AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF GAY, LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL FRATERNITY AND SORORITY MEMBERS REVISITED[1]

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The lead author questioned over 500 self-identified gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) fraternity and sorority members to assess their reasons for joining; how their membership affected their sexual identity development and intimate relationships; the degree of homophobia and heterosexism encountered; how sexual orientation affected the quality of their fraternal experiences; and the level of acceptance or rejection they faced. Many respondents were in the early phases of sexual identity development at the time they joined, and most chose to conceal their sexual orientation from their fellow members. This study details the reactions from fellow members, assesses satisfaction with the fraternity or sorority experience, and reports the level of involvement of GLB students in their fraternities or sororities.

Virtually no formal research exists regarding gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) students who are or were members of college social fraternities and sororities. By choice or perceived necessity, most GLB fraternity and sorority members keep their sexual orientation hidden from their fellow members. The invisibility of the GLB population helps explain the dearth of research. This exploratory study was initiated because the primary researcher, a university student affairs professional who advises fraternities and sororities and an alumnus of a social fraternity, had questions regarding how the experiences of other gay fraternity members were similar to or different from his own.

Regardless of how an individual behaves in other contexts of his/her life, every time he/she encounters a new person (outside specifically GLB settings), that other person will assume that the individual is heterosexual (heteronormality). The GLB person will thus have to decide once again whether to correct that assumption and deal with whatever reaction the other person might have or to let the assumption persist and thereby present himself or herself as a heterosexual in that encounter. D'Augelli (1994) pointed out that given the heteronormality that exists in U.S. society there are few visible appropriate socializing forces for young GLB people; therefore, much of their individual development is because of their own choices and actions.

The terms available for the description of sexual identity have changed over time and hold different meanings for different people (Rust, 1996). Some gay and lesbian persons reject the label homosexual as too clinical a description. They prefer to describe themselves as gay because they see that term as an accurate description of their feelings and behaviors. Many people view the term queer as a decidedly political term that symbolizes a challenge to traditional category boundaries. For other people, however, the term is political and they reject the label because they do not share these politics.

Shilts (1993) maintained, "Homosexuals . . . have very little control over many of the most crucial circumstances of their lives. Control resides with the heterosexual majority, which defines the limits of freedom for the homosexual minority" (pp. 6-7). Ironically, at a time when most college students need support from their peers, many students are afraid to ask for it for fear of receiving rejection instead of support. Although social attitudes toward GLB people are becoming more positive, and GLB men and women are becoming more visible, homophobia

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and heterosexism still pervade both our culture and social systems (Rust, 1996). No place is this assumption of heteronormality more true than within the college fraternity/sorority culture (DeQuine, 2003). Many college campuses have a student organization for GLB students and historically, these groups alone have addressed the needs of these students because counseling centers and campus housing professionals paid little attention to the problems of GLB students until very recently (D'Augelli, 1996). However, few if any such support organizations exist for GLB fraternity/sorority members (Case, 2005) and those that do exist are still in their infancy (see Hesp, 2005). Much informal counseling and crisis intervention occurs in these support organizations and D'Augelli sees it as imperative that campus administrators support them.

GLB fraternal groups have gained acceptance on many college campuses (Gregory & Associates, 2003), but acceptance of GLB fraternity/sorority members who become part of the mainstream fraternity/sorority community has been a slower process (DeQuine, 2003). Because more young GLB people come out of the closet while still in high school, they may arrive on college campuses expecting little or no discrimination in social opportunities due to their sexual orientation (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Savin-Williams, 1995). Although there were not formal exclusionary clauses within the membership guidelines of fraternities or sororities based on sexual orientation, some organizations are making specific statements that indicate that a differing sexual orientation from that of the majority of organization members is not a reason for denying an invitation to join, or removal of a brother or sister who comes out after his/her initiation (Binder, 2003). The familial environment of the college fraternity/sorority, however, may be concurrently a supportive and a hostile environment, particularly for those students in the process of developing a GLB identity. Kuh and Lyons (1990) claimed that "a close community can become closed, oppress as well as support" (p. 21). According to Chan (1996), psychological research indicates that it is far easier and more common to hold negative attitudes towards members of minority groups if an individual does not know or feel connected to someone in the stigmatized group and if he/she cannot see the humanity and similarity to himself/herself. As noted by Chickering and Reisser (1993), "homophobia discourages closeness between males. Men are more likely than women to equate warmth and closeness with sex and look for an erotic component when a strong emotional component exists" (p. 170). When a chapter culture "inhibits personal or cross cultural connections, or assigns second-class citizenship to certain types of students or relationships, then avenues for dialogue and exploration may be closed" (p. 396). Thus, GLB or questioning students may feel alienated from fraternities/sororities and fraternity/sorority members.

