

AN EXPLORATION OF THE SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES OF UNDERGRADUATE FRATERNITY MEMBERS

Larry Long

Previous research found an unwelcoming environment may hinder the identity development of college students. Furthermore, studies revealed gay, bisexual, and questioning (GBQ) students may encounter a hostile environment in college fraternities. This influenced the researcher to question if fraternities are as effective in producing educational gains for GBQ members as for heterosexual members. In the present study, the researcher sampled 286 GBQ and 286 heterosexual fraternity members from the aggregate results of the campuses that used the AFA/EBI Fraternity/Sorority Assessment in 2009 or 2010. The researcher conducted rank-based analyses of variance to assess the differences in personal gains, alcohol use, leadership experience, and satisfaction of fraternity members by sexual orientation. Results revealed heterosexual fraternity members reported greater gains as a result of their fraternity experience for the majority of the personal gains measures. There were no differences in alcohol use, leadership experience, and satisfaction of fraternity members by sexual orientation.

Fraternities attempt to recruit new members through the allure of increased opportunities for leadership development, community service, academic support, and friendship (Sermersheim, 1996). Although gay students choose to join fraternities for friendship and to have a support group while in college (Case, Hesp, & Eberly, 2005), many of these students encounter an unwelcoming environment upon joining. Case et al. (2005) found the majority of gay and bisexual fraternity members described their chapters as homophobic and heterosexist. Further research indicated an unwelcoming college environment may hinder the identity development of gay, bisexual, and questioning (GBQ) students (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans & Broido, 1999), foster a compromised self-image (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007), and influence GBQ students to remain closeted (Rankin, 2003). While fraternity membership has been associated with changes in student learning (Hayek, Carini, O'Day, & Kuh, 2002; Pike, 2003) and improved persistence and graduation rates (DeBard, Lake, & Binder, 2006; DeBard & Sacks, 2010; Grubb, 2006; Severtis & Christie-Mizell, 2007), heterosexual students may be the primary recipients of the benefits of fraternity membership. Given the increased stress that GBQ students may endure in fraternity settings, the researcher hypothesized the fraternal environment may not be as effective in producing educational gains for GBQ members as it is for heterosexual fraternity members. The purpose of this study was to explore if GBQ fraternity members report different levels of personal gains, alcohol use, leadership experience, and satisfaction as a result of their fraternity experience compared to heterosexual members.

Review of Literature

Fraternities have been described as social environments that perpetuate and sometimes exaggerate traditional ideas of masculinity (DeSantis, 2007; Syrett, 2009). In an ethnographic study of the fraternity/sorority community at a large research institution, DeSantis (2007) found members of exclusive fraternal organizations had a propensity to define masculinity in

opposition to femininity. Many of the participants believed masculine men were sexually active, promiscuous, athletic, and muscular. In comparison, they believed non-masculine men were weak, unathletic, and feminine. DeSantis found that some organizations rejected a potential member if chapter members believed the person “talked like a girl, dressed like a fag, associated with feminine men, walked like a queer, avoided fights or conflicts, or was unathletic” (p. 55). The organization members in DeSantis’ study viewed these characteristics as warning signs that a person might be gay. The concern is that the presence of a gay member might hurt the reputation of the chapter by giving the organization the label of being the “gay” fraternity. This is supported by research conducted by Hall and LaFrance (2007), who found the attitude of fraternity members toward homosexuality is related to their heteroidentity concerns. According to these researchers, the more concerned members are about their heterosexuality, the more negative their views toward homosexuality tend to be. The result is that membership in fraternal organizations may be limited to hyper-masculine males (DeSantis, 2007; DeSantis & Coleman, 2008).

Shedding light on the experiences of fraternity/sorority members with minority sexual orientations, Case, Hesp, and Eberly (2005) studied the reasons gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) members chose to join a fraternal organization and the level of homophobia, heterosexism, acceptance, and rejection these members faced upon joining. The lead researcher disseminated a questionnaire using a snowball sampling approach. The researcher collected data between 1992 and 1995 and generated a sample of 524 male respondents and 52 female respondents. Case and his colleagues found the top reasons GLB members joined a fraternal organization were to make friends, have fun, and have a support group. The respondents reported the main lasting benefits of fraternity/sorority membership were gaining social and interpersonal skills, long-term friendships, and leadership skills. Although many of the respondents reported they joined their organization to make friends and to have a support group, the researchers found 74% of male respondents and 71% of female respondents encountered a homophobic or heterosexist climate within their chapter. Nearly half of fraternity respondents and a third of sorority respondents indicated their perceived need to hide part of their identity prevented them from forming closer relationships with their peers. The researchers also found the culture of acceptance members with minority sexual orientations experienced was warmer for respondents who voluntarily disclosed their sexual orientation than for respondents whose orientation was accidentally disclosed. Despite these findings, the vast majority of respondents reported they were satisfied with their fraternity experience. The researchers speculated the level of satisfaction of GLB members was comparable to the level of satisfaction one might expect among heterosexual members.

