority populations joining the general student body (Chang, 1999). Yet, there is still much to learn and understand about different minority groups and how they experience college. Cuyjet (1997) describes the critical student adjustment that takes place for new students to the campus climate, especially for African American males. This is due to a perception and reality of a hostile environment that exists for minority populations in higher education. It is also known that minority students face a lot of obstacles when it comes to entering higher education and once they do enter the ivory tower they have worse experiences than their white counterparts (Bird et al., 1992).

A number of campus services and organizations have been developed over time to accommodate the needs of minority students (Watson et al., 2002) including fraternities and sororities. African-American fraternities and sororities began on predominately white and historically black colleges and universities approximately 100 years ago with the mission of providing support, leadership, and advancement for African-Americans and these institutions continue that mission today (Kimbrough & Harper, 2006). More recently, Latino fraternities and sororities were started on college campuses around the country with similar missions directed toward the Latino student body and community. Although these are both racial/ethnic minority groups, their experiences in college and university campuses are markedly different (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kane, Beals, Valeau, & Johnson, 2004). Understanding the similarities and differences between these

organizations will (a) provide additional evidence of the differences between African American and Latino students and (b) allow administrators and higher education constituents to improve the support and retention of all students of color.

Although there has been considerable research on African American fraternities and sororities in areas such as hazing/pledging (Jones, 2004; Kimbrough, 2004, Sutton & Kimbrough, 1998), advising (Patton & Bonner, 2001), leadership (Kimbrough, 1998), and overall experiences (Schuh, Triponey, Heim, & Nishimura, 1992) much more research needs to be done in other areas that influence African American fraternity and sorority members as well as the general population of Black students. Some of these areas that influence this population are belonging, identity development, and values/ethics. More recently there has been more work on Latino college students and their experiences in higher education (Hurtado, S. & Carter, D.F., 1997). Much less research has been done on Latino fraternities and sororities and no studies currently examine the experiences of members in these organizations. Since African Americans were the largest minority population, many findings were generalized to other minority groups such as Latinos. This may be problematic when these groups have very different cultures, engage in unique customs, as well as hold diverse values. More research should be done to provide a base of knowledge about how these population experience fraternity and sorority life.

The research provides very little information about the experiences of both African American and Latino fraternity and sorority members. Having an understanding of issues such as why students join these organizations, the process by which they

become members, and the benefits they perceive to have gained after they become members would provide administrators with clues and insights into the needs of these as well as other minority students that may not be adequately met by the university. Although the fraternity and sorority system is in place at most institutions, colleges and universities should work with these organizations to ensure that the whole student is being developed and students are successfully matriculating to degree attainment. An examination of the similarities and differences that exist between these minority organizations could provide valuable insight into the different needs of these two student populations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine African American and Latino student's experiences with collegiate fraternities and sororities. In this study experience is defined as the active participation in a series of events including the process by which students decide to join a fraternity or sorority, the practice and procedure through which students attain membership, as well as the costs and benefits that students feel once they enter their organization. The sample for this study consisted of 10 undergraduate minority students over the age of 18 who were members of historically Black and traditionally Latino fraternities and sororities at a large land-grant research extensive university in the Southeast. Through interviews with individual students, the researcher sought to gain insight into how these students experience the university as well as fraternity and sorority life.

Research Questions

The central question of this research study is: What are the similarities and differences between the experiences of African American and Latino college students in fraternities and sororities?

Significance of Study

Several constituents of higher education may benefit from the results of this study. One group that may benefit from the results of this study is other majority and minority college students. The research in this study provides students with information about these minority groups experiences with collegiate and fraternity and sorority life. Students might use this information to diversify their student groups (Greek and non-Greek) by gaining understanding into the needs of these minority groups and attempting to work toward meeting the needs of heterogeneous populations.

Another group that may find this study significant would be those that advise fraternities and sororities along with advisors of other student groups. Since these are the people who will undoubtedly have to communicate and explain the results of this study to students and student groups who wish to improve their diversity, advisors should be knowledgeable about different student's needs and experiences. Advisors might use the information in this study to help students revise mission statements, improve advertising plans, and offer workshops on working with diverse student populations.

The third groups that might benefit from the results of this study are colleges and universities that have large minority student populations and those that wish to increase their minority student populations. The results of the study provide colleges and universities with the needs of African American and Latino college students. Colleges

and universities might use these results to aid them in recruitment and retention programs to increase the populations and graduation rates of these minority groups.

Studying the experiences of African American and Latino collegiate fraternity and sorority members has significance for future research. This study looked at the experiences of Latino and Black fraternity and sorority members, but future research could examine the experiences of other minority sub-groups such as Asian-Americans, religious(Jewish), and/or Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender fraternities and sororities. Similarities and differences could be explored between these minority groups or in relation to the majority student groups. Any of these studies would increase the knowledge and understand of the college student.

In another example, this study also looked at Latino student's experiences in collegiate fraternities and sororities. Future studies could look at the overall collegiate experience of Latino students instead of only those who join fraternities and sororities. Future studies could also be done on a specific functional area of higher education and student affairs such as academic advising or involvement. These studies would focus on how Latino students work through these areas of higher education. Since this is an increasing population in the United States and in higher education a study such as this could help in better understanding the culture, learning, and relations with this minority group.

The focus of this study is fraternity and sorority members and their experiences, similarities and differences. Future research could examine fraternity and sororities and their homogeneity. It would be interesting to know why these organizations have

continued to mainly recruit and give membership to students who share similar attributes although higher education has become much more diverse over the years. Researching the homogeneity of fraternities and sororities would expand the information available on fraternities and sororities as well as other student groups.

The study was also significant in terms of future theory. For example, models of retention focus on both academic and social integration into the life of college. Several studies have shown that social integration is an important construct in predicting persistence behavior (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tinto, 1993). Social integration is often facilitated through involvement in clubs and organizations such as fraternities and sororities. The present study is designed to identify the perceived gains that students accrue as members of historically Black and Latino fraternities and sororities. Results may have significance for student retention theory.

Implications

The results of this study may have important implications for student affairs policy, practice and research. As it relates to policy, a study such as this provides valuable and informative research to those who make decisions regarding university policy. If those who make decisions regarding students have current and reliable information about students, then they will have a higher likelihood to form their policies in a manner that will best meet today's students needs. Specifically, when it comes to those that work in Greek Life having information from this study will potentially aid in forming policies that enhance the Greek community on campus. A study such as this also

informs administrators of the experiences of their students so when issues and policy violations arise they are better equipped to handle those incidents.

Studying African American and Latino fraternity and sorority experiences could also impact practice. Administrators must constantly be aware of the changing experiences of student's that are entering today's colleges and universities. Those that work with fraternities and sororities would benefit from gaining a better understanding of these student's perceptions, motivations, initiation experience, and benefits as it relates to membership in their organizations. In regards to programs, building relationships, and inter council collaborations this research could make a difference in the dynamics of Greek Life offices. Administrators should be cognizant of their actions and behaviors when working with all students and have an understanding of how cultural differences can impact students in various ways.

This study looks at the experiences of African American and Latino fraternity and sorority members. Future research can explore other fraternities and sororities comparatively such as Asian American, Jewish, or Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT). It might also be beneficial to look at minority students who are members of majority organizations to understand what is different about those students. There are many avenues to be taken in looking at minority and majority fraternities and sororities, their experiences, and the relationships with each other. This would be important information for student affairs administrators and other higher education constituents.

Delimitations

As with all research, the present study had some delimitations. The first dealt with the sample. There were a limited number of Latino students who were members of the Latino fraternity and sorority that existed on campus, which happened to be the smallest chapters on campus. Since there was only one Latino fraternity and one Latina sorority there were not as many participants to select from as with the African American fraternities and sororities. The Latino fraternity consisted of three members only, all of whom were Latino. The sorority had a diverse membership of which only two members were actually Latina. One explanation for the lack of Latino students who were members of fraternity and sorority groups may be related to the university's overall Latino population. This delimitation is also related to the location of the university and the populations of Latino students that attended the school. Since there was not a great deal of Latino students that attended the institution, although it is a large research institution, this greatly affected the sample. These limitations may have influenced the results of the study in an unforeseen manner.