Windmeyer and Freeman gave voice to the experiences of select fraternity members (1998) and sorority members (2001) and their involvement in fraternity/sorority life as GLB people. These anecdotal reports affirmed that some people who are openly GLB or who later come out achieve and maintain membership in fraternity chapters. Some researchers have identified and labeled distinctive coping strategies used by GLB people (see Trump 2003; Woods, 1992). Johnson (1996) suggested that some gay adolescents follow one option of being the "best little boy on the face of the earth" (p. 38).

During the 1990s, when diversity became a buzzword on college campuses, many new fraternal organizations organized with a focus on cultural diversity (Johnson & Larabee, 2003). Many of these groups do not currently have an inter/national governing body or umbrella organization (such as the North-American Interfraternity Conference) to which they belong. Members join these culturally diverse groups for numerous reasons, oftentimes the same reasons that members join the older and more traditional chapters. According to Johnson and Larabee,

foremost is the desire for a sense of truly belonging and satisfaction of a need that the older and more traditional groups do not fully understand. Additionally, these organizations contribute significantly to their respective communities and endeavor to improve the quality of life for the culture. Delta Lambda Phi (DLP) was founded in 1986 in Washington, D.C., and modeled on the traditional programs, policies, and activities of the older and more traditional fraternity groups. The organization membership cites the mission as "enhancing the quality of life among gay, bisexual and progressive men by providing dignified and purposeful social, service and recreational activities" (Delta Lambda Phi website, 2005). Johnson and Larabee posit that the meaning and purpose for members of organizations such as DLP is to "have some social group that understands, appreciates and respects members as individuals, and which will help them develop into caring, balanced citizens" (p. 103).

The literature pertaining to homosexual identity development is also dichotomous with some suggesting that a majority of GLB people move through a series of stages from awareness through to the attainment of an integrated homosexual identity, whereas others articulate a nonlinear model. Cass' (1979) model of homosexual identity development appears to be the most widely recognized model within the literature reviewed and suggests environment greatly affects the coming out process.

Mead (1934) argued that self-identity is formed out of the interaction between the "I" and the "me," where the "I" is one's internalized sense of self and the "me" is one's sense of self as we imagine others see us. Through social interaction such as in fraternity/sorority chapter membership, the self emerges as individuals move back and forth between the "I" and the "me." Culture frames social interaction and is reshaped by that interaction. It also establishes the roles that individuals adopt as they engage in social interaction. Erikson (1968) discussed identity development as a sense of self that emerges from the interaction between the individual and social relationships. He recognized the role that society and culture play in shaping how we think of and define ourselves. Both Erikson and Mead highlighted the fundamental role culture and social life play in the process of identity development. Thus, we posit that fraternity/sorority membership has a major impact on the identity development of GLB undergraduates who choose to join fraternal organizations.

Method

Sampling Method

Given the expected difficulty to contact participants, the sampling approach used purposeful "elite sampling" and "snowball sampling" (Zuokemefa, 2003, p. 49). In this procedure, the key researcher contacted initial elite (key) participants, many of whom were student affairs professionals, fraternity and sorority professionals, and fraternity/sorority volunteers. At the end of a survey, he asked the participant if he/she knew of others who would be able to add to the study. If yes, participants either passed on the contact details of the key researcher and had the new person contact the researcher, requested additional blank surveys for distribution, or provided the key researcher with the suggested participants' names and addresses. While some of the referrals might have been unwilling to contact the researcher, the option of utilizing this system maintained the privacy of participants. The desire was that these participants would help to develop, network, and grow – like a snowball – referrals to fraternity/sorority chapter members who are openly GLB as well as some who may remain in the closet or not be open about their sexual orientation. The desire was that this process would lead to an ever-growing list of referrals that would facilitate the expansion of the developing theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Because of interest from the initial research participants, the original survey was refined for mass distribution and expanded to include both

gay and bisexual fraternity members and lesbian and bisexual sorority members. The key researcher compiled nearly 100 surveys from men before he sought responses from women.