In a subsequent study, Trump and Wallace (2006) used qualitative methods to assess the coping strategies of five gay fraternity men. The researchers identified three primary coping strategies: avoidance, passing, and assimilation. Avoidance involved repressing one’s sexual identity or ignoring homosexual topics, passing involved fabricating a heterosexual outward image or censoring one’s behaviors, and assimilation involved trying to blend in to conceal one’s sexual orientation. A secondary coping strategy within the assimilation framework was the tendency to become involved in the formal operations of the chapter by serving in numerous leadership roles. The researchers referred to this behavior as fusing. The coming out process of the participants was facilitated by the prevalence of other diverse members, the level of homosexual-identity development of the participants, and the participants’ belief in brotherhood.

Leftin (2009) assessed the factors that facilitated and hindered the coming out process of gay fraternity men. Leftin found respondents disclosed their sexual orientation in order to enhance their relationships within their organization, to be true to themselves, or to maintain an out identity. Reasons respondents chose not to reveal their sexual orientation included fear of retaliation, fear of altering the nature of relationships, low prioritization, and having a sexual identity that was not yet fully developed. Leftin also studied the effect of members disclosing their sexual orientation on chapter culture. The researcher found the disclosure of fraternity members' sexual orientation led to increased diversity programming and a reduction in the use of harmful language such as crude jokes and homophobic remarks. For example, some chapters instituted policies forbidding the use of the word "fag" or "faggot." The disclosure of a member's sexual orientation also paved the way for other members to disclose their orientation and for openly gay college students to be recruited into the organization. The researcher coined this phenomenon the trailblazer effect. The results suggest the presence of an openly gay member may improve the social climate within a fraternity chapter for all members with a minority sexual orientation.

While the existing literature on the experiences of fraternity members with minority sexual orientations is expanding, more research is needed. Aside from the study by Case et al. (2005), few or no studies assessed the benefits of fraternity membership for students with minority sexual orientations. In addition, the researcher of the current study found no published studies that assessed the effectiveness of fraternal organizations in developing the abilities of GBQ members. Research on this topic would assist campus-based professionals, organization staff, and volunteers in ensuring fraternities adequately develop the abilities of all of their members.

Research on the alcohol use of GBQ fraternity members is needed, as well. Research outside of the fraternity context associated having a minority sexual orientation with an increased risk of alcohol abuse (DeBord, Wood, Sher, & Good, 1998; McCabe, Boyd, Hughes, & d'Arcy, 2003; Pope, Ionescu-Pioggia, & Pope, 2001). These studies found GBQ students may use alcohol as a coping mechanism. Given that fraternity membership is also associated with alcohol abuse (Theall et al., 2009), it is unclear if GBQ fraternity members tend to consume alcohol at greater rates than heterosexual members. The researcher did not find any studies that examined the alcohol use of fraternity members by sexual orientation.

Purpose of the Study

Research on the development of college students found an unwelcoming campus environment may hinder the identity development of students (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans & Broido, 1999). Moreover, studies on the social climate in fraternal organizations found GBQ students may encounter a hostile environment in college fraternities (Case et al., 2005; DeSantis, 2007; Syrett, 2009). These findings influenced the researcher of the current study to question if fraternities are as effective in producing educational gains for GBQ members as for heterosexual members. Specifically, the researcher asked: do gay, bisexual, unsure or questioning, and heterosexual fraternity members report comparable levels of personal gains, alcohol use, leadership experience, and satisfaction?

Method

Data

The data for this study were drawn from the aggregate results of the institutions that used the AFA/EBI Fraternity/Sorority Assessment survey in 2009 or 2010. Educational Benchmarking, Inc. developed the instrument in partnership with the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors. The survey measured background characteristics, learning outcomes, and satisfaction with the fraternity/sorority experience (AFA/EBI Assessment Committee, 2010). An item on the instrument prompted respondents to report their sexual orientation. The response categories were “Heterosexual,” “Unsure or Questioning,” and “Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transsexual.” This item made the Fraternity/Sorority Assessment survey an appropriate instrument for answering the research question of this study.

