
Latino/a Fraternities and Sororities: Their History and Contributions to Identity Development

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Presentation Overview

- Purpose of the Presentation
- Four phases on the history of Latino/a Fraternal Organizations
- Identity development of Latino/a fraternity and sorority members
- Implications for practice
- Group discussion

History of Latino/a Fraternities & Sororities – Why were they formed?

- Legitimacy
- Political issues/change
- Activism
- Hermandad (brotherhood/sisterhood)
- Academic & Social Support
- Cultural and ethnic empowerment
- Community Service

Phase I: Principio (1898-1980)

- Originally began as secret societies in the late 1800s-early 1900s
 - Union Hispano Americana in 1898 at RPI
 - Sociedad Hispano Americana in 1904 at LSU
- The oldest Latino fraternity is Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity, Inc. – established December 26, 1931
- Tiberio Faria, Phi Iota Alpha member since 1956, describes the organization as:
 - Foundation was based on sharing similar political values and beliefs.
 - Membership consisted of Latino men from prominent wealth to having no wealth at all
 - Organization was attractive for Latinos because it was different from the traditional Greek organizations offered.
- 1975: First Latina Sorority (Lambda Theta Alpha) at Kean University, NJ.
- Two more fraternities founded: Lambda Theta Phi (Kean University – 1975) and Lambda Sigma Upsilon (Rutgers University – 1979)

(Ortiz, Muñoz, & Camacho, 2003 and Muñoz & Guardia, 2006)

Phase II: FUERZA (1981-1990)

- Latino/a undergraduate student begin to establish new LGLO's across the nation for political issues on campuses or to provide more leadership opportunities for Latinos
- Increase in expansion across a variety of regions in the U.S.
- Focused mainly on undergraduate development
- Little collaboration between LGLO's outside of their regions

As indicated by a Lambda Pi Chi founder...

“Having a formal means by which women, who were especially interested in the richness of the Latino heritage, perceived themselves as leaders for their communities, and were committed to making positive change for the Latino community...”

(Ortiz, Muñoz, & Camacho, 2003 and Muñoz & Guardia, 2006)

Phase III: FRAGMENTACIÓN (1991-2000)

- Rapid expansion (positive and negative)
- National umbrella organization formed, Concilio Nacional Hermandades Latina (CNHL); Philosophical difference leads to creation of National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations (NALFO)
- Increased competition among organizations
- Emergence of alumni presence
- Fraternal infrastructure begins to emerge
- Movement from student leadership to alumni leadership
- Establishment of name branding of organizations
- Many LGLO's found homes in Multicultural/Diversity Offices and LGCs created on college campuses

(Ortiz, Muñoz, & Camacho, 2003)

Phase IV: ADELANTE (2001-Present)

- NALFO partners with non-profit and higher education associations
- Movement/emphasis on running LGLO's as a corporation
- Open and honest dialogue among national presidents of LGLO's
- Demystifying of LGLO's
- Multicultural Greek Councils emerge on college campuses
- LGLO's develop signature leadership & social programs

(Ortiz, Muñoz, & Camacho, 2003)



Identity Development of Latino/a Fraternity and Sorority Members

Research on Identity Development

- Guardia (2006) sought to understand how membership in a Latino fraternity at a Hispanic Serving Institution enhanced members' ethnic identity development. Utilizing Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological theory of human development, several themes emerged which enhanced members' ethnic identity development including: family, fraternity *hermandad*, the HSI campus, language, and gender.