The availability of the survey to men and women was announced by classified advertisements and press releases sent to various local and national GLB publications, posting announcements to various Internet newsgroups and electronic mail discussion lists (particularly those related to GLB, higher education, and fraternity/sorority issues), and referrals from other respondents. Respondents could respond via electronic mail or by mailing back the survey to a post office box. The key researcher distributed surveys over a 30-month period between 1992 and 1995.

Sample Characteristics

A total of 524 responses were received, 472 from men and 52 from women. Demographically, these self-selected respondents appeared to represent a broad cross-section of individuals who have joined college fraternities and sororities (Table 1).

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of voluntary research participants by sex

Demographic Characteristic	Male n = 472	Female n = 53
Institutions of higher education institutions represented	131	53
Inter/national organizations represented	39	22
Local organizations represented	5	1
Range in age of respondents	19-58	19-59
Average age of respondents	31	35
Number of current undergraduates	32	5

Table 2
Demographic characteristics of voluntary research participants by sex

Conference Region	Male	Female
West	33	44
Mid-America	21	13
Northeast	18	15
Southeast	17	23
Decline to report	11	5

With the exception of six responses from members of three historically Black (NPHC) fraternities, one response from a member of a historically Black (NPHC) sorority and one from a local Latino fraternity, respondents were from predominately White groups. Only 4% of the males and 6% of the females omitted their affiliation. The lead researcher defined regions as states within the regional student conferences (Northeast Greek Leadership Association, Southeastern Panhellenic/Interfraternity Conferences; Mid-American Greek Council Association, Western Greek Leadership Association). Respondents were more likely to be from the author's Western Region (Table 2). Estimation of GLB Fraternity and Sorority Members

Table 3
Self-reported sexual identity among respondents (in percentage of total) upon joining a fraternity or sorority, upon graduation from college, and at the time of the survey.

	Male	Female
Sexual identity upon joining		
Exclusively or Predominately heterosexual	35	79
Exclusively or Predominately gay/lesbian	39	12
Exclusively or Predominately bisexual	21	10
Other (unsure, asexual, etc.)	05	0
Sexual identify upon graduation		
Exclusively or Predominately heterosexual	18	47
Exclusively or Predominately gay/lesbian	60	34
Exclusively or Predominately bisexual	20	19
Other (unsure, asexual, etc.)	2	0
Current sexual identity (at the time of survey completion)		
Exclusively or Predominately gay/lesbian	93	81
Exclusively or Predominately bisexual	07	19

Instrumentation

The research instrument consisted of a 32-item survey administered to self-identified GLB fraternity and sorority members. Most of the questions were multiple-choice, but the key researcher provided spaces for written comments after several items. Content in the survey included GLB respondents' reasons for joining a fraternity/sorority, how their membership may have affected their sexual identity development and intimate relationships; if their sexual orientation affected the quality of their fraternal experience; the level of homophobia or heterosexism they faced; and the level of acceptance or rejection they experienced. Finally, respondents were encouraged to contribute any additional comments, stories, observations, or information they thought would be useful for the purposes of the project. Most respondents included at least a few additional remarks; a few included several pages of narrative. We inserted the "voices" of these respondents in this paper where their comments authentically reflected the trend of the quantitative data presented. (A copy of the original instrument may be obtained from the principal researcher.)