Participants

Sampling approach. The dataset consisted of responses from 13,651 fraternity members at 56 four-year institutions across the United States. About 2% of the respondents identified as gay, bisexual, or transsexual and 1% identified as unsure or questioning. The researcher limited the analysis to institutions where at least three respondents identified as gay, bisexual, or transsexual. This was done to ensure the heterosexual respondents in the final sample were drawn from the same pool of institutions as the non-heterosexual respondents. Thirty-six institutions met this criterion. After controlling for missing values, the sample consisted of 10,013 fraternity members, including 196 gay, bisexual, or transsexual fraternity members and 89 members who indicated they were unsure about their sexual orientation. The researcher produced a final sample by using the full subsample ofGBTQ respondents and sampling an equally-sized group of heterosexual respondents. Using the “select cases” command in SPSS, the researcher randomly sampled 286 heterosexual fraternity members from the pool of 9,727 heterosexual respondents, thus generating a final sample size of 572 participants.

Sample Characteristics. About 20% of the participants were freshmen or first year students, 25% were sophomores, 28% were juniors, and 27% were seniors or older. The ethnic distribution of the sample was 5% Black/African-American, 2% Native American/Alaska Native/Inuit, 4% Asian/Middle Eastern/Pacific Islander, 4% Spanish/Hispanic/Latino(a), and 79% White/Caucasian. Ten participants identified as Other and 4% of the participants identified as Multiracial. The sample consisted of a greater percentage of students of color (21%) compared to the full dataset (16%). This is because nearly a third of theGBTQ respondents in the full dataset were students of color.

It should be noted all of the participants, except for two of theGBT participants and seven of the unsure/questioning participants, reported their gender as “Male.” The other participants marked “Other” and none of the participants marked “Female.” While it is possible some transsexual participants identified as male, this demographic information suggests the subsample of gay, bisexual, and transsexual participants is primarily a subsample of gay and bisexual participants.

Variables of Interest

This study focused on four outcome areas: personal gains, alcohol use, leadership experience, and satisfaction.

Personal gains. Nine measures of personal gains were studied: Sense of Belonging, Diverse Interactions, Interpersonal Relationship Skills, Interpersonal Competence, Leadership Skills, Personal Development Skills, Healthy Behaviors, Self-Worth, and Intrapersonal Competence. The factors were based on questions that asked respondents to report to what extent their fraternity experience enabled them to develop a particular skill. The response options ranged from “Not at all” (1) to “Extremely” (7). Sense of Belonging was a five-item scale ($\alpha = .940$) that measured respondents’ ability to meet people in their organization who shared similar interests, values, and beliefs. Diverse Interactions used three items ($\alpha = .909$) to measure the extent to which the fraternal experience influenced respondents’ interaction with and respect for people with different backgrounds. Interpersonal Relationship Skills was a five-item measure ($\alpha = .955$) of gains in the ability of respondents to meet new people and establish close friendships. Interpersonal Competence was a 10-item measure ($\alpha = .957$) of gains in cognitive and interpersonal abilities. Leadership Skills was a five-item measure ($\alpha = .922$) of gains in administrative abilities, such as managing finances, organizing events, and running meetings. Personal Development Skills was a six-item measure ($\alpha = .933$) of gains in academic and career-related abilities, such as time management, decision making, and oral and written communication skills. Healthy Behaviors was a three-item scale ($\alpha = .896$) that measured the extent to which the fraternity experience encouraged respondents to drink responsibly, understand the consequences of drug and alcohol use, and adopt a healthy lifestyle. Self-Worth measured respondents’ perceptions of the value of their contributions to their organization using five questions ($\alpha = .936$). The measure included questions pertaining to feeling passionate about achieving the goals of the organization, feeling a sense of accomplishment, and having pride as a member of one’s organization. Intrapersonal Competence measured the extent to which the fraternity experience influenced respondents’ understanding of their talents and limitations using four questions ($\alpha = .924$). A detailed description of these factors can be found in a summary report by the AFA/EBI Assessment Committee (2010).

Alcohol use. The alcohol use of respondents was measured from two variables. The first variable was the self-reported frequency of alcohol consumption of the respondents. The response categories were “I do not consume alcohol,” “Once per week or less,” “Two to three times per week,” “Almost every day,” and “Every day.” The second variable was a binary measure of binge drinking (1 = Consumed between 1 and 4 drinks per sitting, 2 = Consumed 5 or more drinks per sitting). Respondents who reported they did not consume alcohol were not included in this measure.