The second delimitation also dealt with the sample. Fraternities and sororities often take on the culture of the campus and region where the chapter began. Meaning that although two chapters are of the same fraternity, since they were chartered on two different campuses and possibly in two different regions of the country the experiences of the members in the chapter may be markedly different. The delimitation would be that students at this university will have different experiences than African Americans and

Latinos fraternity and sorority members at other colleges and universities. This may have also influenced the results of the study in an unanticipated way.

Another possible delimitation in the study had to deal with the subject matter. Members of fraternities and sororities, especially African American and Latino members, may be hesitant to discuss aspects or experiences regarding their fraternity or sorority that they feel are highly private and personal with outsiders. This would be true particularly when it comes to the circumstances through which students obtained membership in their respective organization which may have included illegal hazing or pledging practices. It is possible that participants may not disclose some information or chose to not be completely truthful about some part of their experience. If so, this might have some bearing on the study in an unexpected fashion.

In spite of these delimitations, information gathered in this study provides valuable information and understanding to higher education constituents. Therefore, even if some data may have been skewed, a greater portion of the gathered data is likely to be representative of participants and others in similar situations and contexts. Further, any of the data gathered regarding the experiences of these fraternity and sorority members is rich information and is beneficial in understanding their plight as college students.

Organization of Study

The present study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One introduced the topic of the study, the research questions and the significance of studying the experiences of African American and Latino fraternity and sorority members. The second chapter

reviews the literature relevant to the study. Chapter Three describes the methodology of the study, including the sampling techniques and procedures used to collect and analyze the data. The fourth chapter describes the results of the study while the final chapter discusses those results and their implications for future practice, research and policy.

Definitions

Black Greek Letter Organization (BGLO): Historically Black fraternities and sororities, which are social service oriented.

National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC): Umbrella organization of nine historically Black fraternities and sororities with the goals of unanimity of thought and action of these organizations as well as considering problems of mutual interest.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

In order to examine the experiences of African-American and Latino college students in fraternities and sororities, it was first necessary to explore the current body of literature on collegiate membership in African American and Latino fraternities and sororities. In the present study, experience is defined as active participation in a series of events including the process by which students decided to join a fraternity or sorority, the practices and procedures through which students attained membership, as well as the costs and benefits that students feel once they become a member of their organization. Since there is little or no other research that combines the experiences of African American and Latino students who are members of fraternities and sororities, it was necessary to review literature for each individual student population and bridge the gaps in the research regarding both of these populations.

Black Greek Letter Organizations

The research on Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) focuses on three areas: history, involvement, and gains associated with participating in such organizations. This historical literature suggests that African-American collegiate fraternities and sororities have a long and rich tradition of providing support for minority students at institutions of higher education (Ross, 2001). Since the founding of the first national collegiate BGLO in 1906, members were interested “in the struggles against segregation, discrimination, prejudice, mistreatment, and the advancement of themselves and their people, and in supplying an adequate leadership for them” (Brown, Parks, & Phillips,

2005, p. 60). One hundred years later these organizations are still providing support specifically for African-American college students at predominately White and historically Black colleges and universities (McKee, 1987; Schuh, Triponey, Heim, & Nishimura, 1992). In fact, McKee stated that BGLOs provide “the major social structure for [black] members and nonmembers” on predominately White campuses (p. 28).

The National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) was established on May 10, 1930 on the campus of Howard University. This umbrella organization for the historically black fraternities and sororities was established for “unanimity of thought and action as far as possible in the conduct of collegiate chapters of these organizations.” Also, included in the purpose of the NPHC was considering problems of mutual interest to the member organizations.

Today, there are nine historically Black fraternities and sororities under the umbrella of the National Pan-Hellenic Council. These organizations are Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity (Cornell University, 1906); Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority (Howard University, 1908); Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity (Indiana University, 1911); Omega Psi Phi Fraternity (Howard University, 1911); Delta Sigma Theta Sorority (Howard University, 1913), Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity (Howard University, 1914), Zeta Phi Beta Sorority (Howard University, 1920); Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority (Butler University, 1922); and Iota Phi Theta Fraternity (Morgan University, 1965). These nine social organizations provide support for African-American students who are navigating their way through higher education as well as contributing to the betterment of their campus and surrounding communities through scholarship and service (Ross, 2001).

Other research on historically Black fraternities and sororities looked at African American student involvement with respect to these organizations. Watson and Kuh (1996) found that African-American students at predominately White institutions and at historically Black institutions were involved in more activities than White students, spent more time in academic-related activities, and spent more time using campus facilities and participating in clubs and organizations than their white counterparts. Their study, along with several others, highlights the importance of social involvement for African-American students (Strayhorn, 2006; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001; Sutton & Terrell, 1997; Watson & Kuh, 1996; Watson, Terrell, Wright, Bonner, Cuyjet, Gold, et al., 2002). Sutton and Kimbrough asserts that multicultural organizations, including BGLOS, and commitment to serving disenfranchised members of the community are major reasons why African American students become actively involved in such organizations.

There are other reasons for African American students to join BGLOs. In a qualitative study looking at the experiences of members of six NPHC organizations, four themes related to students' involvement in these organizations were uncovered. They were bonding, service projects, role modeling, and cooperation (Shuh, Triponey, Heim, & Nishimura, 1992).

Finally, there is research that examines the gains or benefits associated with BGLO membership. One of the major benefits associated with joining a Greek-letter organization is leadership development (Sedlacek, 1987). Kimbrough (1995) found that Black Greek letter organizations provided their members with leadership opportunities that they might not otherwise receive in predominately White environments or

organizations. This is due to a far more complicated and crowded pecking order that exists in many majority organizations, which differs from Black Greek letter organizations that may be smaller, more intimate, and more likely to operate on a “family” or relational model versus the traditional hierarchical structures of position and power (McCauley, 1988; Tucker, 1988).

Kimbrough (1995) also found that these organizations offered a significant source of leadership development opportunities for their members. Additionally, minority students that are in these organizations hold more leadership positions than those minorities who are not part of Greek letter organizations. Therefore, leadership plays a major role in the impact of BGLOs on the experiences of minorities in college. If students feel that they may not have access to leadership opportunities that they perceive as being important for their personal and professional success, then they will be far less likely to join predominately White organizations, specifically fraternities and sororities, and as a result will seek out opportunities such as BGLOs.

Historically Black Greek letter organizations provide their members with opportunities for interacting with other students who share similar perspectives, cultural values, and experiences. Such interactions will assist them in adjusting to college and understanding their role in predominately White campuses. Not only that, but research has shown that interacting with individuals whose social and cultural experiences are different from one’s own is associated with positive learning outcomes and opinion change (Bennett, 2006). This is seen as another major benefit of joining these organizations.

Brown (2005) stated that “Black Greek letter organizations are examples of subgroups that play a major role in facilitating college adjustment for their members by providing a strong social support network that helps reverse the plight of social alienation and provides opportunities for cultural expression” (pg. 79) . Overall, predominately White fraternities and sororities do not offer African-American [or Latino] students the support and information needed to help them in their adjustment to college (Schuh et al., 1992). Since their inception, historically Black fraternities and sororities have helped their members negotiate their place in predominately White learning environments (Brown). Moreover, BGLOs provide a supportive and nurturing environment for African American students at predominately White institutions and their involvement in such organizations often eases their adjustment or transition experiences.

It seems reasonable to suggest that if BGLOs serve as supportive environments for African Americans at predominately White institutions, then the same may be true of traditionally Latino fraternities and sororities with respect to Latino students in college. The next section reviews the literature about these new additions to the landscape of student organizations.