Results

Generalizability of the Self-Selected Volunteer Sample

The self-selected respondents in this study learned of the survey by word of mouth from professional or personal associates, or in a male-oriented GLB publication and took the initiative to respond; thus, the respondents did not constitute a random sample of GLB fraternity members and their responses cannot be generalized to represent the experiences of all GLB fraternity/sorority members. The self-selection was necessary, however, due to the limited accessibility of the target group for research purposes (Zuokemefa, 2003). GLB fraternity and sorority members who are still "in the closet" are less likely to read GLB publications or be on GLB electronic mailing lists, so their responses may be underrepresented. Nonetheless, the size and diversity of the respondent pool was useful for initial descriptive research purposes, particularly for

the results regarding fraternity men. The lower number of female respondents was partially due to not recruiting women volunteers until after the key researcher obtained more than 100 responses from men. Sexual Identity Development

All of the respondents identified themselves as GLB at the time they completed the survey. However, over a third of the men and almost 80 % of the women still identified themselves as heterosexual at the time they joined their fraternity or sorority (Table 3). By the time the participants graduated however, only about half of those who initially identified as heterosexual still considered themselves heterosexual. Many identified themselves as bisexual for a period before accepting a gay or lesbian identity. These data also clearly demonstrated a substantial difference between men and women with regard to the age of GLB identification. Most men had begun to adopt a gay or bisexual identity before college, whereas most women adopted a lesbian or bisexual identity during or after college.

Sexual Activity

A total of 36 % of the men and 38 % of the women indicated that they engaged in homosexual activity with one or more members of their own chapter, and 38 % of the men and 12 % of the women reported that they had engaged in homosexual activity with one or more members of other chapters on their campus. Slightly less than half the men had experienced their first post-pubescent homosexual experience prior to college, while only 12 % of the women had done so (Table 4).

For a majority of the male respondents sexual partners in college were of the same gender, whereas one-third of the women reported exclusive relationships with members of their own gender (Table 5).

Table 4
Time of first post-pubescent homosexual experience by sex by percentage of total group

Time Period	Male	Female
Before College	45	12
During College	39	52
After College	15	37
Still a virgin	1	0

Table 5
Gender of self-reported sexual partners in college

Gender	Male	Female
Primarily same gender	52	33
Primarily opposite gender	22	42
Both genders	15	15
Did not have sex partners in college	11	10

Estimation of GLB Fraternity and Sorority Members

One of the research objectives was to attempt to determine the prevalence of GLB members of fraternities and sororities. This task was made complicated by the fact that students are still developing their sexual identify while in college and that most fraternity and sorority members do not reveal their sexual orientation to their fellow undergraduate members. Furthermore, a comparison statistic of the percentage of GLB members in the general college and university

population was also difficult to ascertain with accuracy, particularly with the fluidity of sexual identity among college-aged students and differing criteria for classifying an individual as homosexual or bisexual. The term "closet" symbolizes the oppression of gay people who feel required to remain silent about their sexual identity. Sedgwick (1990) maintained, "The closet is the defining structure for gay oppression" (p. 68) and symbolized the effect of the normalization of other-gender relationships. The power of the norms associated with heterosexuality imprisons those who feel differently and who have attractions that do not fit the normalized version of how society expects individuals to be (Rhoads, 1994). For some, confinement is so severe that thoughts of suicide prevail while for others, fear of being found out leads them to filter carefully feelings and thoughts. According to Rhoads, these factors make it unlikely that someone could establish deep relationships when he/she keeps a significant aspect of his/her identity secret. Resisting society's norms can lead to social retribution while to comply is to deny one's identity. The choice to come out is a very personal one and affected by an individual's stage of sexual identity development. Herdt (1992) recognized the ongoing nature of coming out in discussing it as a rite of passage to gay identity: "Although the 'coming out' concept conveys a single event pinpointed in time and space, many writers today recognize a multiplicity of events stretching over years" (p. 30). A criticism of linear models is that they fail to acknowledge that coming out is a continuous, lifelong process.

One method of deriving an approximation of the percentage of chapter members who are GLB was to ask the respondents how many fellow members they knew, with certainty based on reliable knowledge acquired during or after college, to be GLB. Respondents were to exclude those who they merely suspected were GLB since such data would not be reliable. Of the male members, the average number of fellow members they knew to be gay or bisexual was 3.5 per chapter (4.5 if the respondent himself was included). With a mean reported chapter size of 52 among respondents to the survey, it is probable that the average male respondent matriculated with 70 - 90 different fraternity brothers over the course of his undergraduate experience (extrapolation based on an assumption that the average fraternity member is an active undergraduate member for 2.5 years). Accordingly, respondents knew a total of approximately 5-6 % of the fraternity chapter membership to be gay. The women respondents reporting knowing with certainty that an average of 2.9 fellow members were lesbian or bisexual, with an average chapter size of 81, meaning that a total of approximately 3-4 % of the chapter membership was known to be lesbian or bisexual. Actual percentages of GLB membership in respondents' chapters were likely to be higher, since these approximations do not include those chapter members not known with certainty to be GLB.