Leadership experience. Differences in the assumption of leadership roles were assessed by a question that prompted respondents to report the highest leadership position they held in the chapter. The response categories were “Executive Board member,” “Have not held an officer/committee chair position,” and “Other officer or committee chair.” The first and third response categories were combined to produce a dichotomous variable, Served as a Chapter Officer.

Satisfaction. Differences in satisfaction were assessed by two measures. The first measure was the three-item factor Overall Satisfaction ($\alpha = .875$). Respondents were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with their fraternity experience and how inclined they were to recommend joining a fraternal organization at their campus. Respondents were also asked to report their satisfaction in terms of a cost-benefit analysis. The factor had the same response categories as the personal gains measures. The second measure of satisfaction was anticipated alumni involvement, which was measured from a question that asked respondents: “Do you plan to be involved in your fraternity/sorority (locally, regionally, and/or nationally) after graduation?” The response categories ranged from “Will definitely not be involved” (1) to “Will definitely be involved” (4).

Statistical Approach

The variables of interest had skewed distributions and were ordinal in scale. To assess the differences in the outcomes by sexual orientation, the researcher used the Brunner-Dette-Munk method described by Wilcox (2003, 2005). The approach is a rank-based analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure that tests the null hypothesis that the distributions and relative effects of the groups being compared are the same. A relative effect (q) is the degree to which respondents in one group score high or low on a dependent variable relative to the scores of all of the respondents. The value of the measure can range from 0 to 1. If the null hypothesis for a given dependent variable is not rejected, then all groups should have relative effects of .50 (Erceg-Hurn & Mirosevich, 2008). Post hoc analyses were conducted using Cliff’s delta (d). Cliff’s delta is a nonparametric statistic that assesses the probability that a randomly sampled score from one population is higher than a randomly sampled score of another population, minus the reverse probability (Cliff, 1993, 1996). Cliff’s delta can be used for inferential statistics and as a measure of effect size. Familywise error rates were controlled using the Holm-Bonferonni approach (Cliff, 1996; see also Holm, 1979).

Results

The descriptive results of the differences in personal gains, alcohol use, leadership experience, and satisfaction by sexual orientation are presented in Table 1. As a group, heterosexual fraternity members had higher mean scores for all of the personal gains measures except for Diverse Interactions. Gay and bisexual (GB) fraternity members had the highest mean for Diverse Interactions ($M = 5.86$, $SD = 1.32$). The prevalence of binge drinking was similar across all three groups: 51% of heterosexual, 53% of unsure/questioning, and 51% of GB fraternity members indicated they consumed five or more alcoholic beverages per sitting when they drank. In terms of leadership experience, 72% of heterosexual, 66% of unsure/questioning, and 78% of GB fraternity members indicated they held a position of responsibility in their organizations.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations by Sexual Orientation

Measure	Heterosexual		Questioning		Gay or Bisexual	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<i>Personal Gains</i>						
Sense of Belonging	6.24	0.92	5.74	1.50	5.86	1.32
Diverse Interactions	5.67	1.23	5.34	1.62	5.86	1.32
Interpersonal Relationship Skills	6.19	0.96	5.72	1.41	5.90	1.26
Interpersonal Competence	5.87	1.05	5.32	1.48	5.52	1.29
Leadership Skills	5.83	1.09	5.26	1.58	5.50	1.37
Personal Development Skills	5.59	1.14	5.13	1.59	5.26	1.42
Healthy Behaviors	5.41	1.44	5.01	1.80	5.27	1.60
Self-Worth	6.07	1.00	5.54	1.55	5.80	1.34
Intrapersonal Competence	5.94	1.15	5.35	1.58	5.70	1.29
<i>Alcohol Use</i>						
Frequency of Alcohol Use	2.47	0.76	2.71	1.11	2.51	0.89
Binge Drinking	1.51	0.50	1.53	0.50	1.51	0.51
<i>Leadership Experience</i>						
Served as a Chapter Officer	1.72	0.45	1.66	0.48	1.78	0.42
<i>Satisfaction</i>						
Overall Satisfaction with Fraternity/Sorority Experience	6.19	1.03	5.65	1.68	5.84	1.37
Anticipated Alumni Involvement	3.05	0.75	2.84	0.94	3.10	0.79