Latino Fraternities and Sororities

More recently, the first Latino fraternity being founded in 1931 (Phi Iota Alpha), there has been a rise on college campuses of Latino fraternities and sororities as this population of students continues to grow in higher education. Reisberg (2000) asserts that colleges are seeing an explosion of Latino, Asian-American, and multicultural fraternities and sororities, which are joining the long-standing Black groups as

alternatives to the traditional Greek system. Latino fraternities and sororities have similar goals of education advancement, professional development, and betterment of the Latino communities.

Additionally, there are 23 Latino organizations that operate under the umbrella of the National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NAFLO). These organizations include Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, 1931); Lambda Theta Phi Fraternity (Kean University, 1975); Lambda Theta Alpha Sorority (Kean University, 1975); Lambda Sigma Upsilon Fraternity (Rutgers University, 1979); Chi Upsilon Sigma Sorority (Rutgers University, 1980); Lambda Upsilon Lambda Fraternity (Cornell University, 1982); Alpha Psi Lambda Fraternity (Ohio State University, 1985); Lambda Alpha Upsilon Fraternity (University of Buffalo, 1985); Lambda Theta Nu Sorority (California State University-Chico, 1986); Sigma Lambda Beta Fraternity (University of Iowa, 1986); Kappa Delta Chi Sorority (Texas Tech University, 1987); Gamma Zeta Alpha Fraternity (California State University-Chico, 1987); Sigma Lambda Upsilon Sorority (Binghamton University, 1987); Omega Delta Pi Fraternity (Texas Tech University, 1987); Lambda Pi Chi Sorority (Cornell University, 1988); Nu Alpha Kappa Fraternity (California Polytechnic State University, 1988); Omega Phi Beta Sorority (University of Albany, 1989); Sigma Lambda Gamma Sorority (University of Iowa, 1990); Alpha Pi Sigma Sorority (San Diego State University, 1990); Sigma Iota Alpha Sorority (State University of New York, 1990); Gamma Phi Omega Sorority (Indiana University, 1991), Lambda Pi Upsilon Sorority (State University of New York-Geneseo, 1992); Gamma Alpha Omega Sorority (Arizona State University,

1993). All of these organizations were founded out of a need that existed on their respective campus for support of Latino students. The mission of these organizations includes positive relationships in their communities as well as further development of members and other fraternal organizations.

Perhaps not surprisingly, there is a paucity of research on traditionally Latino fraternities and sororities. On the one hand, these organizations are nascent additions to the landscape of student organizations in higher education. On the other, most of the enrollment boom among Latino college students has occurred over the last decade or so. More research on Latino college students focuses on their experiences in college (Hurtado & Carter, 1997) not their experiences in traditionally Latino fraternities and sororities.

Latino College Students

There is less research on Latino and Latina college students than African American college students, especially in terms of gender-based studies. Latino students are a rapidly growing population in higher education. While more research should be done that examines their unique experiences and needs in college (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998), the research that does exist on this population highlights the importance of families, communities, and social interaction. Dayton and colleagues (2004) stated, “The cultural value of a strong family unit can sometimes be at odds with achieving a college degree” (p. 32). That is, powerfully close ties to one’s family may limit the extent to which individuals integrate (Tinto, 1993) into the academic

and social fabric of campus life. This can particularly true of Latino students in settings that are unlike home such as predominately White institutions.

Ortiz (2004) found that Latino college students experience culture shock in predominately White environments. This results from their introduction to unfamiliar surroundings and other challenges presented by language and cultural barriers to name a few. Culture shock may be particularly problematic as it often results in social isolation.

In predominately White campus environments, campus climate issues are paramount for African American and Latino students who struggle to find a “fit” within the academic and social realms of college life (Tinto, 1993). Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that Latino students often face challenges when trying to achieve a sense of belonging within the campus setting. For example, it may be difficult to make friends whose values and opinions are congruent with the cultural values of the Latino students’ country of origin.

Not only is social isolation a consequence of the challenges faced by Latino students in college, but some studies suggest that students may experience feelings of inadequacy (Gloria & Castellanos, 2003; Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado, 1994). Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996) studied the transition experiences of Latino college students and noted that such students may report feelings of inadequacy due to their limitations in speaking English and lower socioeconomic status. Quite often students struggle to develop strategies for coping with alienation (Gloria & Castellanos).

Taken together, feelings of culture shock, social isolation, and inadequacy may result in students feeling marginalized and discordant with the academic and social

realms of college. This has huge implications on student retention and persistence (Tinto, 1993). That is, students enter the college environment and might find it hostile, unwelcoming, or socially isolating. As a result, they become minimally involved—if at all—in the academic and social life of college which results in departure from college. Opportunities to become involved academically and socially are important and fraternities and sororities represent such opportunities.

Not only was it necessary to review the literature on historically Black and traditionally Latino fraternities and sororities, but it was important to review the literature on within group differences on the basis of gender. While it is not a central research question for the present study, the researcher remained open for quirks and clues about how experiences of fraternity and sorority members differed by gender. Thus, the next section reviews the literature on women and men of African American as well as Latino descent.

African American Females

Johnson-Newman and Exum (1998) assert that “African-American female college students attending predominately White colleges and universities bring with them a unique set of circumstances and experiences that may have a profound effect on their adjustment to a college environment” (p. 70). Issues relating to loneliness and isolation, fears relating to competence, concerns about dating, and feels of inadequacy about appearance are common among this increasing population of college students. These factors can limit the extent to which Black women engage in meaningful interpersonal relationships with others and hinder their adjustment to college.

Some believe that since predominately White colleges were created for white males and historically Black colleges were designed for black males there are no universities designed to meet the unique needs of African-American women (Brown, Parks, & Phillips, 2005). The same holds true for student organizations on such campuses. Majority sororities on predominately White campuses are not able to offer the same support to African-American females as historically Black sororities because the needs of Black women are different from the needs of White women. Moreover, there are few Black women in predominately White sororities. This may not provide a sufficient number of individuals with which to interact and form social networks.

The African American sorority is described as a vehicle through which African American females reconstruct their identities, allowing them to refute the stereotypical images created by dominant culture and redefine themselves (Brown et al.). Not only do Black women benefit from Black sororities but some evidence suggests that Black men stand much to gain from Black fraternities.

African American Males

African American males are also a unique population in the higher education system. Cuyjet (1997) explains that African American males are even different from African American women with discernibly different perceptions and behaviors. For example, African American males are often less prepared for college (Cuyjet & associates, 2006) than their female counterparts. This is communicated through the different recruitment and retention rates of African American males.

Black men are behind in representative numbers on college campuses, academic achievement, and campus involvement (Strayhorn, Jennings, & McCall, 2005). Historically Black fraternities attempt to bridge the gaps for African American males by providing members with support networks that aid in retention, focusing on academics and scholarship, and pushing for more campus involvement among Black men.

Harper and Wolley (2002) also explained that membership in fraternities increases campus involvement, as well as require interested members to exhibit academic excellence, leadership skills, and engagement out of class prior to joining the organization. Further, membership in African American fraternities is a major source of pride and self esteem for these men. It is documented that “Black fraternities pride themselves on their civic contributions and community service endeavors, thus many members enjoy the benefits associated with engagement in these activities” (Harper & Harris, 2006, p. 141).

Membership Intake

As it relates to historically Black fraternities and sororities, there is a great deal of research looking at the process and experience of joining these organizations. Although hazing activities are illegal, it has been found that some African-American members and non-members “steadfastly maintain that the hazing process is essential for building the lifelong bonds these organizations seek to develop between their members” (Kimbrough, 1995, pg.66). Most of the research in the area of the process and experience of joining these organizations focuses on the illegal pledging and hazing activities that undergraduate students in these organizations continue to practice. With old and new

members who participate or who have participated in pledging or hazing nostalgically describing and remembering these times, the Black fraternity and sorority membership process has become a symbol of pride for African-Americans who are members and those who aspire to be part of these organizations. Kimbrough (2003) described African-American Greek members as being admired in many instances because they completed a difficult process and achieved a goal that many, whether they verbalized it or not, sought to accomplish in becoming a member of a fraternity or sorority.