Reasons for Joining and Benefits of Membership

Each respondent selected up to three reasons from a list of 16 possible reasons why he/she determined to join a fraternity or sorority (Table 6). The top reasons for joining among both males and females were "friendship, camaraderie", "social life, parties, having fun,", and "support group, sense of belonging." Among males, "leadership" was the fourth most frequently marked reason for joining, while for females, "friends encouraged me to join" was the fourth most frequent reason checked. Only 3% of men and 4 % of women indicated that they joined "to meet members of the same sex."

Respondents also selected up to three benefits, from a list of ten, which represented the "most important lasting benefits" they actually received from their fraternity/sorority membership experience (Table 7). The top three outcomes listed by these respondents among both males and females were "social and interpersonal skills," "long-term friendships," and "leadership skills."

Table 6
Reasons for joining a fraternity or sorority marked by nine percent or more of respondents

Reasons for joining	Male	Female
Friendship, camaraderie	75	78
Social life, parties, having fun	52	46
Support group, sense of belonging	44	33
Leadership	29	12
Friends encouraged me to join	23	27
Opportunity to get involved in campus activities	15	09
Small group living, home away from home	10	12
Parents encouraged me to join	9	10

Table 7
Lasting benefits of fraternity/sorority memberships (in percentage of total group)

	Male	Female
Social and interpersonal skills	34	54
Long-term friendships	52	52
Leadership skills	52	50
Support group	31	33
Meet people from diverse backgrounds	19	21
Social status	16	17
Meet partner for long-term intimate relationship	7	17
Career contacts, networking	10	6

Leadership Positions

These respondents reported they gravitated toward leadership positions within their chapters or fraternity/sorority community. Of the male respondents, 84 % marked that they held at least one executive level position in their chapter (defined for these purposes as president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, rush/recruitment chair, pledge/new member educator, social chair and standards/judicial chair). Of the female respondents, 65 % indicated they held an executive level position (Table 8). Respondents could mark as many response categories as offices they held during their undergraduate years.

"Coming Out" Experiences

A majority of the respondents remained in the closet while they were in college, not revealing their GLB sexual orientation to any of their fellow members. A total of 75 % of the men and 81 % of the women indicated that to their knowledge no one in their chapter was aware of their sexual orientation. There was a marked generational difference; only 12 % of the respondents who graduated before 1980 reported they had revealed their GLB sexual orientation to one or more of their chapter members while in college. Among members who joined after 1980, 39 % of respondents reported they had revealed their GLB sexual orientation to one or more of their chapter members while they were in college.

The majority of those who "came out" received accepting responses from their fellow members. For the male respondents, however,

the degree of acceptance depended on whether the member choose to "come out" voluntarily to fellow members or whether the he was "outed" (i.e., his sexual orientation was revealed involuntarily). When the revelation was involuntary, the responses of fellow fraternity members were more likely to be negative (Tables 9 & 10).

Table 8
Undergraduate offices held by respondents (percentage of total group responding)

Undergraduate office held	Male	Female
President	22	6
Vice President	18	17
Secretary	20	10
Treasurer	12	8
Pledge/New Member Educator	20	27
Rush/Recruitment Chair	23	8
Social Chair	18	5
Standards/Judicial Chair	15	4
Fraternity/Sorority Council Delegate	18	17
Fraternity/Sorority Council Officer	12	8
Alumni Relations Chair	15	4
Intramurals Chair	1	10
House Manager	12	12
Scholarship Chair	8	4
Other Offices	16	14

Table 9
Sexual orientation revealed to one or more members of chapter while in college by percentage of total group responding