Home family

Well, pretty much my ethnic identity development I owe to my family because they're the ones that brought me up the way they did. When you're little you grow up looking through the world in the lens pretty much created by them, you look at it through their eyes and stuff, you look at it through their past experiences. So, yeah, I've been shaped by the fact that everybody in my family is Cuban. - *Siebel*

Fraternity *hermandad*

I would say the thing I appreciate the most, what I value the most is the brotherhood here in the fraternity. Anywhere I go if there's a brother, then he's my brother. It's like instant love you know. Definitely like an instant love between brothers. It felt [like] home, like I felt home right away, like these are like my family members. Because they share the same values. Family is important. You take care of your family first. - *Joe*

HSI campus environment

It reminds me of who I am, where I come from, but that's pretty much it, there's not that much to it. We're all Hispanic [at Latino University]. We speak Spanish most of us and we also have that in common. I'm surrounded by nothing but Hispanics and that's a good feeling. – *Bart*

We're at [Latino University] and everyone's just Latino. You know whether they show it off or whether they exhibit it or not, they are. So you really can't help but to just feel it. Even they're a little different than you, they're still Latinos so you really don't ever feel out of place here. Nothing reminds you more of it.

- *Rodrigo*

Language

Growing up here, my parents made sure I knew how to speak Spanish...as long as I maintain [it] is what matters the most...[Spanish] helps me so I don't forget from where I come from. – *Bart*

We have certain information and education that's in Spanish. At one level you have to be able to speak some words in Spanish and know what they mean and regardless of people who aren't Latino and join [Omega Beta]; they end up learning something out of it. When we're together we speak Spanish and Spanish is kind of like our family language. So that's why we can identify to that. - *David*

Gender

[The] thing I value the most is earning the [Greek] letters because it was one of the hardest things but it represented a lot more than just the letters. It represented a step towards becoming a man and towards taking responsibility, and whatever might happen, you stick to it because when it comes down to it that's pretty much what life is. One day I'm going to have a family and I'm not going to be caring for myself but I'll be caring for a wife and kids as well. As a man, I need to take responsibility. – *Bart*

That's one of our main things in the fraternity. You got to be a chivalrous man if you want to be a man. There's no other way of putting it. If you're an adulterous, if you beat women, you're not a man. You're hiding behind a guise. - *Siebel*

Research on Identity Development

- Nuñez (2004) found that members of a Latina-based sorority at a predominantly White university in the Midwest gained a heightened sense of ethnic identity through their participation in a Latina based, multicultural sorority.

Identity

- I felt like I was denying myself a lot of activities and I think after a while I almost started to believe that I wasn't Latina just because I wasn't exposed to it at all. I'm really glad that I got the guts and joined the sorority because I think it helped me a lot with [identifying as Latina]. I actually can now identify more and accept who I am. - *Eva*

Identity

- The sorority has helped me to realize that I am Mexican but not just with my family. They always just look at me for me and who I am. [The sorority] has made me feel okay because before I felt like I could never really be proud of who I was because there was always someone reminding me that I look really different. I can be proud of my culture and my sorority sisters don't say anything negative towards me. – *Isa Marie*

Pride

- My sorority sisters have given me more pride in [my culture]. They make me want to learn more about my culture. I have taken a more active involvement in understanding who I am and even at the same [time] teaching my sorority sisters about my Italian culture. – *Isa Marie*

Pride

- A lot of people say that [the sorority] is really proud and full of pride. I, for one, don't think it's a bad thing. They don't get to see the inside and see what we have with one another and that's why we hold some of what we do to our hearts. - *Frida*

Pride

- The sorority is a place where you can feel comfortable about your culture because you don't stand out. Different cultures are accepted and the fact that you're different, it's okay for us. Because for starters we're all different so there's no opportunity for us to hold your culture against you. - *Aihona*

Implications for Practice

- Membership may enhance ethnic identity development for Latino/a students
- LGLO may serve as a family away from home for Latino/a students
- Members may receive academic, social, and cultural support through participation in LGLO
- Participation may help Latino/a students adjust to campus
- LGLO may help to mitigate effects of racism and discrimination experienced in mainstream Greek letter organizations

Group Discussion

- What challenges are Latino/a Greeks facing on your campus?
- What is your campus doing to address the growing trend of Latino/a Greek organizations?
- What is your campus doing to support the ethnic identity development of Latino/a Greek organizations?

Thank You!

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