Little or no published research has focused specifically on the experiences of Latino fraternity and sorority members. Because these organizations were often grouped in with the other minority Greek-lettered organization, namely National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) organizations, there has been a common belief that Latino students shared similar experiences and issues in joining Latino fraternities and sororities as African-American students. Although there is no research of the experiences of Latino college students in fraternities and sororities, there is general research on Latino students' transition and sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997) as well as coping strategies (Chiang, Hunter, & Yeh, 2004). These sources highlight the unique challenges faced by Latino students in postsecondary contexts.

With pledging activities being banned by all NPHC national organizations since the early 1990's, further issues have stemmed from the experience of joining historically Black fraternities or sororities. A stigma has been placed on those members who either choose or by chance participate only in the legal membership intake process that all national organizations follow as opposed to the illegal underground pledging (Ross,

1998). This has caused division within many Black Greek-lettered organizations with those who did participate in the illegal “underground” pledging often marginalizing and isolating those who did not. Kimbrough (2004) discusses how members have placed such value on underground pledging that those who do follow the rules are punished. This value on participating in these practices transcends all these organization and carries over to some Latino Greek-letter organizations.

Motivations

Although there are positive and negative gains associated with membership in a fraternity or sorority such as leadership, popularity, and social activity, it is less clear if these are the motivations for joining these organizations. Currently, there is no major research on motivations for joining fraternities and sororities. A unique characteristic of the present study is the examination of why these minority students are motivated to join their respective group or organization. The motivations for joining these organizations could be related to the unique culture and circumstances that these students bring with them to colleges and universities.

Conclusions

The literature has been organized in regards to African American and Latino fraternity and sorority members. Literature looking at African American organizations discusses the history of these organizations, initiation practices, and some benefits of membership such as leadership development. There is also research that examines the experiences of both African American males and females. There is little or no literature that exists about Latino fraternity and sorority members. The research that does exist

about his population of college students focuses on the importance of family and community in their culture. This study will add to the literature about the experiences of African Americans and especially Latinos as college students and as members of fraternities and sororities. This information will be beneficial due to the lack on research that exists about Latino college students and their organizations. Since this study is the first that examines the experiences of both African American and Latino fraternity and sorority members comparatively, it will also fill a gap in the literature on Greek Life.

The next chapter presents information about the methodology. Chapter Four presents the findings from the present study. Chapter Five discusses the findings in light of previous research on this topic and highlights its implications for policy, practice, and future research.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to learn about the experiences of African-American and Latino college students who are members of historically Black and traditionally Latino fraternities and sororities at predominately White institutions. At the conclusion of the study, researchers will have an understanding of the similarities and differences that exist relative to the experiences of those who are members of African-American and Latino fraternities and sororities. The best way to achieve this goal is to engage in qualitative research methods, which allow researchers to gain insight into the processes, meaning, and behavior of the participants who are the focus of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This chapter will serve as a description of methods by which the study was conducted. This includes information about the participants, instruments, methods for data collection, and data analysis techniques.

Methodology

A qualitative approach using one on one interviews as the methodology guided this research investigation. That is, personal, reflective student experiences through interviews served as the basis for the formation of the research questions, the selection of methods for data collection, and the analytical procedures. To this end, data was collected and analyzed in such a way that themes emerged from the data and the overall themes “painted a picture” or give a general understanding of the meaning assigned to the events by individuals.

Sample

The samples consisted of college students at a large research institution in the Southeast. The institution enrolls approximately 28,000 students. Of these, approximately 8% are African American and around 1.5% are Hispanic. There are approximately 40 social fraternities and sororities on campus. Of these, seven are historically Black or traditionally Latino organizations. The appendix describes the sample used in the study.

All participants were over the age of 18 and varied in school classifications from first year to senior. Participants were all members of one of the 6 historically Black or the 2 traditionally Latino organizations that existed on the campus, which are nationally recognized under the National Pan-Hellenic Council and the National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations. A list of all organizations is shown in the appendix as pseudonyms to protect the true identity of the organizations and participants.

In order to participate in this study, students must have been active, dues paying undergraduate members of a historically Black or traditionally Latino fraternity or sorority. In other words, student participants may not have been illegally initiated members or not dues paying. This criterion was necessary to narrow the focus of the study given the information needed to answer the research questions. It was also necessary to have different representatives from different organizations serve as participants. In addition, this sampling strategy was employed to yield a final sample of “information rich participants” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Altogether, eight different

organizations were represented in the sample. Only the Latino members in the sample came from the same organizations because there exists only one Latino fraternity and one Latino sorority at the institution.

To recruit the sample an email was sent to the presidents of each organization with a brief explanation of the study. The email requested volunteers who would be willing to participate in the study and explained that those who were interested should contact the principal investigator (PI) via email or telephone. In addition, the electronic invite informed individuals that their participation was voluntary, they could withdraw at any time, even after starting the interview, without penalty.

Once interested individuals replied to the email, the PI responded via email to schedule a meeting time and location for the interview. In addition, he sent, via email, the informed consent document for participants to review prior to the interview. Only those persons who were (a) interested in participating in the study (b) willing to participate in an interview and (c) agreed to sign the informed consent were ultimately allowed to participate in the study. The sampling strategy yielded 10 participants; 6 were members of Black fraternities and sororities while 4 were members of Latino organizations. This included 3 African American fraternity member and 3 African American sorority members as well as 2 Latino fraternity members and 2 Latino sorority members

Instrumentation

At the start of each interview session, the purpose of the study was explained to each participant. The researcher also reviewed the informed consent document and notified participants that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without

penalty. In order to participate in the study, all participants were asked to sign the informed consent form acknowledging their willingness to be interviewed and granting permission for interviews to be audio-recorded. Interviews were recorded to allow for later verbatim transcription. This is an appropriate data collection technique that is consistent with the assumptions of qualitative research (Creswell, 2002, 2003).

The interview protocol was developed based on a review of the literature on the experiences of White students who were members of fraternities and sororities (Pascarella, Flowers, & Whitt, 2001; Pike, 2000; Strayhorn & Colvin, 2006) and the limited research on the experiences of minority students who are members of such groups (Harper & Harris, 2006). For example, the literature suggests that student experiences in fraternities and sororities can be broadly described as a process: deciding to join an organization, initiation into the organization, and membership in the organization. Questions were designed to elicit information about these dimensions of student experiences.

There were six questions posed to participants in the interview session. Additional probes were used to address questions that emerged during the interview. As mentioned, the questions were focused on the decision to join the organization, uniqueness of organization, experiences since initiation, motivations, and benefits of organization. The major interview questions were: (1) Describe in as little or as much detail as you would like the factor that led to your decision to join your Greek Letter Organization; (2) Describe in as little or as much detail as you would like your experience in joining your organization (e.g., intake, pledging, etc.); (3) What is unique,

in your opinion, about your fraternity/sorority (not including secret rituals or ceremonies)?; (4) What have been your experiences since you were initiated into your organization?; (5) What would you describe as your motivations for becoming a member of this specific organization?; (6) What do you see as the current and future gains and benefits of being a member of this organization?

A biographical data form provided the researcher with background information on the sample. While keeping participant's identities anonymous, the information gathered in the data form answered questions about the participants age, academic history, classification, race, and other information that could be useful when examining the results of the present study or in future research. Participants were asked to complete the biographical data form after they had read and signed the informed consent document and prior to the start of the interview session. This approach and order of activities has been used in previous studies conducted by qualitative researchers in higher education (Davis, 2002; Evans, 2002) and by the PI, his major advisor, and colleagues (Strayhorn, Baker, McCall, McGaskey, Pendergrast, & Richmond, 2006)

Accuracy of Data

The multiple sources of data included in-depth, semi-structured interviews; a biographical data form; and follow up interviews of participants when necessary. To enhance the accuracy of data being collected several methods were used. This included field notes, external auditors, and participants review of the interview transcriptions.