Response	Male			Female		
	Voluntarily	Involuntarily	Total	Voluntarily	Involuntarily	Total
Total Group	31	10	41	27	12	38
Very supportive response	60	29	54	49	59	52
Somewhat supportive response	32	31	31	36	08	28
Somewhat negative response	6	25	10	5	15	8
Very negative response	2	15	5	8	18	11

Table 10
Sexual orientation revealed to one or more members of chapter after college by percentage of total group responding (without regard to voluntary or involuntary status)

	Male	Female
Total Respondent Group	43	60
Members with very supportive response	55	49
Members with somewhat supportive response	29	25
Members with somewhat negative response	12	13
Members with very negative response	4	13

Table 11
Observed homophobic/heterosexist events within the chapter (by percent of total respondents reporting)

Event/activity observed by respondents	Male	Female
Encountered homophobic behaviors in chapter (across all categories)	74	71
Derogatory remarks or jokes	50	29
Heterosexism expressed in membership selection	12	12
Negative behavior (ostracism, gossip, etc.) directed toward members perceived or known to be GLB	5	12
Other non-specified behaviors	4	12
Did not elaborate the nature of the behavior	7	6

Chapter Climate and Satisfaction with Fraternity/Sorority Experience

Over 70 % of the respondents reported that they had encountered a climate of homophobic or heterosexist behaviors or attitudes within their chapter, with derogatory remarks or jokes about GLB people being the most prevalent example. A little less than half (48 %) of the men and only 10 % of the women reported that they had experienced homoerotic behavior within their chapter. Of the men who reported such behavior over three-fourths (76 %) gave nudity or members dressed only in underwear during fraternity activities as examples. Other examples frequently mentioned included wrestling, hugging (especially when intoxicated), and comments about sexual activity or anatomy (Table 11).

Nevertheless, the vast majority of respondents (89 % of the men and 81 % of the women) stated they were "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their overall fraternity/sorority experience (Table 12). Most respondents indicated, however, that their sexual orientation in some way detracted from the quality of their undergraduate fraternity/sorority experience (Table 13). Nearly half the men and a third of the women reported that their perceived need to hide their orientation kept them from developing closer bonds of brotherhood/sisterhood. Many also felt uncomfortable with the pressure to arrange for opposite-sex dates for chapter social events.

Discussion

This exploratory study carried out in a 30-month period from 1993-1995 did not include fraternity and sorority members who identified themselves as heterosexual at the time.

Table 12
Reported overall satisfaction with fraternity/sorority experience (by percentage of total respondents)

Level of satisfaction	Male	Female
Very satisfied	64	56
Somewhat satisfied	25	25
Somewhat dissatisfied	8	15
Very dissatisfied	3	4

Table 13
Self-reported factors detracting from quality of fraternity/sorority experience (by percentage of respondents reporting)

Factors limiting quality of experience	Male	Female
Social events geared for heterosexual couples	38	42
Intimidated by homophobic attitudes/remarks	30	31
Felt need to hide part of self; difficult to get close to others	45	31
Members stopped associating with respondent once GLB sexual orientation became known or suspected	8	10
Other unspecified factors	3	2
Sexual orientation did NOT impact quality of experience	38	35

Even though there is no parallel responses to the GLB respondents, the authors assume that heterosexual members would answer very similarly as did the GLB respondents as to why they decided to join a fraternity and sorority and what benefits they received from their membership. The results of these self-identified GLB fraternity/sorority members clearly showed that finding sexual partners was not a significant motivation for joining the organization. In fact, the narrative responses of several respondents indicated an opposite motivation. A few commented that joining a heterosexually focused organization would help them hide their sexual orientation, and a couple speculated that an unconscious reason for joining was to facilitate self-denial regarding their sexual orientation.