The one-way analyses of variance using the Brunner-Dette-Munk method revealed further insights into the experiences of fraternity members with minority sexual orientations. Significant differences were found for six of the nine personal gains measures: Sense of Belonging, Diverse Interactions, Interpersonal Relationship Skills, Interpersonal Competence, Leadership Skills, and Intrapersonal Competence (see Table 2). Follow-up pairwise comparisons were conducted to assess how the groups differed. Heterosexual fraternity members reported greater gains in Sense of Belonging compared to GB fraternity members ($d = .169, p = .001$) and greater gains in Intrapersonal Competence compared to fraternity members who were unsure about their sexual orientation ($d = .198, p = .009$). Compared to GB and unsure/questioning fraternity members, heterosexual fraternity members also reported greater gains in Interpersonal Relationship Skills ($d_Q = .179, p = .014; d_{GB} = .133, p = .013$), Interpersonal Competence ($d_Q = .204, p = .007; d_{GB} = .161, p = .002$), and Leadership Skills ($d_Q = .194, p = .011; d_{GB} = .133, p = .013$).

Table 2

Relative Effects (q) and One-Way Analysis of Variance of Differences by Sexual Orientation

Measure	Hetero- sexual q ₁	Ques- tioning q ₂	Gay or Bisexual q ₃	F	df ₁ , df ₂	Sig.	Follow-Up Analyses
<i>Personal Gains</i>							
Sense of Belonging	.541	.460	.458	3.90	2, 208	.029	1 > 3
Diverse Interactions	.485	.448	.545	4.05	2, 205	.025	3 > 1, 2
Interpersonal Relationship Skills	.537	.446	.471	3.77	2, 219	.031	1 > 2, 3
Interpersonal Competence	.544	.438	.465	4.90	2, 204	.013	1 > 2, 3
Leadership Skills	.538	.439	.472	4.10	2, 206	.024	1 > 2, 3
Personal Development Skills	.532	.457	.473	2.48	2, 197	.097	
Healthy Behaviors	.514	.460	.498	1.25	2, 211	.284	
Self-Worth	.530	.451	.479	2.62	2, 198	.087	
Intrapersonal Competence	.535	.431	.481	4.32	2, 195	.021	1 > 2
<i>Alcohol Use</i>							
Frequency of Alcohol Use	.499	.543	.482	1.82	2, 203	.172	
Binge Drinking	.500	.525	.489	0.73	2, 229	.463	
<i>Leadership Experience</i>							
Served as a Chapter Officer	.494	.467	.524	2.35	2, 216	.107	
<i>Satisfaction</i>							
Overall Satisfaction with Fraternity/Sorority Experience	.532	.468	.468	2.34	2, 207	.109	
Anticipated Alumni Involvement	.500	.446	.524	2.90	2, 204	.068	

Note. Relative effects (q) represent the degree to which respondents in one group score high or low on a dependent variable relative to the scores of all of the respondents. Higher values correspond to higher ratings. Familywise error rates were controlled at the $\alpha=.05$ level using the Holm-Bonferonni approach. Significant differences are in **bold**.

Gay and bisexual fraternity members reported greater gains in Diverse Interactions compared to unsure/questioning ($d = -.179, p = .018$) and heterosexual fraternity members ($d = -.124, p = .018$). There were no statistically significant differences in the gains in Personal Development Skills, Self-Worth, and Healthy Behaviors by sexual orientation. The researcher also found no difference in the alcohol-related behaviors of respondents. GB fraternity members were slightly more likely to serve in a position of responsibility ($q = .524$) compared to their heterosexual ($q = .494$) and unsure/questioning ($q = .467$) peers, however the difference was not statistically significant. There were no differences in overall satisfaction and anticipated alumni involvement by sexual orientation.

Limitations

Care should be taken in interpreting the results of this study. The finding that heterosexual fraternity members tended to report higher gains than GBQ members does not imply GBQ members were less skilled. This simply means the fraternal environment was not as effective in developing the skills of the GBQ respondents. It is possible the GBQ respondents developed their abilities through other campus activities. Other limitations pertain to the design of the study. First, it is possible respondents were not honest when reporting their sexual orientation. Closeted GBQ respondents might have reported their sexual orientation as heterosexual. Thus, the results primarily reflect the experiences of “out” GBQ members. Second, the instrument did not allow one to differentiate between the experiences of gay, bisexual, and transsexual members. These subgroups may experience fraternal environments differently. Third, the cross-sectional design provides only a snapshot of the experiences of GBQ fraternity members. Since the sexual identity of students may change throughout the college experience (Case et al., 2005), collecting the data at a later point in time might have produced different results. A longitudinal study that accounts for the changes in the sexual identity of the respondents may provide additional insights into the educational gains of GBQ fraternity members. Lastly, while the study was multi-institutional in nature, the majority of the respondents attended large research institutions, thus the results may have limited generalizability to other campus contexts. Despite these limitations, the results are useful for understanding how the educational outcomes of gay, bisexual, and unsure/questioning members compare to those of heterosexual members.