Throughout the data collection process the researcher was involved in peer debriefing sessions. This involved discussing what happened in the interview sessions

with disinterested peers and his major advisor to gain a better understanding of the data and ensure that the researcher was clearly identifying the important aspects of the interview. This form of peer debriefing is often lauded as an effective strategy for enhancing accuracy of data (Armino & Hultgren, 2002).

In addition, the researcher took notes during each interview for one of two purposes. First, notes, also called field notes (Wolcott, 1995), were used to log important concepts and notions that emerged during the interview. The PI used such notes to record words, key phrases, or experiences that might warrant additional probing. Second, the field notes served as a safeguard against faulty equipment. In the event that a tape recorded failed, the PI could preserve the “essence” of the interview using his field notes. This strategy is highly recommended by qualitative research experts (Fontana & Frey, 2002; Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 1998).

Then, the researcher reviewed notes and comments from each interview with individual participants to ensure that his notes reflected their experiences and intentions. If the participant agreed that the notes reflected what he or she had shared during the interview, data were accepted as is. In all cases, participants had the right to edit, omit sections of, or prohibit use of their interview. This is a widely accepted form of member checking in which participants have an opportunity to assess the overall adequacy of analysis and a chance to confirm individual data points (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002).

Data Collection Process

Upon IRB request and approval all attempts were made to conduct interviews in a private location. However, participants were given the option to choose a place in which

they would feel most comfortable. Most of the interviews took place in the Black Cultural Center on campus. Other possible locations include the major advisor's office, a conference room in the College of Education, and a private room in the library on campus.

The principal investigator conducted all of interviews. The length of the interviews ranged from 90-120 minutes. If there was more information that participants wanted to share, they were encouraged to contact the principal investigator at a later time to schedule another interview or to share their thoughts in written form via email.

Interviews were scheduled and held based on the availability of participants. Due to the busy schedule of student participants, interviews were conducted at participants' convenience, even during hours that extend beyond traditional business hours (9a-5p). Sessions were held at night and even on the weekend, if necessary. Given his extensive experience working with minority students, the PI deemed it necessary to be flexible to accommodate the schedule of participants. It is possible that this flexibility significantly reduced concerns that are common in qualitative research such as trust and comfortability (Jones, 2002). In many cases, the participants had prior experiences with the researcher and participants were allowed to schedule their interview and location according to their own preferences.

In addition, it is important to note that the researcher is a well-known member of both the campus community and a nationally-recognized African American fraternity. As such, he represents a part of the community and may have access to information that would otherwise be obscured or hidden from those who are not "natives" of the

community (Gonzalez, Marin, Moreno, & Navia, 2002). To be sure, being a member of one of the organizations presented a number of issues with which the researcher must contend; yet, membership status also quells concerns about trust, fear, and comfortability.

Data Analysis

As a member of a historically Black fraternity, I realized that I may have biases and opinions on the subject matter. It was very important that I did not allow my own personal experiences and opinions to impact the direction of the study and the data collected or data being analyzed. To minimize the probability of this occurrence, I went into the study recognizing that my biases could impact the study and intentionally avoided looking back at my experiences and judgments on comments. In addition, I invited three individuals to serve as external auditors (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the interview research process to debrief about the interview experiences. These included my chair and major advisor, Dr. Terrell Strayhorn; a disinterested peer, Ms. Amy Colvin; and Dr. Belinda Bennett, as a qualitative researcher.

The data sets consisted of interviews, which were transcribed verbatim, as well as field notes from the principal investigator. The biographical data form about characteristics of participants'. Transcripts provided valuable insights and quotes that helped to get at the essence of the participants' experiences. Field notes provided additional "rich thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of the research setting including place, day, time, disposition, and general comments made by participants. The transcripts and notes were read and re-read by the researcher after the data collection process for analysis

After the data collection process, various themes were pulled from the transcripts and notes. These themes were based on similar experiences and reactions to the questions by the participants. Once participants reviewed the transcripts, they were also able to give their opinions as to what they viewed as being important and thematic in their interview session. Themes were pulled out collectively from both groups, Latino and Black, as well as separately.

Data are presented to readers in the form of the themes that were pulled from the transcripts and notes. Under the themes narratives or quotes from participants that highlight and illustrate the significance of the various themes are presented. Themes are presented in the form of (a) common themes and (b) themes for each sub-group. The results of the study pull the themes together and examine the differences and similarities between the two groups.

Conclusion

Collecting data through qualitative means allows the researcher to obtain greater insight into the experiences of participants. In fact, it allows all findings to be anchored in the words and experiences of participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Due to the nature of the research question, using a specific sample allowed the principal investigator to gain the information needed to explore the topic. Steps were taken with the information collected such as peer debriefing and member checks to enhance the accuracy of the data. The nature of data analysis was also important in pulling out themes that answer the research question and provide valuable information that will benefit those who have an interest in the experiences of two minority student groups in fraternities and sororities.

The next chapter presents the findings from the present study. Chapter Five discusses the findings in light of previous research on this topic and highlights its implications for policy, practice, and future research.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

The purpose of this study was to learn about the experiences of African-American and Latino college students who are members of historically Black and traditionally Latino fraternities and sororities at predominately White institutions. This chapter presents finding from the study across five major themes and four sub themes. That is, after conducting interviews with six African American and four Latino student participants, several themes emerged regarding their experiences in fraternities and sororities. These themes included: initial contact, transformation through membership, relationships, organizational pride, and networking.

Initial Contact

Respondent's initial contact with their fraternity or sorority had a significant impact on their decision to join the organization. Initial contacts, in turn, affected the individual's perception of the organization. Most participants had had a positive, attractive experience with the organization that caused them to want to join, usually through specific individuals (e.g., relatives, church members, and teachers) with whom they came in contact at a middle/high school age through experiences at the beginning of their college careers. An African American BGLO sorority member recalls:

When I came here my main deciding factor was they were one of the first people that I met was my [future] sorority sister and she became a mentor to me and took really good care of me while I was living in the dorms and helped me out a lot.

The visibility of the organization was also cited by participants as being an important factor when deciding to join their respective organization. One respondent who was an African American male member of a Historically Black Fraternity said:

As far as within the community being in the city I was born in it was a lot of people in my organization. I saw them do a lot of things in the community. Also they had a community group in the high school.

Another male member of a historically black fraternity recalled:

When I got to the university the first guy I met who was an upperclassman was a member and he volunteered to help me out and move my stuff in, he always checked up on me...they were the ones who reached out to me.

These quotes illustrate the importance of being able to “see” the organization’s involvement in local, community, and national activities. In some cases, this visibility served as the initial point of contact between the individual and the organization and was a deciding factor for choosing membership in their organization. For example, a fraternity president of a BGLO shared his initial contact with his organization at a summer internship:

The summer before my senior year of high school I worked at the city attorney’s office and there were six black attorneys. Three of which were from one organization and three of which were from another organization. I felt that the ones who were open with me, really seemed to genuinely care about the things I was doing in high school, and cared about me in general were the members of my organization...They were the only ones who took me to court with them and out in the field with them...and those were the ones who have kept in touch with me to this day.

Organizational Pride

Participants who are members of these organizations seemed to exude a great deal of pride in their fraternity or sorority. In becoming members of these organizations participants assigned a significant portion of their identity to the organization as illustrated by the quote below:

Being a member of my sorority is great. We are the first, the best, and there is none like us. Since I have joined the organization I feel like me and my sisters are totally committed to the sorority and would do anything for each other and the organization.

The students with whom I spoke reported that fraternities and sororities provided them with a significant source of satisfaction and members seemed to be very passionate about their organizations. For example, one African American male who was president of his fraternity described his organization:

I feel that when I saw it... that it's the best organization on this campus, and in the United States. I know that with the background and history we have I can learn and grow and make my own contributions and make my own name in the fraternity and not use the fraternity to make my name.