It is difficult to find precise approximations of GLB students in the general college and university population. Nonetheless, a reasonable conclusion is that the percentage of GLB fraternity and sorority members mirrors that of the campus population as a whole on which they are found. Many male respondents commented that based on their experience and observations they were confident that the percentage of gay or bisexual fraternity members actually exceeded that of the overall campus population; however, the information from this study was insufficient to confirm or deny that supposition. The percentage of the respondents who held executive offices was significantly higher than what one would have expected of a random sample of fraternity and sorority members. The method of survey distribution may partially account for the high percentage of leaders. University student affairs administrators, fraternity and sorority staff members, volunteer fraternity/sorority alumni, as well others referred by those individuals completed some of the surveys. One

could expect that such alumni were leaders in their undergraduate chapters. Even considering those participants, the results reflected that GLB members tended to be "overachievers." This tendency toward "overachievement" may reflect a desire for validation and acceptance by the group, which was borne out by comments to that effect made by several respondents. Another possible explanation is that "closeted" GLB members channeled their energies into organizational leadership duties that others applied toward developing heterosexual relationships.

The high number of respondents who stated that they had encountered homophobic or heterosexist attitudes within their chapter, usually in the form of derogatory jokes or comments, was predictable for a single-gender youth organization based on the author's professional experience. Participants also frequently evidenced heterosexism in membership selection. If a potential member was rumored or perceived to be gay or lesbian, the chapter members were likely to summarily vote against offering the student a bid to join. Likewise, if a chapter's members discovered or believed a pre-initiate was gay or lesbian, the chapter was inclined to dismiss the person. More often than not, the initiated GLB member(s) would voice no opposition to the discrimination, fearing that to do so might cause other members to question their motivation. One man even wrote, "A rushee was blackballed because of suspected homosexuality. I was one of the three who blackballed him. Five years later I met this individual again at a bar, and we have been lovers for eight years now (and going strong)!"

While chapters seemed generally unwilling to pledge or initiate a student thought to be lesbian or gay, chapter members demonstrated greater tolerance if the homosexual orientation of a brother/sister became known after initiation. The responses of fellow members to the revelation that a member was GLB varied widely, from immediate expulsion and physical threats at the one extreme to complete acceptance at the other. In most cases, however, the majority of the chapter had at least a somewhat supportive response, with only a few members responding with rejection. In those instances in which the GLB member had control over the circumstances, by voluntarily determining the time, manner and recipients of the disclosure, the response was much more likely to be supportive than in those instances in which the member's sexual orientation was discovered by others.

There was a noteworthy dichotomy between chapter members' responses to prospective members or pre-initiates perceived to be GLB and their response to the revelation that an initiated member was GLB. With few exceptions, the respondents reported that their chapters were very reluctant to offer an invitation of membership to a potential member perceived to be GLB. On the other hand, while some initiated GLB members faced expulsion or ostracism after their sexual orientation became known, more frequently GLB members who "came out" did not face the rejection they had feared. This is comparable to the experiences of GLB people who have "come out" to their families. Far more often than not in this authors' personal experiences, siblings strive to be understanding and supportive when they learn that a brother or sister is lesbian or gay, even when the sibling harbors homophobic attitudes and beliefs. It is not unusual for siblings to take time to process this initial cognitive dissonance, but in the end brotherhood and sisterhood tend to prevail over fear and prejudice.

Despite the pervasiveness of homophobia and heterosexism and the personal strains associated with concealing their true sexual identity, the overwhelming majority of the respondents rated their fraternity or sorority experience as positive. For many, the brotherhood and sisterhood was the acceptance they were seeking. At the time of this original study, comparable satisfaction statistics for heterosexual members were not available. However, the latest AFA/EBI Fraternity/Sorority Assessment Survey (Ves-

tal & Butler, 2005) indicated a composite 88 % satisfaction rate for all fraternity members and a composite 86 % satisfaction for all sorority members. Thus, satisfaction with the fraternity/sorority experience would seem to be no different for members specifically self-identified as GLB than for students in general as surveyed by the AFA/EBI Fraternity/Sorority Assessment Survey.

The data collected in this survey were a composite of GLB fraternity/sorority members spanning four decades. The narratives that accompanied the surveys showed slow but significant change and promise for the future. For example, one chapter president who had recently graduated from a large Midwestern university organized a "coming out" party for himself during his final term, to which the entire chapter was invited and most attended. Another chapter president who also had recently graduated from a large Midwestern university reported that the chapter membership reelected him as president for a second year shortly after "coming out" to the chapter.