Discussion

This exploratory study sought to assess if the gains fraternity members experienced as a result of their fraternity affiliation varied by sexual orientation. The study differed from previous studies on the experiences of fraternity members with a minority sexual orientation by including heterosexual members as a comparison group. Leftin (2009) suggested including heterosexual members in the study provides a more complete picture of the experiences of non-heterosexual members. The current study also differed from previous studies in that the experiences of fraternity members who were unsure about their orientation were assessed. Little or no published research had explored the experiences of this subgroup.

Personal Gains

The descriptive results revealed unsure/questioning respondents reported the lowest gains for all of the personal gains measures compared to the gay, bisexual, and heterosexual respondents (see Table 1). Follow-up analyses revealed statistically significant differences between unsure/questioning respondents and heterosexual respondents for four of the personal gains measures (Interpersonal Relationship Skills, Interpersonal Competence, Leadership Skills, and Intrapersonal Competence) with heterosexual members reporting greater gains for the measures (see Table 2). The factors primarily measured psychosocial concepts: that is, the respondents’ abilities to effectively interact within the social environment of the fraternal organization. A possible explanation for the lower gains is unsure/questioning members have to dedicate more time and energy toward coming to terms with their sexual identity compared to heterosexual members. This might leave less time and energy unsure/questioning members can dedicate to developing their interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities. This is plausible in light of the coming

out literature which states gay fraternity members may repress their sexual identity or fabricate a heterosexual outward image as coping strategies (see Trump & Wallace, 2006). These practices prevent unsure/questioning members from fully immersing themselves into the fraternal environment, which may negatively impact the gains of unsure/questioning members.

In regard to interpersonal abilities, Case et al. (2005) found developing social and interpersonal skills and forming friendships were two of the main benefits of fraternity membership for GB men. The descriptive results of the current study revealed the highest mean scores of GB respondents were for the measures of Sense of Belonging ($M = 5.86$, $SD = 1.32$) and Interpersonal Relationship Skills ($M = 5.90$, $SD = 1.26$), which affirm the findings by Case and his colleagues. The present study contributed to the extant literature by revealing unsure/questioning fraternity members benefit in these two areas, as well. Unsure/questioning respondents reported mean ratings of 5.74 ($SD = 1.50$) and 5.72 ($SD = 1.41$) for Sense of Belonging and Interpersonal Relationship Skills, respectively.

It should be noted that GB respondents reported less development in Sense of Belonging compared to heterosexual respondents (see Table 2). A review of the factor components revealed the fraternity experience enabled GB respondents to meet people with whom they enjoyed spending time ($M = 6.06$, $SD = 1.41$), but the experience was not as effective in helping GB respondents meet people who included them in activities ($M = 5.80$, $SD = 1.53$) and shared similar interests ($M = 5.77$, $SD = 1.42$) and beliefs ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 1.48$). According to these results, GB members enjoy the social environment in fraternities, but they may experience dissonance due to a perceived lack of fit. This mirrors the results by Case et al. (2005), who found gay, lesbian, and bisexual members' perceived need to hide part of their identity prevented the members from forming closer relationships with their peers. There was no difference in the development of sense of belonging between unsure/questioning and heterosexual respondents.

In regard to leadership abilities, the majority of respondents in the study by Case et al. (2005) reported the development of leadership skills was a benefit of fraternity membership. However, the current study revealed GB ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.37$) and unsure/questioning ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.58$) respondents reported moderate gains in leadership abilities. The high standard deviations of the Leadership Skills factor suggest GBQ members have varying experiences in this area. Some GBQ respondents reported high gains as a result of their fraternity experience and other GBQ respondents reported lower gains. There was less dispersion in the response pattern of heterosexual members ($SD_H = 1.09$), indicating the reported gains among heterosexual fraternity members were more similar.

As shown in Table 1, the Healthy Behaviors and Personal Development Skills factors received the lowest ratings within each group. The outcomes of all fraternity members can be improved by making the fraternity experience more conducive to gaining competencies pertaining to these two measures. The non-significant difference across the three groups implies that no particular subgroup is advantaged in the gains in Healthy Behaviors and Personal Development Skills. This strengthens the case that these two areas should be addressed. Campus-based professionals, organization staff, and volunteers can be integral in developing these competencies in fraternity members.