In speaking about what makes their organization unique an African American sorority member stated, "Confidence is one thing that makes the sorority in general stand out and just being proud... and sometimes an attitude." Several students also made comments like, "If I had it all over to do again, I would still make the same decision." Even with the hard work and long hours associated with joining a fraternity or sorority

and participating in duties after membership in their fraternity or sorority, the students' commitment to their organization was certain. One student described her commitments as an undergraduate member of her organization:

You are doing stuff for school, you are doing stuff for work, and then you are doing the official stuff for your sorority and other things for the sorority-it is like a 25 hour a day thing. (African American female student who is a senior and member of a BGLO)

Other participants also noted the hard work and dedication associated with being a member of their organizations. In talking about the challenges with being a member one African American fraternity member stated:

It's a lot to give...you have to have a lot of time and commitment. But if you have the commitment the time won't be an issue because you will make time. You will learn not to sleep because you have all your life to sleep when you are out of this place in heaven or when you are out of college doing your work

Participants' comments suggest a clear message that although affiliation with their organization is time consuming, pride is a significant factor when deciding to join and maintain one's membership with Black and Latino Greek Letter organizations. Often members joined their organization due to organizational pride, which, in the voice of the participants was a benefit that is far above that of any other fraternity or sorority.

Transformation Through Membership

A common theme for almost all participants was the transformation that occurred during the process of joining their organization. There were four common experiences that marked the transformation that the student participants experienced during the

membership intake process. Membership intake refers to the practice and events that socialize an individual into his/her respective organization and is described by Kimbrough (2003) as a term to describe many of the BLGO's attempts in the 1980's and 1990's to address hazing issues as well as prevent the violence and brutality associated with pledging a fraternity or sorority. During their membership intake experiences participants reported gaining a boost in self-confidence; increase in self-awareness; development through learning; and preparation for leadership.

Self-Confidence

Fraternity and sorority members spoke of pride and self-confidence as a product of their membership experience. One fraternity member explained his experience with membership intake:

I have definitely developed professionally and developed a lot of confidence throughout the process itself and also the fact of there are so many leadership opportunities and it gives you that experience that there is so much you can do if you set your mind to it. (Member was a Latino student who was a freshman and a member of a Latino Greek Organization)

Participants reported that their self confidence was enhanced through the socialization that each individual chapter/organization offered. Participants were often hesitant when discussing their experiences of becoming members of their organization because this is thought of as a very personal and secretive occurrence in their lives. Brown (2005) explains that the more secrecy that potential initiates experience the closer they move from being non members to full brotherhood and sisterhood in the organization. Participants' also discuss how the secrecy increases cohesion and defines boundaries

within the organization. The sense of pride that participants gained with regards to themselves, even aside from the pride in the organization, seems to be a very important part of their membership experience. One member described:

”Joining my sorority has made me feel like I am part of something bigger than myself and I love doing community service with my chapter...It makes me feel good. (Student was a sophomore, new member of a Latino Greek Organization)

Self-Awareness

Participants communicated that their membership intake process was a time of self discovery or self awareness. Throughout their intake experience they were given opportunities to learn a lot about themselves as well as others who were joining the organization with them. This often times caused a lot of personal reflection and change.

One member recalls:

I just learned a lot about my character. I opened up a lot and gave all these young ladies [sisters going through process as well] a chance. You really try to get to know people and then gradually open up to them and in that situation it makes you have to open up and I learned a lot because I didn't think I could do that.

A member of a different sorority stated, “I am not a very open person-I never had a whole bunch of friends and being in a sorority you automatically have a large number of people you have to trust.” Opening up to others during the intake process seemed to be common among all participants.

Learning

Many participants described becoming a member of their organization as an educational process or experience. A Latino fraternity member reported:

As far as the process goes it's a lot of information. Learning information about the organization from founding brothers to founding fathers to chapters in your state to just about everything that has to do with your Latin identity... It's just being aware of your own culture through the process.

In joining the organizations members gained a great deal of information about the organization as well as how to conduct themselves in the organization. In becoming members, many participants also talked about “growing up” and “becoming a better person” through their experiences. One member of a historically black fraternity explained:

I learned to do certain things at certain times when I didn't think they were possible. I have limits but I can always push myself further because I have had to push myself further being that I went through those hard time before and still had to do school, take care of athletics, keep in contact with my family. It is way easier now.

Preparation for Leadership

Those who participated in the study discussed how their process prepared them for leadership in the organization. In discussing joining her organization a sorority woman shared, “I gained experience in what it takes to run a chapter.” This could happen through working with people in interest groups, which is a group of individuals who are interesting in joining the chapter that function like a chapter (although they are not

initiated members) in preparation for joining the organization. A Latino sorority new member explained:

You join the interest groups and it gives you the experience of what it's like to run the chapter and a lot of experience in how much work it takes...Interest groups helps you take on a lot of that responsibility [that you will have to take on being a chapter member].

There also seemed to be deeper experiences that occurred throughout membership intake or pledging that prepared members for leadership, as one fraternity man stated:

I feel that my pledging process has equipped me well enough where I'm good as if it were eight people with me. I can do everything by myself-I feel like I gained those assets and I don't feel like I could have gained those assets anywhere else. (African American male student who is a junior and member of a BGLO)

These "deeper" experiences, which are specific to each organizations membership intake process, are not outlined by participants. Another African American sorority woman discussed her increase in leadership skills through the process and more specifically, "Learning that you can be a leader without being the loudest person and without certain people around."

Networking

Respondents cited networking as an important characteristic of being members of their organizations. Having the opportunity to make contacts both socially and professionally was a benefit that almost all participants discussed in their interviews. One of the students shared the following experience about networking:

It exposes you to a lot of people who I normally wouldn't come into contact with. For example, we had our regional conference and after I finish school I want to become a lawyer, then a judge and I met a lady who was a lawyer during the conference so that's a contact that I might not of gotten any other way.

Many of the comments that other participants shared were along the same lines of being able to make important contacts that would be beneficial for their development as well as having members as resources. As it relates to networking a fraternity member stated, "Now we have brothers who have moved onto their professional careers and a lot of them are working and can help you out, they can mentor you, they can give you advice."

Through the network of members in the organization participants felt that they were connected to others with the same values and interest and could call upon those resources at any moment. One participant stated:

You can call brothers in California and say I need to stay at your place. [They'll say] alright you can stay at my place even though they don't know you it's cool and I think that's one of the biggest benefits.

Comments like these suggest that members of Black and Latino Greek-letter organizations may accrue intangible benefits such as increased social capital.

Relationships

Participants expressed their perception of the significance of the relationships that they forged with brothers and sisters in their organizations. Brotherhood and sisterhood are major tenets that fraternal and sororal groups espouse and students in the study referred to those relationships as vital to their experience. Brown et al (2005) explained

that “Like white fraternities and sororities, BGLO’s were established by groups of like-minded individuals who desired to maintain contact and provide brotherhood and sisterhood for their groups” (pg. 42). A fraternity member who was the president of his Latino fraternal organization explained, “Growing up I didn’t have brothers of my own so now I can call these guys my brothers and it feels good to call somebody brother.” Many members identified the relationships that are gained as major motivations as well as benefits of joining their organizations. One Latina sorority member who was the president of her chapter described not having good relationships with females and her organization providing her with sisters, which was not common for her. She explained, “I never really had a lot of female friends or relationships with other females so to have that sisterhood was a major reason for joining my sorority.”

The relationships created by those who were collectively seeking membership and by those currently in the chapter played a major role in the lives of the participants of the study. These relationships allowed members to work together in their chapters even through the challenges of different personalities. It was important for them to work collectively to be productive in achieving their organizations mission and values. A sorority member explained, “A lot of us have different personalities and different ways in a certain extent but we are able to come together and put differences aside and to not allow those differences to be a hindrance to progression.”

Finally, participants discussed the support system that their organizations provided and how these relationships can be important in times of need. One sorority member commented, “I know if I am in a jam I can call one of my sorority sisters and if

they got it, I got it.” (African American female who was a senior and member of BLGO)

In commenting on this aspect of his fraternity an African American junior said:

It’s about just being your brother’s keeper...It’s easier if you have somebody-a shoulder to lean on. Somebody who can help you with your studies and nobody who is always looking for something in return.