Reflecting gay life on the college campus as confirmed in Dilley (2002), a 1963 Brown University graduate and president of his fraternity chapter, wrote the following:

> In considering the questions asked, it occurs to me how very dramatically the world has changed in the 30+ years which separate me from my undergraduate experience.
>
> In my opinion, the fraternity system of the late '50's and early '60's merely reflected the predominant social values of the times, it did not create them. Homophobia was just another of the postwar social norms…My sexual repression was firmly in place way before I hit the ivy covered walls, and in a sense fraternity membership, not to mention achieving fraternity leadership, was elemental to the expression of this repression. It represented simply another layer of the cloak which was designed to hide my true identity.
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> It took tremendous courage to be openly gay in this era. There was little public tolerance for deviant behavior, and certainly in university courses such as Sociology 201 (Nuts and Sluts), my recollection is the homosexuality ran a distant third behind alcoholism and nymphomania in emphasis and treatment.
>
> The environment didn't do a whole lot for the self-esteem of your average emerging homosexual, and generations of psychotherapists have grown rich treating the multiple personality disorders which resulted. But fraternity membership was, on balance, a constructive force in my development. Being a member gave me a social identity. It provided a "community" in which to develop leadership and interpersonal skills….
>
> No, I haven't found it appropriate to publish a newsletter announcing my true sexual orientation to these friends from the past, and as a divorced father of two (pretty neat) kids, I guess the supposition is that I'm straight—to the degree that anyone thinks about such things.
>
> I'm out to my kids, I'm out to my (current) friends, and even out to a few of the people I went to high school with… It has been an interesting journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance, and an incredibly enriching one as well. My fraternity experience was simply a stop along the way.

A second respondent from the University of Wyoming, who graduated thirty years later in 1993, provided an insightful contrast to the personal reflection above that mirrored the changing times in which he was an active fraternity member. He "came out" to the chapter during rush and thus never had to hide his sexual orientation from his brothers.

> I have really enjoyed my experiences in my fraternity. I have managed to change quite a few of my brother's ideas about gays. David [name changed], who was our vice

president when I was initiated and is now our president, is a redneck from Nebraska. We have spent a lot of time together this semester. David and I drove to our regional convention this past spring and really got to know each other better. David recently admitted that he had quite a few reservations about my joining the fraternity. He said he used to think of gays as being "sub-human." In high school, David and his friends actually went to Omaha one weekend to "beat up fags." They didn't find any gays to beat up, but he acknowledges that he was excited about the prospect. Now when I see David on campus, he comes up and gives me a hug (a fairly butch hug, but a hug nonetheless). We've discussed our romantic and sexual problems. We occasionally work out together and we take a shower at the gym afterwards.

This semester, Robert [name changed], the homophobe [mentioned previously in his survey response] rushed a friend who he knows from the College Republicans group. This friend also writes a column for the campus paper. In this column he has attacked gays three times in the past year. As the rush chairman, I have the ultimate say in whether or not we extend a bid to prospective members. I could have kept this guy from joining our fraternity. I expressed my concerns about him to a couple of men in the fraternity. As a result, the president, treasurer, and sergeant-at-arms visited the individual to explain that his homophobic beliefs could not enter into the fraternity. They explained to him that his ideas were his own, but that they had no business in the fraternity. This individual was initiated over a month ago, and I haven't had a single problem with him. He actually goes out of his way to come over and say hello when we see each other on campus.

More changes have occurred during the past decade. Today on many campuses, openly GLB students are successfully participating in membership recruitment. Once accepted as a member, these openly GLB members take same-sex dates to fraternity and sorority functions – something that was virtually unimaginable in the prior generations.

Members of the Lambda 10 Project (www.lambda10.org), a national clearinghouse for information about sexual orientation issues in fraternities and sororities, are planning a more formal follow-up to this study. The planned survey will measure any progress made since the time of this original survey, and add additional dimensions to the study for analysis such as cultural and ethnic differences. The information in this study and the follow-up study can provide fresh guidance to student affairs administrators in developing programming to create greater awareness and understanding of GLB issues within fraternities and sororities, so future students can enjoy the full benefits of brotherhood/sisterhood regardless of sexual orientation.

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