Alcohol Use

Fraternity membership has been associated with increased rates of alcohol use and binge drinking (Theall et al., 2009). In addition, research outside of the fraternity context associated having a minority sexual orientation with an increased risk of alcohol abuse (DeBord et al., 1998; McCabe et al., 2003; Pope et al., 2001). These findings lead one to suspect the prevalence of alcohol abuse among GBQ fraternity members might be greater than among heterosexual members. The results of the current study revealed no difference in the alcohol use of gay, bisexual, unsure or questioning, and heterosexual fraternity members. According to this finding, the fraternity environment does not influence the drinking behaviors of GBQ members any more than the environment may influence the drinking behaviors of heterosexual members. The non-significant difference in alcohol use is comparable to the results by Ridner, Frost, and LaJoie (2006), who found no difference in the drinking behaviors of gay and heterosexual college men. The researchers, however, did not provide an explanation for the finding. A possible explanation for the non-significant difference in alcohol use by sexual orientation is GBQ members avoided engaging in behaviors that placed them in a negative light. Researchers suggested fraternity members with minority sexual orientations might become highly engaged in chapter activities to prove themselves to other members (see Case et al., 2005; Trump & Wallace, 2006). If this is the case, then one would expect GBQ members to avoid engaging in socially unacceptable behaviors, as well. Based on the experiences of the researcher, consuming alcohol excessively (that is, more often than other fraternity members) and engaging in destructive behaviors as a result of one's drinking behaviors is censured in fraternal organizations. It is possible the fraternal environment prevents some GBQ members from using alcohol as a coping mechanism.

Leadership Experience

Previous studies exploring the leadership experiences of GB fraternity members suggested members with a minority sexual orientation have a propensity to serve in formal leadership roles, especially executive-level positions (Case et al., 2005; Trump & Wallace, 2006). A limitation of these studies was the absence of a comparison group of heterosexual members. Thus, the studies did not reveal if gay and bisexual members were more likely to serve in leadership roles compared to heterosexual members. The ANOVA in the current study revealed no difference in the prevalence of gay, bisexual, unsure/questioning, and heterosexual chapter officers (see Table 2), suggesting GBQ and non-GBQ members serve in formal leadership roles at comparable rates. Despite the non-significant difference in the prevalence of chapter officers by sexual orientation, the descriptive results support the finding that gay and bisexual members serve in formal leadership roles at high rates. Seventy-eight percent of the GB respondents served as chapter officers. Moreover, 44% of GB respondents—compared to 33% of unsure/questioning respondents and 38% of heterosexual respondents—indicated the highest leadership position they held in their chapter was an executive-level position.

Satisfaction

Respondents with a minority sexual orientation were satisfied with their fraternity experience as demonstrated by the high ratings for the Overall Satisfaction factor. Compared to the ratings for the personal gains measures, the Overall Satisfaction factor had the third highest mean for unsure/questioning respondents ($M = 5.65$, $SD = 1.68$) and the fourth highest mean for GB respondents ($M = 5.84$, $SD = 1.37$). The mean for heterosexual respondents ($M = 6.19$, $SD = 1.03$) was higher, however the researcher found no statistically significant difference in the

overall satisfaction of fraternity members by sexual orientation, indicating GBQ fraternity respondents were at least as satisfied as their heterosexual peers. Furthermore, GB fraternity members were slightly more likely to anticipate being involved in their organization post-graduation compared to their questioning and heterosexual peers, as shown by the means in Table 1. Case et al. (2005) suggested the level of satisfaction of fraternity members with a minority sexual orientation was comparable to that of heterosexual fraternity members. The results of the current study affirm these conclusions.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study revealed differences in the experiences of fraternity members by sexual orientation. Heterosexual fraternity members reported significantly greater gains for the majority of the personal gains measures compared to GBQ fraternity members. Moreover, questioning fraternity members expressed gaining the least from their fraternity experience for most of the personal gains measures. These results have several implications for practice and research.

Implications for Practice

Chapter advisors, organization staff, and campus-based professionals (hereafter referred to as advisors) can be integral in ensuring fraternities are effective in developing the abilities of all members, regardless of the sexual orientation of the members. Strategies include establishing safe and inclusive social environments, developing the academic and career-related abilities of members, and encouraging members to make healthy lifestyle choices.