The concept of “leaning on each other” was a common response for the participants who took part in this study.

Differences between African American and Latino organizations

The initial contact with the organization was very different for African American and Latino Students. African American students’ described family members, church members, and other community members prior to college as being their initial contact with the organization. Participants claimed that it was those positive relationships with individuals that served as a deciding factor for joining a fraternity or sorority even prior to coming to the institution. African American students also reported a high visibility of the organization when they came to campus as well as members reaching out to them. Latino college participants did not come to college with prior knowledge of Latino fraternities or sororities. It was not until Latino participants came to the institution that they were introduced to these organizations. There was also a positive, attractive experience that drew student participants to their organization.

Also related to the initial contact was the cultural attraction to the organization which seemed to differ with African American and Latino respondents. Latino participants always cited the lack Latino students or Latino culture on campus and the

attraction was this organization where that was highlighted. Participants always mentioned something about their Latino heritage in the interviews as a reason why they joined their organization. African American participants never mentioned anything about African American culture or history when discussing their initial contact or attraction to their organization. Additionally, African Americans' did not discuss the cultural aspect of their fraternity or sorority at any point in their interviews.

In sum, this chapter presents findings from the present study on the experiences of African-American and Latino college students who are members of historically Black and traditionally Latino fraternities and sororities at predominately White institutions. Five major themes were identified: positive initial contact, transformation through membership, relationships, organizational pride, and networking. Four sub-themes of membership transformation were identified and explicated. Chapter Five presents the discussion and conclusions.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to learn about the experiences of African-American and Latino college students who are members of historically Black and traditionally Latino fraternities and sororities at predominately White institutions. Chapter five presents the themes presented in the Chapter 4 and the conclusions of the study in relation to the similarities and differences between historically Black and traditionally Latino fraternities and sororities. Toward that end, the chapter will also present possible implications for future research about fraternities and sororities. Recommendations for future professional practice are explicated based on the results on the results of this present study.

Initial Contact

When the initial contact that participants experienced was with a member who represented the organization well, this served as a major recruiting tool for organizations and motivator to those looking for membership in an organization. Potential members must come to know or “see” the organization as a viable option and be able to “see themselves” in the organization as members. That is, prospective members must be able to believe in the tenets and values of the fraternity or sorority as well as align with the values and priorities of current chapter members. For example, many of these organizations place a premium on scholarship and service. Prospective members must first come to know that the organization exists, then the priorities of the organization, and ultimately the extent to which the organization’s values align with their own value set.

Usually such learning takes place during the initial contact with a member of the said organization.

The initial contact seemed to happen differently for African American and Latino college students. Exposure to fraternities and sororities was likely to happen earlier in the lives of African American students. Exposure was usually facilitated through educators, mentors, church members, or other community acquaintances who were members of Black-Greek Letter organizations. These experiences were usually positive and have sometimes been a deciding factor in potential members deciding on an organization to join before they ever enrolled in a college or university.

In contrast, since Latino Greek organizations are recent additions to the Greek Organization chart and do not have the same long tradition afforded Black Greek Letter organizations, which dates back to 1906, the situation (e.g., deciding early in life to join an organization) was not reflective of the experiences of Latino members. Latino college students did not usually come to school with a desire to be in a Latino Greek organization. The lack of Latino presence on campus often seemed to be a deciding factor for students joining these organizations. For Latino students, the initial contact at their institution is even more vital because of the lack of exposure to Latino Greek Letter Organization prior to coming to college. So, while many African American students were somewhat predisposed to joining a Black Greek letter organization (e.g., quite often the one joined by a parent or community members), Latino college students knew little or nothing about Latino Greek Letter organization upon entering college. The initial contact, then, provided much need information about the organization and its values.

There was typically a minority student, either Greek or non-Greek, that introduced potential members to the ideal of Latino Greek organizations as support system for Latino college students.

Another difference in the initial contact with the organization was that Latino student's attraction to their fraternity or sorority seemed to be more culturally based. Students from a Latino background emphasized how their Latino culture was a major part of who they were and why they wanted to be a part of a Latino Greek organization. The unity that was found in the organization and the "home away from home" atmosphere was particularly appealing and influenced students' decision to join the group.

On the other hand, African American students did not call attention to the cultural aspect of their fraternity or sorority and did not seem to as much of a focus on reasons for joining a BGLO. It could be assumed that because these ethnic based that this is important to all these students but it was not consciously communicated by African American students.

Organizational Pride

The pride that participants felt for their personal fraternity or sorority seems to become an integral part of who these members are once they join the organization. Although many of the organizations stand for similar principles such as scholarship, brotherhood/sisterhood, leadership, and service, members still perceive that the service, tenets, or leadership of their specific organization is superior to that of all other organizations. It seems as if student's commitment and dedication to the organization becomes fixed during the process of joining a fraternity or sorority. Often times this is

communicated through brothers and sisters referring to themselves as the organization as opposed to a member of the organization. (i.e., “I am a Kappa” as opposed to I am a member of Kappa Alpha Psi) The very idea of fraternal organizations was borne out of a perceived association among those who share similar values, expectations, and roles. The thought that those in a group who share ethnicities, experiences, and culture think of themselves as better than others is a valuable detail to highlight in this study.

Both African American and Hispanic fraternity and sorority members feel this sense of pride toward their organization. This pride is usually discussed in terms of very similar organizational characteristics (i.e., best “Black” fraternity or best “Latina” sorority). Since African American and Latino Greek organizations function on college campuses in separate governing bodies or councils they are more likely to compete with those inside their councils than those outside. Therefore, the competition that is caused by this organizational pride almost exclusively exists between African American Greek organizations and almost exclusively between Latino Greek organizations.

Transformation Through Membership

Separate from the pride that participants gained for their organization is the self confidence and pride they gained in themselves. Through the process of joining their organizations, students experienced a boost in self confidence. Since fraternities and sororities have to market themselves to sustain membership, they must strongly promote the greatness of their ideals and philosophies. This promotion of greatness seems to be transferred to the members of the organization. The greatness of their organization’s ideals and objectives becomes very personal to members of fraternities and sororities.

The self confidence seems to be a positive side effect of membership in these organizations for both African American and Latino Greek students.

The finding that participants became more aware of themselves was another significant aspect of the membership experience. It seemed that students became more aware of themselves at the time when they joined an organization because joining a fraternity or sorority caused members to shift from an individual perspective to a more collective thinking as a group. This usually happened through group activities with others who were joining the organization which required potential members to be socialized into the fraternity or sorority. These activities, which usually take place through the “pledge process,” are often the very secretive actions discussed previously that are associated with membership intake, especially in Black Greek Letter organizations. Many members highlighted the relationships with those who were also joining the organization as the experience that helped them to learn about themselves. Having to open up to others and share personal experiences with other potential members going through the membership intake process appeared to be very challenging for students as well as an eye opening encounter.

The educational aspects of joining an organization played a major role in the lives of participants. Learning information about the organization is a very important part of membership in the organization. In both African American and Latino Greek organizations, the information that is transferred to new members through membership experiences serve as a source of credibility to others inside the organization as well as other fraternity and sorority members in other organizations. It is through history and

information about the organization that members confirm that they truly are part of the fraternity or sorority when meeting and talking with other members from other locations. Through their membership intake experience, many participants also gave the impression that they grew up and matured through the membership intake process that the organization required. This suggests that the knowledge that participants gained was development for them and enhanced their character. It seems that valuable lessons were learned from the membership intake process for African American and Latino fraternity and sorority members.

In joining their fraternities and sororities student participants also learned valuable skills that better equipped them to serve their organization and specifically focused on the areas that were important to their organization. This seemed to be the time where potential members learned how to conduct themselves as members. This would include appropriate meeting attire, policies/procedures for the organization, relationships with others outside the organization, and other things that will affect new members thinking as well as behavior once they are initiated. Latino participants were very open about their interest groups, which prepared them for membership responsibilities prior to being initiated into their organization. The interest group functioned like a small chapter with the help of current members of the fraternity or sorority. Potential members would plan events, do community service and learn how an organization runs. African American participants were less clear about what specific experiences prepared them for leadership in their chapters but they did explain that these experiences were part of their membership experience. Since each fraternity and sorority is founded on different values

and various focuses, it is important that new members have a sense of their purpose and direction inside the organization.

Networking

All participants described networking as an important benefit of membership in their organizations. Having a connection with brothers and sisters around the country offers members various opportunities both professionally and socially. Participants were confident that whether they were moving or visiting another city that there would be a member there for them to connect with. Although members may have never met each other or may be thousands of miles away, there is still a bond that respondents felt they would have with those within their organization. The professional connection was also considered very important for those college students who are graduating and trying to gain employment in specific careers. Respondents reported that they had brothers and sister in all types of career fields who may be able to help members get their foot in the door or serve as references in their profession.

Relationships

The relationships that respondents discussed with brothers and sisters seemed to be the most essential piece of their membership experience. The relationships that fraternity and sorority members acquire were friendships that they knew would continue throughout their lifetime. The friendships that were produced with other members in the organization were bonds that really did become similar to family relationships, especially with those who are members of the chapter. In both African American and Latina sororities, these relationships started as a challenge because of the “pettiness” or negative

attitudes that many participants describe as being common, especially among females. Later, after opening up and having to get to know each other because of the sorority, their connections became so strong that they were almost unbreakable.

Implications

The implications of this research study are related to understanding the dynamics of different organizations, organizational models for other student groups, and future research on student group. These implications are important for all student affairs administrators but especially those who work with student groups, specifically fraternities and sororities.

First, the research gives those in higher education and its constituents a better understanding of the experiences of African American and Latino fraternity and sorority members. It is important for those administrators that work with students to recognize the similarities and differences that exist between these students groups. With a better understanding of the dynamics of these two student groups, administrators will be able to advance their support of fraternities and sororities. More specifically, knowing the distinctive aspects of these student's experiences will provide those that work in student affairs knowledge about the cultures, relationships, and the unique characteristics of these groups. In turn, administrators will be able to identify the different needs of these fraternity and sorority members.

The implications of the study help to inform administrators about how positive student relationships are facilitated. This could have an impact on student involvement, belonging, and retention. If advisors of student groups have an understanding of what

fraternities and sororities do to facilitate positive relationships and strong bonds, then some of those practices could be used in general student organizations. This would aid in making all student organizations stronger and ensuring that those that come to colleges and universities are engaged and form positive relationships on campuses. If students truly feel like they are an integral part of any organization then it will also be more difficult for them to part ties with the organization and the institution because there is a strong connection.

Another implication of the study is opening the door to future research with minority student groups. In general, the amount of research that is available on minority student groups, especially fraternities and sororities is minimal unless the focus is African American students. Even still, the population of students is ever changing as we are seeing millennial students invade higher education. We have also seen a great deal of first generation students enter higher education institutions who are also minority students. These students bring with them different thoughts, ideals, and beliefs from previous generations and even recent student populations. It is important to continuously study students and student groups as they continue to transform so that administrators are always able to apply the best practices of challenge and support. Some recommendations for future research topics will be addressed in the next section.

Recommendations

In the future it may be beneficial to examine further the process of membership intake. This seems to be a central aspect of the African American and Latino fraternity and sorority experience. Although this seemed to be a very important part of the Greek

experience, this was also an aspect that members did not feel comfortable sharing because it is such a secretive practice, especially with Historically Black fraternities and sororities. It would be helpful if a study was done that specifically focused on the membership intake/pledging experience so those outside could have a better understanding of what that fully entails. With members not going into great detail about their experience joining their organizations, a lot is still to be said about their experience with the organization.

If this study were to be replicated it might be valuable to secure more participants from various organization within the two councils. Having a larger student population is always helpful in providing a broader insight into the experiences of students overall. In the limited number of students to serve as participants, we may have missed out on some important vital information about the different experiences of students. This would especially be true in the case of the Latino students who were only represented through two organizations while the African American students were represented from 6 different organizations. Due to the cultural differences at institutions of higher education, it also might be ideal to have at least one more research site. It could improve the richness of the data if this site was at an institution with a larger population of Latino and African American students, if the institution was in a different region of the country other than the southeast, or if it was a more selective college or university.

Although these organizations were created for similar purposes for their respective communities and have similar objectives, it is important to treat them as two separate student populations with different needs. It seems that often times, these

minority groups are clustered together and advised in the same manor. This could not be as affective because these two groups of students come from very different cultural backgrounds. Even more, neither of these groups have the same cultural experiences as the majority student groups that advisors are often accustomed to advising. For this reason, it is important for more research to be conducted on these two groups as well as other minorities so that those that work with fraternities and sororities are able to distinguish the differences with these populations and better meet their individual needs.

Conclusion

Research on African American and Latino fraternities and sororities grew out of a lack of understanding by those that work with these groups. Research such as this is so important in providing administrators in higher education a better grasp of how these organizations operate, which is usually different than the majority groups that administrators are accustomed to advising. Through this study, administrators and advisors should have a greater understanding of the similarities and differences between African American and Latino fraternity and sorority members. They should also be able to compare this new knowledge with the information that already exists on majority student organizational dynamics.

The results of the study indicate that the participant's experience included an initial contact with their organization that was positive and attracted them to the fraternity or sorority. Next, it appeared that members of these organizations exude a great deal of pride in their respective group, which was a common feeling for all participants. Respondents in the study also mentioned that there was a definite transformation through

their membership experience. This change that participants experienced included an increase in self confidence, self awareness, learning, and preparation for leadership. Those that participated in the study also cite that networking within the fraternity or sorority was an important benefit of joining their organization and allowed them to connect with other members around the country. Finally, members emphasized the brotherhood and sisterhood relationships that were formed in their collegiate chapter.

In relation to the research question, which asks about the comparative and contrasting experiences of these two groups of students, there are major similarities and differences with between the types of organizations. There were major differences in the initial contact that African American and Latino students had with their organizations, aspects of membership intake, and cultural emphasis of the organizations. The other themes that came from the participant interviews were similar across African American and Latino fraternities and sororities.

The findings from the study must be interpreted within the limitations of participants and location where the research was conducted. Since the study was carried out at an institution with a limited number of Latino students this surely affected the Greek Students from Latino backgrounds that chose to participate in the study. The sample of students in the study from a Latino background would surely have been different if this study would have taken place at a Hispanic-Serving Institution. The participants and institution are also affected by the culture of the university, which might be completely different at another university in another part of the country. Had the same

questions been asked to students at a school with a different culture or in an area with differing traditions then the responses may have been entirely different.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Description of the Sample

Characteristic	n	%
Gender		
Male	5	50
Female	5	50
Race		
Black	6	60
Hispanic	4	40
Year in School		
Freshman	0	0
Sophomore	1	10
Junior	4	40
Senior	5	50
First Generation		
Yes	6	60
No	4	40
Campus Involvement		
Greek Only	2	20
Two organizations	4	40
Three or more	4	40

Appendix 2

Pseudonyms of Organizations in Sample

Organizations

Psi Epsilon Pi

Beta Theta Rho

Phi Omega Tau

Sigma Lambda Gamma

Kappa Upsilon Zeta

Phi Theta Mu

Theta Iota Sigma

Tau Lambda Zeta

Vita

Fred McCall is a native of Akron, Ohio. He graduated from Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio with a Bachelors of Arts degree in psychology. Fred also earned a Masters of Science degree in College Student Personnel from the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. While at Bowling Green State University Fred was initiated into a Historically Black fraternity and since then has become very interested in the experiences of fraternity and sorority members. More specifically, how minority college students navigate their way through college within the context of these organizations. Currently Fred is the Coordinator in the Office of Greek Life at the University of South Florida in Tampa.