Establish safe and inclusive social environments. The results revealed the fraternity experience was less effective in producing personal gains for gay, bisexual, and unsure/questioning respondents compared to heterosexual respondents. The difference might be a result of sexual-orientation-related stress. Zubernis and Snyder (2007) stated students with minority sexual orientations “experience the same stresses and concerns that affect college students in general, but have the additional stress related to managing the stigma of being a sexual minority” (p. 76). Advisors should work with chapter members to create social environments that are accepting and supportive of people with non-heterosexual identities. Adding diversity programming to the membership education curriculum that improves members’ understanding of sexual identity development and ways to support brothers with minority sexual orientations would be beneficial. In addition, advisors should work with chapter members to make their organization less heteronormative. These efforts may limit the additional sexual-orientation-related stress GBQ members may experience. Consequently, GBQ members may have more time and energy to dedicate to developing their abilities.

Develop the academic and career-related abilities of members. Personal Development Skills was the lowest rated measure for GB respondents and the second lowest for heterosexual and unsure/questioning respondents. These descriptive results revealed the fraternity experience was mildly effective in developing the academic and career-related abilities of members, such as time management, decision making, and oral and written communication skills. Advisors should consider adding hands-on workshops on business writing and developing public speaking skills to membership education programs. Chapter-based or community-wide support programs, such

as Toastmasters, may also be beneficial in developing the academic and career-related abilities of members.

Encourage members to make healthy lifestyle choices. The Healthy Behaviors factor received the lowest rating by heterosexual and unsure/questioning respondents and the second lowest rating by GB respondents. Furthermore, half of the respondents indicated they binge drink when they consume alcohol. Advisors should consider offering educational programs on health, wellness, and the consequences of alcohol and drug abuse. In addition, advisors should work with organization members to reduce the prominence of alcohol at social events. Traditions, such as initiations, anniversaries, parent weekends, and homecoming, should be commemorated through activities that do not promote the use of alcohol as a bonding mechanism. This would teach members they can be social without consuming alcohol.

Implications for Research

While this study expanded the literature on the experiences of fraternity members with minority sexual orientations, some questions remain unanswered. The instrument of the current study did not allow one to differentiate between the experiences of gay, bisexual, and transgendered respondents. Additional research is needed to understand how the experiences of these subgroups compare. More research on members who are unsure or question their sexual orientation is needed, as well. The results of the current study revealed questioning students reported fewer gains as a result of their fraternity experience compared to GB and heterosexual fraternity members. Future research should explore why the differences might exist. Future research should also explore if fraternities can facilitate the identity development of gay and bisexual students and under which conditions this might occur. Research indicated serving in a leadership role in a GBQ student organization facilitated the identity development of GBQ students (Renn, 2007; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). Since fraternity members with a minority sexual orientation have a tendency to serve in chapter leadership roles, the right conditions may enable GBQ members to explore and refine their sexual identity. Further research should also explore if differences exist in the experiences of GBQ members by living arrangement. It is possible the experiences of members who live in a chapter house are different compared to the experiences of members who reside in other living arrangements.

Conclusion

This study contributed to the existing literature by shedding light on the differences in outcomes of fraternity members by sexual orientation. While GBQ were more likely to report fewer gains as a result of their fraternity experience, members with a minority sexual orientation reported comparable levels of the assumption of leadership positions and satisfaction compared to their heterosexual peers. Programs and interventions by campus-based professionals, organization staff, and volunteers can be integral in ensuring gay, bisexual, and questioning members have positive fraternal experiences.

For resources on supporting non-heterosexual fraternity and sorority members, advisors should visit the Lambda 10 Project website (www.lambda10.org). The website features resources for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning (GLBTQ) members, such as a list of “out”

fraternity and sorority members, stories about GLBTQ fraternity and sorority members, and recommendations for things to consider when coming out to one's chapter. The website also includes resources for GLBTQ allies. These resources include recommendations for fraternity/sorority professionals, an anti-homophobia training manual, climate assessment checklists for fraternities and sororities, and descriptions of ways to develop a fraternity/sorority ally program. In addition, chapter advisors, organization staff, and campus-based professionals can improve their GLBTQ advising abilities by attending an educational program on supporting students with minority sexual orientations. Advisors who are affiliated with an institution of higher education might attend a safe zone training program, if one is available. Alternatively, advisors might consider attending a conference or training session, such as the week-long Advisor Book Camp organized by Campus Pride (www.campuspride.org/camppride).

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Author Autobiography

Larry Long is the Student Life Coordinator at Gonzaga University in Florence, Italy. Larry earned graduate degrees in Student Affairs Administration, Educational Psychology, and Sociology from Ball State University and undergraduate degrees in Modern Languages and Physical Sciences from Kansas State University. He currently serves the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors as a member of the *Essentials* Editorial Board.